

Historical Revisionism – Romans 16:17-18

I. Introduction:

- A. A couple weeks ago I brought a message entitled: *“Ours is not a Reformed Baptist Church.”*
1. It generated quite a bit of interest beyond the walls of our own building.
 2. I don't know how many have watched it on FaceBook, but nearly a hundred people have listened to it on Sermonaudio.com, and more are listening every day. Thirteen countries & half the United States.
 3. I mentioned at the time that the message was prompted by an email which said that our church was listed on a *“Reformed Baptist”* website, and I wasn't particularly pleased.
 4. My purpose was to warn you, Calvary Baptist Church, of the dangers in the *“Reformed Baptist Movement.”*
 5. It is moving ever closer to us. But the truth is, I have had very little direct experience with it thus far.
 6. However some of you **have** been confronted by it, & other acquaintances have actually been in battle with it
- B. Missionary Daniel Pearson called me a couple days after he heard that message, basically commending it.
1. But he also asked for more information on a point that I made. I said Protestants have persecuted Baptists.
 2. It seems that today's Protestant-minded Baptists are ignoring or manipulating church history.
 3. As our Apostle warned us, they are causing divisions and offenses – which doesn't really surprise me.
 4. But some of them are actually trying to deceive the hearts of the simple with lies and factual manipulation.
 5. It is not so much with the Word of God, especially in the area of the atonement and salvation in general.
 6. Some of their attacks come in the area of our Baptist history.
- C. For example, Brother Daniel has been told that the Reformers never really persecuted Baptists, therefore we shouldn't mind being a part of the Protestant flock.
1. He asked me if I could give him some supporting documentation.
 2. That encouraged me to spend a few hours combing through my library.
 3. Having done that for him, I have decided to share with you, facts which are currently being denied by some of our brethren in the Reformed Baptist movement.

II. But before I get to Protestant persecution, it is necessary to consider the people they were persecuting.

- A. This is where the historical revisionism begins.
1. Our Baptist doctrines did not reemerge in the 16th century after being buried for one and a half millennia.
 2. Early historians from among both the Catholics and Protestants have declared that baptistic people have been worshiping and serving Christ since the close of the New Testament era.
 3. The doctrines which we at this church hold have been taught and preached throughout history.
- B. I won't spend a lot of time on this point, and yet it is important.
1. In 1819, Protestants **Ypieg & Dermout** published *The History of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands*.
 - a. In it they concluded, *“We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites, were the original Waldenses, and have long in the history of the church received the honor that origin.*
 - b. *On this account the Baptists may be considered the **ONLY** Christian community which has stood since the days of the Apostles,*
 - c. *and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the Gospel through all ages.”*
 2. Remember this is not a Baptist testimony of itself. This is what a pair of distinguished Protestants wrote.
- C. Johann **Neander** (1789-1850) a German Lutheran theologian wrote a book called *General History of Christian Religion and the Church*.
1. Somewhat indistinctly he wrote: *“It was not without some foundation of truth that the Waldenses of this period asserted the high antiquity of their sect, and maintained that from the time of the secularization of the church – this is, as they believe, from the time of Constantine's gift to the Roman bishop Silvester – such an opposition as finally broke forth in them, had been existing all along.”*

2. What Neander was trying to say was that the people called "*Waldenses*," claimed to have existed from the time that the Roman Emperor Constantine granted his authority to the Bishop of Rome.
- D. Trying not to belabor the point, I'll give you one other historian.
1. Johann *Mosheim*, a Lutheran, is generally considered to be the father of modern church history.
 2. His book *Ecclesiastical History from the Birth of Christ to the Present* was published in 1726.
 3. He wrote: "*The true origin of that sect which acquired the denomination of anabaptists, by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who came over to their communion... is hid in the remote depths of antiquity, and is, of consequence, extremely difficult to be ascertained.*"
- E. My point is: there have been baptistic people in this world since the beginning.
1. For more than a millennium, multitudes of these protesting people were being slaughtered by the armies of the Pope.
 2. But then in 1517, Martin Luther, a Catholic and former monk, posted his 95-point protest against Rome.
 3. That man, and that act, have been considered the beginning of the Reformation & the rise of Protestantism.
 4. Note those two words – "*reformation*" & "*protest.*" They express *the original intent* of Luther & the others.
 - a. At first, there was no intention of leaving the Mother church of Rome.
 - b. All they wanted was to protest a few of her heresies and to force some reforms.
 5. But again, there were others before, during and after the Reformation who had nothing to do with Rome.
 6. And I believe that our church – along with many others – sprang from those churches, completely apart from the Reformers.

