

In Search Of An Old Landmark

By Milburn Cockrell

I feel that I must terminate this series in this issue, lest the readers of the BBS become weary with my much speaking. I have repeatedly shown from history that our Baptist

people believed that a church should baptize through its ordained pastor. This is the natural and normal way to baptize. This practice is one of the old landmarks of our Baptist Fathers, a landmark which needs to be rediscovered and reset in these times of doctrinal apostasy and new lightism.

It is the position of the Editor of this paper that the authority to baptize was given to the New Testament Baptist Church in this age, but in administering this ordinance the church is shut up to its ordained officials. A man should not be permitted to baptize himself, nor should a woman baptize a man, nor a child baptize any person. As a general rule the church administers the ordinance of baptism through its ordained pastor.

I wish to continue to examine the historical records of the American Baptists as to the use of an ordained minister in church baptism. In the last article I considered the Baptists of the North. Then I briefly discussed the Baptists in the South, namely North Carolina and South Carolina.

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IN SEARCH

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VIRGINIA

The early Baptists of Virginia stood by the old landmark. In his history, Robert Semple gives us this information: "Some time in the year 1766, and a short time after Mr. Thomas's preaching, three of the parties, viz., Elijah Craig and two others, traveled to Mr. Harris's house, in order to procure his services in Orange and the adjacent parts to preach and baptize new converts. They found to their surprise that he had not been ordained to the administration of the ordinances. To remedy this inconvenience he carried them about sixty miles into North Carolina to get James Read, who was ordained."¹

The First Separate Baptist Association, Orange County, Virginia, in May 1771 said: "Every ordained minister of the same faith, etc., being legally called upon by any church, may administer the sacraments among them, and with the help of their church, ordain their elders or deacons if found qualified; and in case they have made choice of a minister whom they desire to be examined and ordained, they may petition neighboring ministers to proceed in the said work, and on the same occasions any of them fail-

The Red River Baptist Association of Middle Tennessee was constituted from the Cumberland in 1806. Article 12 of their Confession said: "We believe that no ministers have a right to the administration of the ordinances only such as are regularly baptized, called, and come under the imposition of hands by the presbytery."⁷

The Concord Baptist Association, the oldest missionary association in Middle Tennessee, was constituted in 1810. Article 10 of their Confession reads: "We believe that ministers have no right to administer the ordinances, only such as are regularly baptized and come under the imposition of hands by the presbytery."⁸

The Salem Baptist Association was constituted in 1822. Here is what their Confession of Faith says in Article 10: "We believe that no minister has a right to administer the ordinance only such as are regularly baptized and come under the imposition of hands by a presbytery."⁹ These confessions were all written before J. R. Graves came to Tennessee.

The Enon Association, constituted in 1850, adopted the same confession, and, in fact, practically all the old churches and associations of Middle Tennessee adopted this or a similar confession of faith.

Water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the gospel, to be continued until the Lord's second coming, and to be

Adoniram Judson. To my knowledge, this association has never changed its Abstract of Principles since its birth. Article 11 says: "We believe that Jesus Christ has appointed two positive institutions or ordinances to be observed in His churches, viz: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That Baptism is immersion in water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and that believers alone are capable of rightly receiving this ordinance; that baptism precedes the Lord's Supper and that none but regular ordained ministers have the right to administer them."¹³

The Editor grew up in the area where these churches were. In 1956, he was baptized by the authority of the New Hope Baptist Church, Dorsey, Miss., at the hands of Elder G. S. Raburn of Guntown, Miss. So far as I know, these churches still stand upon these same principles as they have since 1856. The Editor of the BBB stands with them upon their Abstract of Principles. I guess you might say that "I ain't got above my raising."

LOUISIANA

The Concord Baptist Association was constituted in 1832. In Article 4 of their Confession of Faith they make this statement: "We believe that believers are the only proper subjects; and immersion the only Scriptural action of baptism; and the

KENTUCKY

The Little River Baptist Association was constituted in 1813. It adopted a confession of faith

body in water."¹⁷ This was reaffirmed in 1822.

