

I was specifically asked to speak about the ecumenical movement. It will be more of a historical and philosophical discussion than what I prefer -- an exposition of Scripture.

I would like to remind you then of the situation in the U.S. 100 years ago. Perhaps not as far back as 100. Perhaps 60 years ago. We had at that time in the U.S. six or seven major denominations. These denominations differed on particular doctrinal points but there was hardly anyone in them that denied the great central verities of the Christian faith. You would go into a Presbyterian church and you might hear how we are saved through Christ and how God has elected from all eternity those who are to be saved, and if you are saved, truly believe in Him, you do not need to fear you might lose your salvation. There was a big stress on the importance of regeneration, and the Presbyterians were active in having revival meetings.

The system of having various denominations meet together in Bible conferences for discussion of great Christian truths was begun in this country by the Presbyterians. Then the Methodists took it up and they carried it much further than the Presbyterians had. A hundred years ago you would find Methodist churches all over this country, and they would not put much stress upon election. Sometimes people in them would think that they needed to be saved again every year. I don't know how many had that sort of an attitude. But I do know this that the Methodist churches even as recently as 60 years ago were practically all of them putting their great stress on the importance of being saved from sin through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there were several other denominations which differed on certain points but it was rare indeed that you would find a minister in any of these denominations who did not put the greater part of his attention to those great central verities of the faith.

Now that was the situation certain 100 years ago and to a very large extent 60 years ago. Then however, these great denominations began to form boards and agencies to increase the efficiency of the work. They had had small organizations that were sending out missionaries. The Presbyterians and the Congregationalists united in an organization 200 years ago that sent missionaries into Ohio and established churches all through there preaching the Gospel. The Presbyterians the Congregationalists united on their foreign mission work until about 1870 when the Presbyterians decided they wanted a board of their own and unbelief was beginning to come into the Congregational church.

Let me say just a word about the Congregational church. The Congregational church originally began with the Separatists who came over here from England, -- the Pilgrim fathers and then the Puritans who followed them. Each of their churches was a separate entity responsible for decision only to itself but having a loose federation. They looked to the federation to examine their ministers as to their orthodoxy. If a minister were to move away from his beliefs the conference would warn the local church, but control was pretty much in the hands of the local church. Then the great university the Congregationalists had formed for the specific purpose of training ministers, in 1805 Harvard elected a professor of divinity who denied the deity of Christ. Many of the Congregational churches were tremendously shocked at this, and there was quite a division among the Congregationalists. They looked to Yale University which still held strongly to the great central points of the Christian faith. But fine Christian ministers who had gone to Harvard and graduated there and had a great love for the love for Lord which had been greatly increased during their stay at Harvard could not believe that that grand old school had departed from its loyalty to Christ.