

BEHIND THE "LANDMARK" CURTAIN
Old Union Baptist Ministers' School
March 28, 2002 - Elder J. A. Reynolds

TEXTS: Rom. 2:17-21 & 11:21 // Matt. 21:43

BACKGROUND: What is a "Landmark" Baptist?

All true (historical, or "old-time") Baptists believe churches should consist of people immersed in water in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost AFTER they have experienced regeneration of their spirits.

"Landmark" has to do with the doctrine of what the Lord's church consists of:

SUMMARY:

- (1) There is only "one body," that is only ONE true church; but, ONE IN KIND, NOT in number.
- (2) A true church is a local visible congregation of baptized regenerated believers, in fellowship and covenant with one another, maintaining all of the fundamental commandments Jesus gave to his disciples during his personal ministry. There is no other sense in which the word "ecclesia," translated "church" in English, is conclusively used in the New Testament. "The church," used a few times in the generic sense, is often misconstrued to teach a "universal" church.
- (3) Each such church is the bride of Christ (or a "body" belonging to Him) as if no other such churches existed. When all such churches are gathered into one congregation in Heaven hereafter, that one called, chosen, and faithful congregation will have a special place of honor among the redeemed.
- (4) The "church" and the "saved" are NOT synonymous. All regenerated spirits are saved, and their whole soul and body has promise of total deliverance hereafter as well, but the Lord's churches are made up of such people who become and remain disciples (students or learners) of Jesus Christ, and thus learn and continue to "observe all things whatsoever" He commanded while obeying the commission to "teach" them to others. (Matt. 18:20)
- (5) Such people who "overcome" through Christ's new birth, AND keep his "works unto the end," receive ruling power over the nations with their Lord. (Revelation 2: 26-27)
- (6) True churches were preserved and perpetuated in every year of time since Jesus established the first one during His personal ministry. They were preserved "(away) from the face of the Serpent" (Devil), hidden "in the wilderness" by God for "time, and times, and half a time." (Revelation 12:14) They were not hidden in the bowels of apostate Christianity, so as to necessitate their coming forth in this late age by reform or restoration of the "Mother of Harlots." (Rev. 17:5)
- (7) True churches have a kinship to, and spiritual descent from, forerunners in the middle ages, among whom were people called "Anabaptist" and "Waldenses."
- (8) True Baptists are NOT truly "Protestants," having not derived their heritage from Catholics, nor acknowledged themselves as Catholic offspring in any sense whatsoever.

(9) FULL fellowship with "Protestant churches" is not permissible, or even possible, for a true Baptist church. This separateness is especially important regarding observation of the two ordinances; but some measure of spiritual fellowship with other born again children of God is commendable and can be profitable.

(10) Such pulpit affiliation as invites protestant preachers into the pulpits of Baptist churches is generally forbidden, because such invitation is virtual recognition before our people and the world of our acceptance of their ministries.

The foregoing ten points are a general summary of "Landmark Baptist" principles as they were widely accepted in the first half of the twentieth Century. Since all Baptist churches are independent and autonomous, some have interpreted these ideas with varying degrees of tolerance and intolerance.

The FACT needs to be KNOWN, that when J. R. Graves, J. M. Pendleton, A. C. Dayton, and their comrades promoted this movement in the middle of the nineteenth century, many worthy Baptist leaders OPPOSED them strenuously on certain points.

When Dayton published ALIEN BAPTISM in 1858, with Graves writing his introduction, he quoted at length such scholars as Francis Wayland, David Benedict, Richard Fuller, J. L. Waller, and others, who clearly wrote in favor of Baptist churches accepting baptisms performed by protestant ("pedobaptist" = baby baptizer - a misnomer for baby sprinkler!) ministers and churches. Dayton very ably exposed the relevant errors in such reasoning of these GOOD men. YET HE WOULD NOT WITHDRAW FELLOWSHIP from these good Baptist brothers because they endorsed acceptance of "alien immersion" into Baptist churches. Dayton found as many noted preachers and scholars to quote who, like himself, strongly opposed acceptance of "alien immersion." These "landmarkers" remained in fellowship and cooperation with the conventions until well into the twentieth century.

