

A brief look at our Baptists

Milburn Cockrell

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Mantachie, MS

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(Editor's Note: The article was published over ten years ago. At that time, it was written to show the many things taking place among our ranks. It is saddening to the editor to see that we have travelled further from the path than was "forecast for the future.")

When I first came among Sovereign Grace, Landmark, Independent Baptists in 1969, it seemed to me that their whole movement centered around three great pillars based upon a literal interpretation of the Bible: the local church to the exclusion of the universal, invisible church; the doctrines of grace; and premillennialism. To the best of my knowledge, about 95 percent of the brethren at that time stood firmly on these points, although they differed on other points of doctrine. As the years have passed, these three great pillars have cracked and crumbled to some degree.

THE PILLAR OF PREMILLENNIALISM

The first pillar to suffer was premillennialism. Here and there appeared a few mid-tribers and post-tribers. Some of these went on to embrace amillennialism, although some continued as they were and remained premillennialists. A very few returned to pre-trib premillennialism.

I would guess that the present situation is about as follows. The vast majority of our preachers are still pre-trib premillennialists, although the post-trib position has gained some strength and the mid-trib has lost a few. It is to be greatly feared that most premillennialists have received their views mostly by tradition from their fathers, and that they in the main do not have any deep-seated convictions based on personal study of the Scriptures. This makes them an easy prey of amillennialists. A growing

number have no stable views on eschatology. They are disgusted with the conflicting views about prophecy, and they seldom study it, preach it, or teach it in their churches. There exists also a growing number of amillennialists who are convinced of their position by personal Bible study. The pillar of premillennialism has not fallen to the ground, but it is tottering.

THE PILLAR OF CHURCH TRUTH

Perhaps no pillar has suffered as much as church truth. It has suffered from the hands of conservatives and liberals. The first to attack the pillar were the conservatives. In the early 1960s a few of our preachers invented the "priesthood of the church" theory. This was a reactionary movement started to help stabilize church truth. These men limited God's priesthood on earth to Baptist churches. Some of these went on to teach that only Baptists have the Holy Spirit and are regenerated, and will be in the first resurrection. A very few taught that there was no sin but a doctrinal sin and that the child of God can commit the unpardonable sin.

And, as is always the case, there was a relation to this making a god out of the church and its anointed priesthood. Most of the brethren repudiated this new teaching. Some were so upset with the priesthood doctrine that they left our ranks and became immersed Presbyterians. The majority of the priesthood men saw nothing more in their view than new arguments for church authority. A few priesthood men went into hardshellism, or some sort of cult, or gross immorality. While the teaching of an anointed priesthood is on the decline at present, when it appeared it split our ranks and drove some weaker brethren from us into Protestantism.

Church truth in the last few years has suffered in the house of her friends. Here and there Landmarkers attack Landmarkism. The start of this attack came in the 1960s when one of our preachers wrote a book against Landmarkism. He was disfellowshipped and his book repudiated. We went on for a brief time at peace. Then another brother wrote a book against Landmarkism, charging that water baptism is our golden calf and that most

Landmarkers do not have the mental capacity to read. This book was well received by a few Landmark Baptists, but it was rejected by most brethren, as was the first, as heresy. Unlike in the case of the first book, the writer of the second book continued in good grace among a few professed Landmarkers.

In the last few years the idea of a mother church has come under attack from within the ranks of Landmarkers. One of the fundamentals of Landmarkism is that there has been a succession of true churches across the centuries who preserved the ordinances uncorrupted. Any new church organized must derive its authority and church rights from another church in the line of succession. Any church not in this line of succession is not a scriptural church. Now we are being told that this is all wrong, and that it is not at all necessary that one church descend from another church. Furthermore, we are told that any church which had a mother church was organized in an unscriptural fashion. We also are told that a church need not be concerned about its origin, for to do so would be to hold to a "paper-chain" succession. Among those who are propagating these ideas are some brethren whose churches were started out of excluded members from another true New Testament Baptist church, or, in some case, their churches sprang out of the ground.

These brethren have raised more questions than they have answered. Consider a few. If there is no Scripture for a mother church, how can churches which have a mother be scriptural churches? Can you have a true church which was started in an unscriptural manner? If how a church is started is not important, then are all so-called Baptist churches scriptural churches? What about the Protestants if there is no need to be in the line of Baptist succession? Can you have a true church without scriptural baptism? If not, where do you get the authority for scriptural baptism if not from another true Baptist church? Can excluded members from a true Baptist church be constituted into a scriptural church? Can there be any scriptural baptism apart from the body of Christ?

