

A SERMON ON CHURCH HISTORY

delivered by ELDER W. C. ARNOLD at the PRIMITIVE
BAPTIST CHURCH in Crossville, Illinois -- May 19, 1907

THE SERMON

This beautiful Sabbath morning finds us pleasantly seated in the Lord's house, and I trust we all appreciate such a sweet privilege, and humbly pray that we may be blessed with the spirit of true service and humble devotion.

As I look into the faces of this large and intelligent congregation, I must adopt the language of the eminent apostle when he stood before King Agrippa and said, "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching the things whereof I am accused of the Jews." It has not always been the happy privilege of my people to answer publicly for themselves, to set aside false charges and answer accusations made against them. It has been publicly stated in this town that we are not the Primitive Baptists, and that our origin is of recent date. I deny the truthfulness of these statements and propose under the blessing of God's Holy Spirit to show this people that such loose statements come from men ignorant of the history of the church of God, or are made with malicious intent. I have nothing to say about any religious body today, except the Baptists.

You know of the origin of the different denominations of this country; hence I shall inquire into the origin of that people everywhere spoken against, and by the public press, at times, slandered and abused.

The church of God has been known by various names in the different ages, often being called by the name of the man who most ably set forth and defended their faith. Names amount to but little, but principles never change. If I should call Brother Jerry Brown by the name of John Smith, it would not change the person of Brother Brown, neither would it change his appearance. If we should change the name of our village from Crossville to Smithfield this would not necessarily change our form of government. So with the church. We will find the following appellations given to the church at various times, viz., Novatianists, Waldenses, Mennonites, Lollards, Paulicians, Donatists, etc., etc., yet their principles and government have never changed.

The apostle John died in about A. D. 100. Polycarp was "one of the apostolic fathers, for more than eighty years pastor of the church at Smyrna, to which he was recommended by the apostle John," Brown's Encyclopedia, page 950. Polycarp died in A. D. 166; sixty-six years after the death of John. He must

have been of the same faith with John, or else John would not have recommended him to the church at Smyrna as her pastor. Tertullian, contemporary with Polycarp, died A. D. 220; fifty-four years after the death of Polycarp.

Now I want the attention of everyone to the following historical statement. Listen! "Tertullian's writings proved that he, as a Baptist, stood between contending parties," Orchard, p. 32, 33. Now, notice, "Tertullian," says the learned historian, "was a Baptist." He and Polycarp were of the same faith; John recommended Polycarp to the church at Smyrna, therefore the apostle John was a Baptist.

Hear the same historian again: "During the first three centuries Christian churches all over the East subsisted in separate, independent bodies, unsupported by government, and consequently without any secular power over one another. All this time they were Baptist churches." Orchard, p. 36. Remember, my friends, that during the first three centuries, the churches were Baptist churches, according to the statement of the learned Orchard.

It is not our object today to prove that we have been scriptural in doctrine and practice at all times, but to show that we have existed as a church since the days of the apostles. The first division in the church occurred in A. D. 251. The leaders of the contending parties at this time were Cornelius and Novatian. Cornelius was a very slack disciplinarian. In fact, I suspect he was very much opposed to "putting up bars" against anything. No doubt he thought one thing could be as much the church as another, regardless of practice. I am sure that all the Corneliuses are not dead yet. Novatian strongly opposed the practices of Cornelius--and no doubt Cornelius thought him very cruel and unkind to differ with a man of such "piety and learning"--and the result was the division in A. D. 251.

Concerning Novatian, we have the following: "They say that Novatian was the first anti-pope; yet there was, at that time, no pope in the modern sense of the word 'pope.' They called Novatian the author of the heresy of Puritanism; yet they know that Tertullian had quitted the church, nearly fifty years before, for the same reason." Robinson, p. 126; Jones, p. 181. I call the special attention of this people to the evidence of these two historians. They say that Tertullian quit the church for the same reason that Novatian did. Hence Novatian was agreed with Tertullian, whom we have seen was, as a Baptist, identical with Polycarp and the apostle John. This establishes the fact that Novatian was a Baptist in direct succession from the apostle John.