COULD IT BE TRUE THAT HALF OF THE BAPTIST LEADERS IN THE MID 1800'S CONDONED ACCEPTANCE OF ALIEN IMMERSION ??

- (1) Many English Baptists churches were formed in the middle 1600's in Britain from Puritan independent (separatist) congregations who were converted to the doctrine of believers immersion, but NOT to the idea that Baptist churches were anything more than a more perfectly reformed Protestant denomination.
- (2) Although the first Baptists in Britain were General Atonement Baptists, most if not all, of these Puritan converts retained their Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement, unconditional election, and all that goes along with the "five points" of "Calvinism" which had sprung from the Reformed Church (Presbyterian) synod at Dordrecht in 1619.
- (3) While the "General Baptists" were not disinclined to acknowledge a heritage from the notoriously "Arminian" Dutch Anabaptists, the "Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists were loathe to do so! Most preferred to claim their Puritan heritage as their sole ancestry. (We must acknowledge BOTH heritages as productive of the Baptists

of Britain and America to be truthful to history! Baptists could NEVER have inherited such unique stands as freedom of conscience and equality of citizenry from the intolerant Puritans! These were unique to Anabaptists and their forerunners. However, Anabaptist excesses of nonresistance and reclusiveness gave way to Puritan modifications, leaving "Baptists" more militant and social. This was a good blend.)

(4) NOT UNTIL AFTER THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING (EARLY 1800'S) DID "ALIEN IMMERSIONS" EXIST, at least in numbers significant enough to concern Baptists. Most protestants accounted baby sprinkling as sufficient baptism. In Britain and America, ONLY BAPTISTS contended for immersion after regeneration as the only valid baptism.

(5) Within fifty years of the launching of this "Landmark" movement, most "Southern Baptist" churches including the "Convention" had taken a decided stand with the Landmarkers against alien immersion as well as open communion.

(6) This firm stand for separateness regarding the ordinances remained for another fifty years among Southern Baptists, long after most "Baptist" churches had departed from the faith by adopting the protestant mass evangelism of D. L. Moody and Billy Sunday.

(7) By the early 1920's hundreds (perhaps more) of Landmark Baptist churches following Ben M. Bogard and D. N. Jackson, mostly in the southwest United States, had separated from the Southern Baptist Convention, allegedly because of Convention "mission methods" Unfortunately, many of them carried out with them this worst error then among the Southern Baptists, that of deceptive evangelism which was in stark contrast to historic Baptist practice. (Ben M. Bogard's self-confessed altar call: "Instantaneously you can accept Jesus by faith and be saved now ... Suppose I get up and say, 'Now is the time. Will you accept Jesus now?'" A man walks down the aisle and takes me by the hand and says, 'I take it.'" - page 116, Bogard-Hardeman Debate)

(8) In the fifty years which followed the Bogard/Jackson defection, most Old Time Baptist churches which had remained in Southern Baptist ranks also separated from the S.B.C. primarily because of this practice of soul deception. We count most of our churches in this number.

(9) With the departure of most of the spiritual element among them, many churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention began, in the latter half of the twentieth century, to exercise their individual liberty to adopt many new doctrines and practices.

(10) In the twentieth century many other "Baptists" went independent from the Conventions for other reasons than those stated above, some, THAT THEY MIGHT FIND MORE LIBERTY THAN BEFORE TO EXPERIMENT WITH NEW IDEAS NOT IN ACCORD WITH HISTORIC BAPTISTS. Many of these "independent fundamental" churches are more aggressive and deceptive than churches within the Convention, while exulting in pride that they are not bound by the superstition of denominationalism. These are really Protestants, disguising themselves with the Baptist name for advantage, aggressively deceiving souls by an "easy believism" void of godly sorrow or the genuine repentance it works unto saving faith.

THE VAST BAPTIST KINGDOM OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES WAS NOT WRECKED BY ERRING MISSION METHODS NOR BY ADOPTION OF VARIOUS FORMS OF "LIBERALISM" TOWARD FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES.