III. The Protestant Reformers.

- A. Among lesser leaders and many followers, six men are considered to be the foremost Reformers.
1. *Martin Luther* (1483-1546) and *Philipp Melancthon* (1497–1560) in Germany.
 2. *John Calvin* (1509–1564) and *Uldrych Zwingli* (1484–1531) in Switzerland.
 3. *John Knox* (1513–1572) in Scotland, and *Henry VIII* (1491-1547) in England.
 - a. It might be argued that King Henry was not really a Protestant, because he wasn't a theologian.
 - b. Nevertheless, for private reasons he broke with Rome and tried to rid England – and himself – of the authority of the Pope.
 - c. And Edward VI, Henry's son Henry by wan of this third wife, Jane Seymour, was raised a Protestant.
 4. All six of these men lived at the turn of the 16th century.
 5. Protestantism began fifteen hundred years too late to be Biblical, and to point to these men as the beginning of anything, is a theological mistake.
- B. Now, let's go back to my study for the past two weeks and the purpose of this message:
1. Several of these men – some to a larger degree than others – but several of these men joined the Catholics in their persecution of the baptistic people who had lived separated from Rome for 1500 years.
 2. These Reformers retained the hatred which Rome had for our forefathers, persecuting and murdering people who more or less believed what we believe here in this church.
- C. Before getting to some details, let me make a few preliminary comments.
1. Our Reformed Baptist brethren try to tell us the Reformers didn't persecute Baptists based on two things:
 2. Some of them would rather not say that those who practiced believers' baptism by immersion from the 1st century to the 16th century were really Baptists, because they had different titles and various doctrines.
 - a. They did have different names, and it is true that some of them had some serious doctrinal errors.
 - b. But many of them believed essentially what we believe here at Calvary Baptist.
 3. And yet some of today's Reformed Baptists say, when the Reformers rejected the Anabaptists, it had nothing to do with modern Baptists.
 4. That is a matter of little more than semantics.

- D. And then second, for the most part, the leaders of the reformation **didn't PERSONALLY persecute** anyone.
1. Several of them only made statements against the Anabaptists and encouraged others to rid their countries of the Baptist influence.
 - a. They looked away when some of the horrendous things were being done.
 - b. They were complicit, but they didn't get their hands dirty. They avoided the "wet-work" – the blood.
 2. Tonight, for the sake of time and our sanity, I'm not going to mention all the sources of my information.
 3. But I am putting those sources in my notes, & if anyone would like to have them, all they need to do is ask.
 4. Also, for the sake of an outline I'm going to use the names of several of those Reformers.

IV. Let's start with the man who is considered Protestantism's founder – Martin Luther.

- A. For many hundreds of years, Anabaptist people had protected themselves by living high in the Alps.
1. Life there was hard – severe – but they were willing to endure in order to maintain their Baptist principles: faith in Christ alone, water immersion for believers, the return of Christ, religious freedom and so on.
 2. The Catholics hated them and often tried to exterminate them, but the Lord blessed with protection.
 3. They would venture out of the mountains as book sellers and merchants for the purpose of spreading the gospel, but for the most part they remained, like the conies, among the rocks and mountains.
 4. And because of this, Luther didn't have much contact with them in the early days of his protest.
 5. But as soon as word of the rebellion reached the Alps, the Anabaptist Waldensians began to more aggressively evangelize, thinking that Luther, Calvin and the others would protect them.
 6. Sadly, they were not as well-protected as they had hoped.
- B. Wherever the Baptists settled, Luther played the part of a universal bishop, and wrote to princes and senates to engage them to expel such dangerous men – G. H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Baptists*, point 1522.
- C. In Luther's Germany, As soon as the civil authority learned that (the Anabaptist named) Melchoir began to baptize, he and all those who adhered to the sect, who allowed themselves to be baptized again, were banished out of East Feisland, and all belonging to the sect were obliged to leave. John T. Christian, "A History of the Baptists," Vol. 1, page 131.
- D. Luther never participated in the execution of any Anabaptist, and he was never present when one of his men carried out an execution, but his rhetoric was certainly against them.
- E. Catholics weren't generally killed in Lutheran territories (in non-wartime); they were banished; but Anabaptists were killed by Lutherans, with the express consent of Luther and Melanchthon. – David Armstrong, Internet article.
- F. In 2010 the Lutheran World Federation formally asked forgiveness from the Anabaptists... for its 16th-century persecution, including torture and killings.
1. Anabaptists, whose name means "rebaptizers," were... persecuted by both Lutherans and Catholics.
 2. They emphasized believer's, or adult, baptism, even for those who had been baptized as infants.
 3. Much of the Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists was based on writings by key figures in the Lutheran movement such as Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, as well as condemnations in Lutheran confessional documents such as the Formula of Concord and the Augsburg Confession, which are still considered authoritative for Lutherans today. – *The Christian Century Magazine*.
- G. Why did the Lutheran denomination feel the need for forgiveness if there wasn't a good reason?
1. It wasn't that modern Baptists or Anabaptist groups were trying to force the Lutherans into reparations.
 2. This apparently began in the hearts of some modern Lutheran leaders.