When historians speak of Novatian withdrawing from the church, they simply refer to the action of the minority under

his leadership, coming out from among them and being separate, according to the divine command. These persecuted people, under the leadership of this noble, God-fearing man were called Novatians. Concerning them Robinson says, "Novatianists were Trinitarian Baptists," see History, p. 19, 20. "They were distinguished by a variety of names, and a succession of them continued till the Reformation," Brown's Encyclopedia, p. 878. J. Newton Brown was not a Baptist, neither did he publish his Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge for our special benefit; hence he could not be called a sympathizer, neither can it be truthfully said that he was prejudiced in our favor. And he says the Novatians--who were identical with John the apostle--had succession till the Reformation. That these people were peculiar in their views is evident from the following: "They declared their community to be the only true church, and required such as come over to them from other sects to be baptized anew," Brown's Encyclopedia, p. 877. What did they do? Why, sir, they baptized all that came to them from other sects, although they had been baptized (so-called) before. Now, my friends, I want you to observe this peculiarity of this ancient people, and answer me one question: Where do you see their photograph? The answer comes from as many tongues as there are people here today, saying, the Old Baptists, who are slanderously called "Hardshells," and them alone. Thank God for the similarity!

These Novatianists contended that the church was an executive body only, and as such could only enforce the laws given her by the head of the church, Jesus Christ. This, my friends, has been a peculiar mark of the Baptists in every age of the gospel dispensation. We deny that the church has any scriptural authority to legislate. Cornelius, or the Catholic party, affirmed the right of legislation, hence the many auxiliaries of the Protestant world today. These things are borrowed from the Roman Catholics, but nowhere sanctioned by divine revelation. God abhors it all.

"In the fourth Lateran Council canons were made to banish them as heretics; and their canons were supported by an edict in A. D. 413, declaring that all persons rebaptized and the rebaptizers both should be punished with death." Orchard, p. 60. O, how thankful we should be today for the God-given privilege of worshipping according to the dictates of our own consciences, and in harmony with the Holy Scriptures. This privilege would not be ours if the world had its desire. The spirit of persecution is not dead, but only under the control of God-given law. For the defense I make in your presence this day, my feet would be made fast in the stocks, and shackles would bind these hands, were it not for the flag which waves--emblem of freedom of thought and liberty of speech.

But I must proceed. On account of baptizing anew all who came to them from other sects, the Novatianists were called "Ana-baptists." Hear what is said of them: "The rigid Ana-baptists enjoin it as an obligation upon their disciples and members ... to wash the feet of their guests as a token of brotherly love and affection, and in obedience to the example of Christ, which they suppose in this case to have the effect of a positive command." Mosheim, p. 137. This great historian was a member of the Lutheran church, and was an avowed enemy to the doctrine of the Baptists, yet his honor as a man of learning compelled him to speak the truth, even of those with whom he differed. Would that all men were as honorable! Mosheim says the Ana-baptists of the first centuries believed the example of feet washing, given by Jesus Christ, had the force of a positive command. You that were here in our meeting yesterday evening and saw the members of this church engaging in this heaven-given service, by humbly washing each other's feet, are witnesses as to the similarity of our people with the ancient Ana-baptists.

"The true origin of this sect ... called Ana-baptists, ... is hidden in the depths of antiquity, and it is, of consequence, extremely difficult to be ascertained," Mosheim, vol 2., p. 127. Notwithstanding such statements from men of learning, it has been publicly stated in this town that our origin was of recent date, so I am informed. I want you all to remember we are not quoting from Baptist historians. I wish now to introduce the evidence of two more witnesses who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, of Holland, and were appointed by the king to write a history of their church in 1819.

These men could not be biased towards the Baptists. "We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Ana-baptists ... were the original Waldenses; ... on this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society, preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all the ages," Dr. Ypeij and Rev. Dermont, vol. 1, p. 148.

I have not finished my argument; however, I claim that my proposition is sustained. Hear the testimony of three unbiased witnesses, neither of them Baptists, but all men of great learning. J. Newton Brown says, "A succession of the Novatianists continued till the Reformation." Dr. Ypeij and Rev. Dermont says, "They are the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles." The unimpeachable evidence of these witnesses, with the evidence of the learned Mosheim, forever establishes our claim.