THE S.B.C. WAS SUBVERTED PRIMARILY BY THE SUBTLETY OF DECEPTIVE MASS EVANGELISM WHICH APPEARED TO BE WINNING THE WORLD TO CHRIST.

WHAT GOOD DID THE LANDMARK MOVEMENT DO FOR THE AMERICAN BAPTISTS ?

It kept many Baptist churches from losing their distinct identity - separate and apart from Protestantism. This happened badly in the northern states where the Convention endorsed reception of alien immersions. The same appears to have occurred in Britain. I dealt with this destruction in West Virginia!

CAN IT BE POSSIBLE THAT DAYTON, GRAVES, PENDLETON AND THE REST OF OUR LANDMARK FOREFATHERS GLORIOUSLY WON THIS BATTLE WITHIN THE REALM OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS WITHOUT EVER WITHDRAWING FROM THE CONVENTION OR DECLARING NON-FELLOWSHIP WITH THE BAPTIST BROTHERS WHO ADVISED OUR CHURCHES TO RECEIVE ALIEN IMMERSIONS ??? INDEED THEY DID!

HAVE WE SINCE FORGOTTEN ABOUT THE METHODS OF LOVE, ETERNAL TRUTH, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT 'S POWER OF PERSUASION AND RESORTED TO CONTENTION, STRIFE, AND ATTEMPTED COERCION TOWARD OUR SISTER CHURCHES ??

WHY HAS THE CONDITION OF THE BAPTIST KINGDOM BEEN IN SUCH FERMENT AND DISARRAY SINCE THE DOWNFALL OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION ?? Have Bogard's and Jackson's "Landmark" movements ("American Baptist Association" and "Baptist Missionary Association") fared much better than those from whom they departed ??

Schism after schism has rent what little is left of Old Time Landmark Missionary Baptists in the last fifty or sixty years.

What is the way to stop this self-destruction which makes some ask, "with friends like us, what need does Satan have to array an enemy against us?" ?

Are we so carnal and void of Holy Spirit leadership that we cannot regroup and be used of God to once more advance in conquest upon the world?

It appears that the spirit of King Saul or Captain Joab has taken command of the Lord's armies instead of the "sure mercies of David." (Is. 55:3) Diotrefes can never see himself; nor will he accept the rebuke of the Apostle John. (3 John 1:9) "If you have BITTER ENVYING and STRIFE in your HEART, glory (BOAST) not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above but is earthly, sensual,

devilish." (James 3:14-15) "As long as there are strifes and divisions among you, are you not carnal and walk as men" (rather than children of God!) (I Cor. 3: 3)

This began when Baptists began to accept worldliness as not inherently evil. The line of demarcation between Baptists and the world became obscured thereby. God wants his children to be different and appear different - we are not of the world - we are commanded not to "love the world" (if we do, "the love of the Father is not in us.") (1 John 2:15) So the "salt lost its savor" (Matt. 5:13) trying to hold on to the God's power while reaching for worldly acceptance.

What else can explain the vast "delusion" which allowed tens of thousands of churches to quietly succumb to a deceptive evangelism in less than a century?

NOW TO THE ISSUE AT HAND!! Why cannot the scattered remnants of God's kingdom reunite under the ancient banner of the faith once delivered to the saints?? In every region where sound Baptist churches remain, they seem to be crippled and often torn apart by internal strifes and divisions within the churches and within the churches. Often divisions between churches are soon projected into the internal workings one or more of the churches involved to disturb their peace and sometimes divide or even destroy those churches.

David was unexcelled as a leader in the time God exalted him. After he conquered and subdued many of the Lord's enemies and was old, he had a vision and a desire to build an "exceeding magnificent" temple (1 Chr. 22:5) for the glory of God. God approved the idea, but he rejected David for that task. David was a "man of war." (1 Chr. 28:3) God made his chosen successor, Solomon, a "man of rest ... (in whose days God would) "give peace and quietness unto Israel." (1 Chr. 22:9), qualified for that task.