The same association in answer to a query from Little Union said: "Doubts have arisen in our Baptist society, whether persons baptized (immersed) by a Baptist preacher, not ordained, should be rebaptized before they are received into our churches? Answer: We believe each church is the most proper tribunal to determine the qualifications of her members, and that baptism is not rightly administered by any one except a regularly ordained minister."¹⁸ It is very plain from this statement that the early Kentucky Baptists would not have received baptism administered by some male member appointed by the church. Brethren, please consider these words, and then see how far some are now removed from the old paths of our Baptist fathers.

The North District Baptist Association was constituted in 1802. In 1830 she put forth the following declaration: "*Mode of Baptism:* -- The administrator, an ordained preacher, and the person to be baptized, standing in water of suitable depth, the minister, in an audible voice, pronounces the baptismal words; then lays the person to be baptized, backwards into the water, until the body is covered, or overwhelmed with water; then raising the person to his or her feet."¹⁹

The Little Union Association of Old

tion of the Word and ordinances without ordination by the imposition of hands. This being contrary to the established rule of the Kectocon Association, and indeed of the Baptists of Virginia generally, when the church sent her delegates to the next Association they were rejected."3 Semple goes on to tell us that this resulted in Elder Leland submitting to ordination by the imposition of the hands of a presbytery.

Jeremiah Bell Jeters (1802-1880), editor of the *Religious Herald*, wrote: "The administrator should be pious--baptized--a church member, called to the ministry, and authorized by the church to engage in the ministry--duly ordained to the work. While there may be some question as to what constitutes valid ordination, there is almost universal agreement in our churches as to its necessity, in some form, in order to the administration of baptism."4

John L. Dagg (1794-1884) was an eminent theologian born in the State of Virginia. He wrote: "We have seen that baptism ought to be administered by an ordained minister of the word. . . ."5 "Admission to membership belongs to churches; but admission to baptism belongs properly to the ministry."6

TENNESSEE

5. Determine by the grace of God that you will do what is right--whether family or friends, or

ministers regularly ordained."10

MISSISSIPPI

The Lusascoona Regular Baptist Association was organized in 1840. In 1844 they received this query: "What is a legal and valid Baptism?" They answered: "We believe that Baptism administered by a legal and regular ordained preacher of the gospel--baptizing by immersion a proper candidate, after hearing a declaration of his faith in Christ--to be a legal and valid Baptism."11

The Lowndes County Baptist Association was organized in Lowndes County in 1834. Article 8 of the Articles of Faith says: "We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the church of perpetual obligation, and that Gospel Baptism includes four things: First, a credible profession of faith in Christ, voluntarily made by the subject. Second, immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Third, that it be administered by a man possessing the ordinary qualifications of those on whom the work of baptizing was originally enjoined. Fourth, by authority of a New Testament church."12

The Judson Baptist Association of Northeast Mississippi was organized in 1856. It was named after the famous Baptist missionary,

with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

ministers have a right to the administration of the ordinances, only such as are regularly baptized, called, and come under the imposition of hands by the presbytery."15

The Obion Baptist Association (Tennessee and Kentucky) was constituted in 1828. In Article XI they say: "We believe that no minister has a right to the administration of ordinances, only such as are regenerated and born again, regularly baptized, specially called of God to the Work of the ministry, and come under the imposition of the hands of a presbytery."16

Elkhorn is the oldest Baptist Association in the State, being constituted in 1785. In 1802, the question as to what constitutes valid baptism, which had been evaded in 1793, was brought before the Association in a different form and answered as follows: "Query from South Elkhorn. --What constitutes valid Baptism? Answer. --The administrator ought to have been baptized himself by immersion, legally called to preach the gospel, and ordained as the Scriptures dictate; and the candidate for baptism should make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and be baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, by dipping the whole