But I proceed. "The Donatists held that baptism conferred out of the church, that is, out of their sect, was null, and accordingly rebaptized those who joined their party from other churches. They, also, re-ordained their ministers," Brown's Encyclopedia, p.472. They remained a separate body till the close of this, the sixth century," Brown's Encycl., p. 472. We have traced the church through the first five centuries under various names, and here we find them in the sixth century practicing the same things.

Speaking of the Paulicians, Brown says they were "a numerous body ... in the sixth and following centuries, so called on account of their attachment to the doctrines of the apostle Paul, when all was corrupt around them." "In the seventh century one Constantine revived this drooping body, which had suffered much from the violence of its adversaries," See Encycl., p. 916. "The Paulicians were the genuine successors of the Christians of the first two centuries," William Jones. See Hassell's History, p. 418. This statement from Jones coincides with the above statement of Brown, that these people were attached to the doctrine of Paul. For we have seen that the Christians of the first centuries were identical with the apostle John, and it is very evident that Paul and John were of the same faith; hence, these Paulicians of the seventh century were in love with the same doctrine that John and the Christians of the first century advocated.

"In about 817, Claudius (or Claud) began to preach, and against much persecution nobly persevered till all Piedmont was filled with his doctrine," Brown's Encycl., p. 382. "Piedmont was the jailer of this class of Christians called Waldenses," Brown's Encycl., p. 1148. From these two historical statements I deduce the following argument: In 817 Claudius preached in Piedmont till it was filled with his doctrine. Piedmont was the home of the Waldenses, who were identical with the apostles, and were Baptists. Therefore Claudius was a Waldensian Baptist. "During the ninth century ... exquisite tortures were inflicted upon the Paulicians, ... in 845, one hundred thousand being put to death," Hassell, p. 424.

Bishop Usher complains of the Waldenses heresy corrupting all France, Italy and England, in A. D. 1080. "During the tenth century the Paulicians ... spread themselves through every province of Europe," Hassell, p. 427. In the eleventh century many persons called Cathari (the pure) appeared in Italy, Germany and France, who entertained similar sentiments to those of the Paulicians," Hassell, p. 433. We have seen that the Paulicians embraced the faith of Paul and John, which was contended for during the first two centuries by Polycarp, Novatian and others; hence, here we find the same faith defended in the eleventh century. "In the

latter part of the twelfth century the popes and councils pronounced repeated excommunications against the Waldenses and affirmed the right of the 'church' to banish them, confiscate their property, and put them to death," Hassell, p. 441. "The scriptural, simple and upright Waldenses in northern Italy were providentially protected during the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, until 1487." Hassell, p. 450. "In about A. D. 1315, Walter Lollard ... a man of great renown among the Waldenses, came to England," Jarrell, p. 319. "Special laws were made in 1400 for the punishment of the Lollards by death, during the reign of Henry IV," Benedict, p. 309. Now, as Walter Lollard was "a man of great renown among the Waldenses," these statements from Jarrell and Benedict prove the existence of the Waldensian Baptists in A. D. 1300 and 1400. "In A. D. 1236, the National clergy met ... and declared against the sentiment of the Baptists." "In 1538 a commission was given to burn their books." "In 1547 a commission was issued to search for Baptists; under this commission Joan of Kent was burned, May 2, A. D. 1549," Benedict, p. 303.

"There is no record of the Baptists ever having become nonexistent in England," Jarrell, p. 318. In 1643, seven churches in London published a confession of faith. This confession was readopted in 1689, and is today the confession of faith upon which we as Primitive Baptists stand.

Now, my friends, I have traced the old church from the apostles down to the present date. I have shown you her footprints in every century. Many have been her struggles as she has unfurled the old banner of sovereign grace, under which she has marched through the ages past, leaving her trail by the blood she has shed. But God was her protector and preserver, and still she stands as an everlasting monument of his power, and shall stand through all future ages as a hiding place for the tempest-tossed and tried pilgrims of earth, a sweet home for the weary and heavy laden. Come, O, come ye poor and hungry, and eat and drink at our Master's table.

The quotations we have given from Baptist historians perfectly coincide with those we have given from others who were never Baptists, hence we claim our position is sustained beyond all doubt.