It took some "men of war" to coax a fearful people to abandon the Southern Baptist Convention and lead them in braving the onslaughts of ridicule, reproach, and persecution the enemies who had crept within used to attempt to keep us intimidated into staying on that sinking "Titanic." They had the God-given vision to teach increased measures of judgment, discerning of spirits of others, critical examination of doctrines and practices, etc. of others who professed to be Baptists than had theretofore been required. But when that battle was won, and the essential separations had been made, they had taught their disciples too well these arts of war, which later began to be used against one another over differences UNWORTHY OF BROKEN FELLOWSHIP!! This devastating problem of a divided kingdom (in danger of falling) seems to be in every area, but the controversies that divide are different in different localities. How could this be?? Different issues - common problem??

Landmark Baptists have attempted to erect a barrier around themselves to keep corrupting influences out. I am calling it a "curtain" for purposes of this lesson. In some ways it resembles the famous "iron curtain" the soviet union built around their experiment, which their leaders theorized would ultimately solve all human problems. (Soon the iron element was needed to keep a disillusioned people IN. Can we not all perceive that something must be wrong when ANY kind of government resorts to

coercion in an attempt to keep their people from leaving? Surely missionary Baptist churches would never resort to misusing the curtain in this manner, would they?? Need I name the example of the current misuse of "letters" preventing membership moves?? This is only one example happening in one area, but is it not greatly dividing and disabling God's church kingdom and disturbing many churches.

What is generally going on behind that curtain?

Preachers and teachers have stroked the PRIDE of church members with a constant boast that "we are the one and only true churches." Every time human pride is mentioned between Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 22:21, God condemns and despises it. It "goeth before destruction" (Prov. 16:18); "When pride cometh, then cometh shame, but with the lowly is wisdom." (Prov. 11:12); "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." (Prov. 26:12) "Let him that thinketh that he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12) "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." (1 Cor. 8:2) Job said to his friends, "No doubt ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." (Job 12:2) Paul told the Jews they were confident that "thou thyself art guide to the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes ..." but needed to teach themselves. (Rom. 2:17-21) Jesus had before told the unbelieving Jews, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matthew 21:43) Paul also warned the Gentile churches, "be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." (Rom. 11:20-21) "We dare not make ourselves of the number... (who) measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise." (2 Cor. 10:12-13) These are but a few of the fearful warnings we tend to ignore behind this curtain!

Some Baptists read the "Trail of Blood" and become instant bigots. The "Trail of Blood" is a good PRIMER for church history but is dangerously concise and simplistic, leaving a false impression that every Christian congregation ever called by these various names were Baptists we would all anxiously fellowship.

Behind the landmark curtain many of us have ignored the consistent warnings of our Landmark forefathers NOT to attempt to trace a chain link succession. Why did they warn us, and why do we ignore the warning? What good do such genealogies do? What harm do they do? Is this why some of us are now demanding standards for church organizations which our fathers did not?? Are some demanding pedigrees from sister churches which they cannot produce for themselves when the facts are known?

Behind the landmark curtain some leaders are urging breaches of fellowship with sister churches fundamentally sound in doctrine and practice. As for ME, I am going to fellowship all whom God will let me fellowship, only insofar as we can agree.

Behind the landmark curtain we have allowed our internal church discipline to lapse shamefully, resulting in the tragic deterioration of our morals after the influence of the world. Still, some churches will "recommend" a long term chronically absentee member by "letter," the voters sometimes knowing that he or she is not a moral person, and soon after refuse a letter for a commendable member because of some disagreement with the sister church with which they wish to unite.

Behind the "landmark curtain" some of us have become an almost prayerless people. "We have not because he ask not," while we engage in the very forbidden strifes between brethren which James was warning against when he said that. Paul told the young pastor that prayers, supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made "FIRST OF ALL." (1 Tim. 2:1) Does this mean AFTER singing, greetings, announcements, more lengthy prayer requests than prayers, etc. How many times have I heard our preachers ask, "does anyone have anything else to say before we pray?" Even while lost seekers who were assured we would pray WITH them languish on a mourners bench for ten or twenty minutes before Christians bend a knee?? I do not believe our forefathers and foremothers did it that way. Are our people laying their burdens one another through prayer requests in place of laying them on the Lord in humble prayer. Are our children hearing the examples of heaven-rending prayer that we heard long ago?