True Baptists claim to be people of THE BOOK. That is, if the Bible commands a thing it is to be obeyed

The Three Forks Baptist Association was organized in 1921. Article 14 of their Articles of Faith says: "We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water, by a properly qualified administrator, into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."21

Professor N. K. Davis wrote his views as follows in a Kentucky Baptist paper: "It seems to me that the only essential qualification of a baptizer is the authority from a church, but that in conferring this authority, the church is subject to limitations which restrict its action to recognized and approved gospel ministers, in full fellowship, teaching its doctrines and practicing its faith."22

MISSOURI

In the neighborhood of the Two-mile Prairie, Howard County, Missouri Territory, a Baptist church was constituted in 1819. Article 10 of its Confession of Faith said: "We believe that ministers have no right to the administration of the ordinances, only such as are regularly baptized, ordained and set forward to the work of the ministry."23

The Dixon Association in Southwest Missouri was constituted in 1874. On the subject of baptism they said: "Believers in Christ are the only proper subjects of baptism, and

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CHRISTMAS

IN SEARCH

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the immersion of a proper subject in water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by a regularly baptized Baptist minister, is the only scriptural baptism."²⁴

I could go on citing such material, but I will not lest I weary the readers. These quotes prove that the old American Baptists did not consider baptism to be valid unless it was performed by an ordained Baptist minister. They would not have accepted the baptism administered by a woman, or a child, or some male member of the church. To them such baptism was invalid. If they were wrong in this contention, then where does that put our modern Baptist churches who descended through them? If the old American Baptists denied the one baptism of the New Testament, as some now claim, then we are all unbaptized heretics! I believe that the old American Baptists were right, and, therefore, our baptisms are valid today, if performed in the New Testament and historic manner.

GRAVES AND PENDLETON

It has been charged that the Editor of the BBB believes more about baptism than did J. R. Graves and J. M. Pendleton. It is said that I am some sort of a hyper-Landmarker. But

work; and that no one may take this office or work unto himself but 'he that is called of God, as was Aaron' (Heb. 5:4)."²⁷

"But every sound Baptist on earth, and every intelligent Bible reader of every denomination admits that a scriptural church of Christ alone can ordain---i.e., commission---a man to preach the gospel and administer church ordinances."²⁸

"The polity set forth in this book is that the churches of Christ are absolutely independent bodies; and that to them Christ committed *all* the ordinances, and constituted them the sole guardians and administrators of them; and that *his* ministers are the servants, not the masters, of the churches, to administer the ordinances to those whom the churches deem qualified. . . ."²⁹

Surely these quotes are enough to convince honest men that J. R. Graves stood by the old Landmark. Oh, that this could be said of all who claim to be Landmark Baptists today! But, alas, I fear that in many places the old landmark of our fathers has fallen down, and it needs to be reset.

What were the views of J. M. Pendleton? Did he stand by the landmark? I shall let him speak for himself. He wrote an article in S. H. Ford's paper on "Who Should Baptize?" In this article he said: "Hence, Baptist churches as a rule have ever

Forum: "We know it is right for all baptism to be under the authority of a church. When the pastor is unable physically to administer the ordinance of baptism, is it Scriptural for the church to vote for some other preacher to administer the ordinance in their behalf?"

In reply to this question Elder Roy Mason said: "I know of no Scripture that would be violated if this were done."

Elder James Hobbs said: "Absolutely. . . ."

"Now my friends, our churches authorize an evangelist to hold a revival or help support a missionary as part of the fulfillment of the first commission. Our churches oftentimes authorize some preacher to teach the church some particular portion of God's Word or some particular doctrine as part of the fulfillment of the third commission.

"Why would it be wrong for our churches to authorize some other preacher to administer their ordinances for them?"

Elder E. G. Cook said: "Since baptism is a church ordinance, and very definitely so, I see no reason why she should not authorize another preacher, or even a deacon if she feels led to do so to administer the ordinance."