Bear with me a little longer and then I am done. The question: "Who are the Primitive Baptists?" is yet undecided in this investigation. I propose now to answer the question. Until A. D. 1832, this question was not agitated. It has been stated from a pulpit in this town that the people known as Missionaries are the Primitives; and stated by a man who could have nothing in view but the injury of my people, as he is not a Baptist of any kind. I purpose to settle the

question by Missionary Baptist authors themselves. "The first Baptist church in America was constituted at Newport, R. I., in 1639, by Elder John Clark, M. D.," - D. B. Ray, M. B. "The first Missionary society among Baptists was formed at Kettering, England, October 3, 1792." - R. B. Cook, D. D. Now, notice, my friends, Cook, who was a Missionary, says the FIRST Missionary society among Baptists was formed in 1792. This was 154 years after the organization of the church in America, and about 1700 years after the death of the apostle John. I ask were the apostles Baptists? If so, then according to this learned Missionary, Cook, they had no mission societies, for he says 1792 was the first "among Baptists."

The word "Primitive" means first. Hence, to be Primitive Baptists we must be like the first. The first Baptists had no mission societies. We, as a denomination, have none today. Therefore we are Primitive. In 1860 David Benedict wrote as follows: "Fifty years ago not an agent for collecting funds ... was to be seen in the whole Baptist field." Fifty from 1860 would leave 1810. Hence, according to Mr. Benedict, a missionary of renown, in 1820 the Baptists had no collecting agents. We have none today. Therefore we are Primitive.

Mission societies "have had a place among Baptists at least since 1802," W. P. Throgmorton. Here Mr. Throgmorton admits, while in discussion with Elder Lemuel Potter, that mission societies have "had a place among Baptists in America since 1802." This was 164 years after the first church was organized by Elder Clark. I wonder how the church got along here in this new and wilderness country for these 164 years! She had no auxiliaries, no societies, no side shows, in fact, nothing but the plain, simple, apostolic service of Christ, and yet she lived and thrived.

I have now shown by Missionary Baptist authors, and could produce many more if time would permit, that prior to A. D. 1792, the church had no societies, and in fact, was, as Novatian argued, an executive body only. We remain the same today, and are therefore the Primitive Baptists, our enemies being judges. I have shown you by unbiased and learned historians that we are the only Christian society which has stood in every age since the apostles. Jesus said that the gates of hell should not prevail against the church he established while here on earth; and as the old prophet, with prophetic vision, viewed the same glorious kingdom, he said it should never be destroyed, but should stand forever. Therefore, the Primitive Baptists are the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said this kingdom is like the seeds which grow, we know not how. Our death has been prophesied from time immemorial, but yet we live and the world knows not

how. Borrowed from us are the principles of this grand government which gives us rights our fathers had not.

Religious freedom, thou art a gift from God our wise creator, benefactor and preserver! Thou infinitely gracious God, thou hast heard the cries of thine own dear people, and through thine own rich, abounding and overwhelming providence hast given them a land where they can worship unmolested in thine own appointed way!

O, my brethren, let us adore and reverence his precious name; let us continue faithful unto the end, ever thanking the dear Lord for the high and sweet privilege of being Old Baptists. Let us stand united against every form of heresy and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let us tell our neighbors and our own dear children of the glorious majesty of the kingdom of God and invite all His little lambs to come with us and under the banner of Immanuel. I see some here today who are longing for a place at the banqueting table of Jesus, and yet they stay away. Dear children, come home; come in, ye blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without? You say you are not fit. I am glad you have found it out, but in the name of Jesus you may come. You say you are poor, Jesus said the kingdom belongs to the poor, therefore the blessed invitation comes to you, saying, Come; your tears flow from a heart of flesh and not from a hard and stony heart. God has given you this heart of flesh, and now you should honor

His precious name by walking in his footprints.

"Time is winging us away

To our eternal home;

Life is but a winter's day,

A journey to the tomb."

O, my friends, let us spend our short lives in the sweet service of Jesus. He is so good and kind to us all. A few more days here and then, O, then, we shall all be gathered home--

"Where we shall see

Him face to face,

And tell the story,

Saved by grace."

God bless you all. Amen.