There is also a growing problem about the reception of alien immersion among our churches and pulpit affiliation with heretical groups. If you go to a Bible conference don't be surprised if there are Arminians, hardshells, Reformed Baptists, universal church men, or even Protestants on the program. The pillar of church truth is all but ready to fall to the ground. Worse still, most Landmarkers do not know this and some do not care.

THE PILLAR OF THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

The doctrines of grace have suffered the least of the three in my opinion, but this pillar is now under heavy attack. Some brethren have taken these doctrines to the extreme and ended up in hardshellism. But a great number in our ranks who claim to believe them do not. There is a growing number of Calminians (an Arminian who wants people to think he is a Calvinist). A strong sermon on the covenant of grace, or election out of pure grace, would split some Sovereign Grace Baptist churches!

Gospel regeneration" has been stressed until it has neared the point of the teaching of Free Will Baptists more than Sovereign Grace Baptists. Some even see no difference between the gospel as preached by Arminian Baptists and that preached by Sovereign Grace Baptists. They inconsistently contend that the Arminian gospel is the same as ours, but then throw a fit when it comes to Arminian baptism, although the Bible teaches baptism is a picture of the gospel. Another pillar is tottering.

THE PILLAR OF MORALITY

Sad to say, there is another growing problem which I never expected to see. I refer to the moral declension in our churches. I continue to be appalled at the growing open sin of adultery among some preachers and deacons in our ranks! Preachers I considered strong in the faith have left the wife of their youth for a whore. Our churches are filled with people who have broken homes. Most preachers are silent about this problem, lest they offend some good-paying members.

I am utterly astonished to see that some see no evil in a preacher living with a number of women as wives who are not his wives. If any one dares to raise questions about this he is branded a trouble-maker who seeks to destroy the ministry of our best preachers. The words in the Bible about adultery and lying means nothing to some preachers and their churches.

Verily, if we cannot agree that lying and adultery are sins, then it stands to reason we cannot agree on anything, and that we are hopelessly divided. It is now no longer doctrinal issues which divide us; it is moral issues as well. Unless these moral problems are checked we are doomed to death and destruction. God will not bless a people who try to justify the sins of lying and adultery.

None of the facts that I have called attention to in our ranks are pleasing to me. The knowledge of these things is very grievous to this writer. How he would like to see unity on the three great pillars once again, but he does not expect to see it. Instead, I expect the apostasy to gain strength in the next few years. God is slowly but surely removing our leaders. T. P. Simmons, Berlin Hisel, Rosco Brong, E. G. Cook, and Roy Mason are no more. Most of our preachers are middle aged or older. In 10 to 20 years most of the present population will be no more. Who will take our place? How many young preachers do we have who are sound? Who will teach the world the truth in the next generation? Will our doctrines all but fade from the American scene? God only knows.

A SOLUTION

None of the three pillars will fall to the ground unless we let them. We can reverse present trends. We could have a revival. We could rise up with united voices and defend the great truths which have distinguished our people in the past. Those of us left who still believe the old truths need to stand up and be counted. Truth needs no apology and error deserves none. Indeed, **"we are left but a few of many"** (Jer. 42:2) and what we do we must do quickly.

What should we do? I want to offer a very good suggestion. Why not have our able preachers to write a brief commentary on the New Testament? Such a book, or books, could remain to teach the next generation as well as the present. Look how the writings of Gill and Graves continue to teach our people. I doubt that any preacher will live long enough to do this work by himself. I suggest that qualified men be assigned a book of the New Testament and then put these all together. Nothing is needed more than such a brief commentary in my opinion. We sorely need a Sovereign Grace, Landmark Bible Commentary on the New Testament. We have men capable of writing such. Then why not no

FORECASTS FOR THE FUTURE

The forecasts I am about to give are based on present trends and observations of the past. They do not have to come to pass. We can change the future. No one would hope to change this future more than the writer of this article.

The churches and pastors will continue a gradual decline doctrinally and numerically. As the older pastors die, young men from other groups will take over a great many of our churches and lead them into Arminianism and universal church heresy. Bickering and backbiting will continue until we are hopelessly divided so that most cooperation among the churches will cease in missions, education, and publication work. A few sound preachers will be overworked, trying to preach and pastor the sound churches which remain. The present generation will leave behind very little written material to teach the next generation.

This is a dark and dismal picture, but I fear it will become a horrible reality in the next 10 to 20 years unless we wake up now!

Let me assure and reassure the readers of the BBB that as long as I keep my right mind and physical health I will do my best to keep the BBB in

the mail. We will not diminish from the three great pillars though all others forsake them.

“My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen” (I Cor. 16:24).