V. Philip Melanchthon

- A. Melanchthon was the first German reformer to formally demand that governments punish false teaching.
1. In a letter of 15 February 1530, Melanchthon promoted the idea that blasphemous articles of faith, even if they have nothing to do with (political) sedition, must be punished with the sword.
 2. That is, those Anabaptist articles and statements of faith were considered to be seditious.
 3. Luther bestowed his sanction upon this device in his Exposition of the 82d Psalm. – *Global Anabaptist Mennonite on line*.
- B. In 1530 even the gentle Melanchthon could write to Myconius: “But now I regret not a little my former mildness. I am now of the opinion that persons who defend an article of doctrine which is openly blasphemous should be put to death by the authorities.”
1. And what was considered “openly blasphemous” was anything that deviated from the Reformers’ view.
 2. Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon & others eagerly welcomed the death penalty for Baptists & similar “heretics.”
- C. In 1534 the Protestant city of Strasbourg decreed that no child was to be left unbaptised, and that children so left unbaptised would be baptised “by the officers of the law.”
1. Can it be surprising that the Baptists were asking, “Where is such a Christianity to be found in the New Testament?”
 2. The early Reformers were Protestants, which meant protesting against the false doctrines of Romanism and protesting, just as severely, against any of a Baptist viewpoint. – Alun McNubb, *Evangelical Times on line*.

VI. John Calvin

- A. According to Erasmus, the Anabaptists were numerous in Switzerland in 1529.
1. However they had already been suffering there at the hands of the Reformed.
 2. The first decree against them, imposing a fine, was passed by the Senate at Zurich in 1525.
 3. In 1526, another decree was passed making the penalty for Anabaptism – death.
 4. These always were made with the full approbation of the reformers, who were intensely active in the securing their execution. *Martyrology*
- B. Calvin enforced Christian doctrine and principles at the point of the sword.
1. In October 1563, the Geneva government burned to death Michael Servetus for heresy.
 2. Servetus held unitarian views and was definitely a false teacher, but the New Testament nowhere instructs churches to kill false teachers.
 3. Servetus’ death sentence was supported not only by Calvin, but also by Melanchthon in Germany and Bullinger in Geneva and by other Protestant leaders who were consulted about the case.
 4. (I am not saying that Servetus was a Baptist, but he was not much more a heretic in the eyes of the Protestants than the anabaptists.)
- C. Other men were also put to death under Calvin’s tenure.
1. “So entirely was he in favour of persecuting measures, that he wrote a treatise in defence of them, maintaining the lawfulness of putting heretics to death.
 2. And he reduced these rigid theories to practice, in his conduct towards Castellio, Jerom Bolsee, and Servetus, whose fates are too generally known to require being here repeated. – J.J. Stockdale, *The History of the Inquisitions* (1810), p. xxviii).
- D. In the days of King Edward VI of England, Calvin wrote a letter to Lord Protector Somerset and urged him to put Anabaptists to death:
1. These altogether deserve to be well punished by the sword, seeing that they do conspire against God, who had set him (the king) in his royal seat – J. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. 1, chap. 15.

2. Historian John Christian observes that Calvin “was responsible in a large measure for the demon of hate and fierce hostility which the Baptists of England had to encounter.”