Elder Fields took the position that the church should appoint someone other than the pastor in the mem-

and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself baptized not but His disciples---John 4:1-2), so a church in obedience to the commission (Matt. 28:19) makes and baptizes disciples, though the church baptizes not but her selected and duly appointed ministry."³⁵

In 1965 Harley Chiles wrote: "Just as Christ baptized believers through His agents or disciples, so a New Testament church administers baptism by its duly authorized agent, usually the pastor."³⁶

In 1971 on the subject of "The Ordinances" Elder Roy Mitchell said: "The proper authority for baptism is a local Baptist Church. . . . A proper administrator is an ordained minister of that church. A lot of people believe that anyone can do that, but I don't think so."³⁷

The reader is asked to recall the statements made by T. P. Simmons earlier in this series which appeared in TBE. Also recall that Elder Simmons was the first editor of TBE, Elder J. R. Gilpin the second, and Milburn Cockrell the third. My views on the administrator of church baptism were stated in 1979 when I wrote an article on "The Bible Authority For Baptism." In this article I said: "Thus in our generation water baptism is to be administered by the Divine authority given to New Testament Baptist churches who act through their ordained of

stand on an ordained minister in church baptism? A few isolated quotes, now being used by some, taken out of context proves nothing.

J. R. Graves (1820-1893) stood by the old landmark as did the Baptists before him. He wrote: "Paul distinctly declares that he was specially called, ordained, and put into the ministry' (I Tim. 1:11-12 and 2:7). He reminds both Timothy and Archippus that they were specially designated for this office (I Tim. 4: 14 and Col. 4:17). He also declares that evangelists, pastors, and teachers, are special gifts to the churches. He commanded Titus to ordain elders in every city, and left Timothy in Crete for this purpose. Why ordain men to do a specific work--as preaching and administering the ordinances--if all Christians are equally obligated to do it?"²⁵

"If 'it is as much the duty of one Christian as another to preach the gospel,' then the doctrine of a special call and the duty of ordination should both be repudiated, and all men, women, and children, if only church members, should proceed to preach and baptize *when, where,* and whomsoever they please! The preaching of the gospel, and administering the ordinances, belong strictly to a *specific* officer of a local church--can only be done by its authority and under its guardianship. The minister is then a church officer, and his work is official work."²⁶ . . . Despite all their sophistries, it is as certain as the teachings of the Scriptures are true.

exercising their authority in recognizing God's call to any of the members to preach and to administer the ordinances. This has been their plan, and I know of no better plan."³⁰

Hear him still again: "Our fathers believed that the officers of the churches, chosen by the suffrages of the churches, and set apart by ordination, were the men to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. This was the old doctrine. . ."³¹ Still again: "The churches, therefore, appoint elders to preach and administer the ordinances. . ."³²

In his church manual he says: "The administration of ordinances as well as the preaching of the Word is the proper business of the pastor."³³ Still again he says: ". . .that is to say, it is administered by ministers of the gospel. But ministers derive their authority to preach and all minister the ordinances from Christ, through his churches."³⁴

Yes, Bro. J. M. Pendleton stood by the old landmark. After all, he was an Old Landmark Baptist.

THE BAPTIST EXAMINER ON THIS QUESTION

I feel sure that all are willing to concede that there have been examples of what some now call "dual authority in baptism" published in *The Baptist Examiner* over the years. I feel also that they are ready to concede that for the five years that I was editor I advocated the view I now hold. Hence I shall waste no time trying to prove these things. But did TBE advocate my position at all in the past? Let us look and see.

bership of the church.

J. G. Bow wrote an article in 1964 on "A True Baptist Church Is The Only Administrator Of Baptism." He said in this article: "As 'Jesus made

ficials. This is the only valid baptism."³⁸

It is extremely strange to me that in TBE there were articles before my

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A COMPARISON