Long before this landmark curtain, did not most fruitful testimonies used to come AFTER a powerful heart-stirring sermon AND after the clock struck noon. People did not race to their favorite restaurant back when. Sunday was the Lord's day, ALL DAY !! Some of us even had Sunday night services! Every week!! And some of us rarely missed going.

Behind the landmark curtain such matters as I am discussing have come to be regarded lightly by our people, as if they are optional, instead of critically important to our spiritual health. Meanwhile, fellowship is disturbed and one accord rendered impossible by nitpicking over matters not even defined by scriptures.

Behind the landmark curtain, some have exalted "church authority" invested in us by God above the innate authority of God. Church members once humbly trembled in fear at the thought of hindering the leadership of God's spirit.

Behind the landmark curtain majority votes accomplished in a "business meeting" or "conference" are regarded by some like the "law of the Medes and the Persians." (Daniel 6:8) No matter how wrong the move may be, it is still binding and somehow all right. We would be hard pressed to find a "business meeting" in the Bible let alone our parliamentary procedure of a "motion and second" demanding the body settle the issue by majority. These procedures are methods used for good order as long as they are used charitably. But CONSENSUS IN THE WILL OF GOD is the scriptural aim of our deliberations. Only by this can one accord be achieved. Any action that aborts this is wrong, no matter how procedurally correct !!

Behind the landmark curtain exclusive powers are being claimed for the church and for preachers that the Bible does not warrant. Anything put in series with God's salvation but Jesus is a dangerous venture. Jonah cried long ago "out of the belly of hell" ..." salvation is of Jehovah!" Jesus is Jehovah!. Perhaps we need a similar place from which to cry.

Behind the landmark curtain some Baptists are falling into the same type of conceit which befell the Jews. It is too easy to lose your walk with God even while you are bragging of our exclusive closeness to Him. I am not denying that we have a privileged access!! I am not denying our special heritage!

Behind that landmark curtain some would now ironize it to keep God's people in, and, I fear, under their control.

Behind the landmark curtain some tend to disdain all outside criticism and success. {Have we forgotten the lesson of Balaam's donkey? (Numbers 22:5-35) Jethro's counsel to Moses? (Ex 18:14-26) Abigail's salvation of David? (1 Sam 25:13-33) Elihu's reproof of Job and his elderly "friends"? (Job 32:1 - 38:1) /// (Closer to home) How God used the Methodists to pull Baptists back from a dangerous meander toward rigid Calvinism?} This is a dangerous conceit. Other children of God have access to Him also. What did Jesus say of the stranger his disciples observed casting out devils? "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me." (Matt. 9:39)

Behind the Landmark curtain some of our brethren seem to have confused forbearance and the toleration it demands with compromise. If we must err (and we all do), let it be on the side of mercy rather than judgment. The "law of liberty" declares that we shall be measured according to our standard of measuring others: "He that judges without mercy shall be judged without mercy."

Behind the landmark curtain PRIDE has some Baptists thinking that ALL of our Baptist forefathers did everything exactly as we now do.

Furthermore, some erroneously feel that our forefathers did nothing wrong. These are dangerous presumptions, guaranteeing that we shall do worse and worse with each succeeding generation. Idolatrous "high places" Solomon erected (2 Kings 23:13) were preserved for more than two and one half centuries in Judah to continually entice God's people. In some of the most moving supplications recorded in the Bible, sons were repenting not only for themselves, but for the whole of their people, AND ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THEIR DECEASED FATHERS AND MOTHERS. (Daniel 9:3-21, Psalm 106, Jer. 14:20-21, Lam. 5:7, Lev. 26:40, etc.) Such is needed today!

Let us tear that landmark curtain down, be open to the world, lean wholly upon God, and regain the vitality our fathers had in the great awakenings that created this much lamented Baptist kingdom we have since lost. God is big enough to protect and preserve all who trust in Him (even in a state of slavery!!)

Behind the landmark curtain some preachers and some churches have become shamefully self-centered and/or self-promotional. The motto of every one of us preacher, every one of our little flocks (churches), ought to be those words of the first "Baptist," "HE (JESUS) must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

Christmas Evans' prayer escaping Sandemanian influence !!