VII. Ulrich Zwingli

- A. Zwingli, took over the leadership of the Swiss Reformation from John Calvin.
 1. He who was hailed as a great reformer and as a godly man, was actually a serial killer, a mass murderer of the highest order.” James Alter, *The Reformation in the Light of Baptist History* – page 9.
 2. Zwingli could stand coolly by and see the Baptists drowned, but surely not because the New Testament was silent on the subject of drowning Baptists.
 3. If its silence gave consent to the baptism of infants, certainly it did not render the legal murder of Baptists holy.” – T. Armitage “*The History of the Baptists,*” page 334.
- B. Zwingli was so frightened with the spread of Anabaptism that he complained that the struggle with the Catholic party was “but child’s play compared to the conflict with the Anabaptists.” – G.F. Hersberger, “*Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision,* Page31 (?)
- C. Still, for a long period, the persecutions continued throughout all Switzerland, which so far from checking Anabaptism, seemed to stimulate its growth.
 1. It was either go to the Reformed Church, or die, and many died.
 2. Balthazar Hubmeyer was one the more distinguished Anabaptists who felt the severity of the laws and persecuting spirit of the Swiss Reformers.
 3. As a learned and eloquent Catholic priest, he first embraced the Reformed doctrines and became a good friend of Zwingli. But he came finally, to regard infant baptism as a popular error and renounced it.
 4. He was seized and imprisoned in Zurich, enduring various forms of torture.
 5. Eventually he was burned to death in 1528. His last words were: “With joy I die that I may come to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”
 6. At the same time his wife was drowned in the Danube. – R. Cook *The Story of the Baptists,* (1884), pg. 64.
- D. Felix Mantz, an Anabaptist, a native of Zurich and former friend of Zwingli was drowned in 1527, and Louis Hetzer was beheaded in 1529.
 1. As late as 1671, 7,800 persons, homeless and destitute, were driven out of Berne by the Reformers. – R. Cook *The Story of the Baptists,* (1884), Page 64.
- E. At the urging of Zwingli on September 9, 1527 the St. Gall city council passed the following decree:
 1. “All who adhere to or favor the false sect of the Baptists, and who attend hedge-meetings, shall suffer the most severe punishments. Baptist leaders, their followers, and protectors shall be drowned without mercy. Those, however, who assist them, or fail to report or to arrest them shall be punished otherwise on body and goods as injurious and faithless subjects.”
 2. The Council of St. Gall, ordered that “as the Baptists dipped for baptism they were to be drowned for punishment.” – John T. Christian, “*A History of the Baptists,*” Vol. 1 page 121

VIII. King Henry VIII

- A. As much as Henry VIII hated the papal party, after he had broken with the Pope, he had still more hatred for the Baptists.
 1. The history of the Baptists of England, in the times of Henry VIII is written in blood.
 2. He had scarcely come to the throne before proceedings were begun against them, and they were persecuted to the death.” – John T. Christian, “*A History of the Baptists,*” Vol. 1 page 189.

- B. In 1534, King Henry VIII issued an edict against those foreigners “who had been baptized in infancy, but had renounced that baptism, and having been re-baptized, had entered England, and were spreading their opinions over the kingdom.
1. In 1535, ten were burned in pairs and fourteen more in 1536.
 2. In 1538, six Dutch Baptists were sentenced and imprisoned, two of whom were burned.” – *All Religions of the World*, pg. 408.
 3. In 1539 fifteen women were drowned and sixteen men were beheaded.
- C. Thieves and vagabonds shared the king’s favor, but Baptists were not tolerated.
1. Joan Boucher, a lady of rank and well known at court, was the first victim.
 2. Annie Askew, a lady of quality, whose name stands high on the roles of the Christian martyrology of the sixteenth century was the next to seal her testimony by her death.
 3. She was first cruelly tortured, and afterward burned alive in 1546.” – *All Religions of the World*, pg. 409.
- D. George Van Pare, a Dutch Baptist, was burned at Smithfield as late as, January 13, 1551.
1. His persecution testified that he was man of fervid piety and enlarged benevolence.
 2. His condemnatory sentence was signed by Cranmer, Ridley and Coverdale. – *All Religions of the World*, pg. 409.

IX. Conclusion:

- A. Speaking generally, Mosheim, remarks, “there were certain sects and doctrines against whom the zeal, vigilance and severity of Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists were united. The object of their common aversion were the Anabaptists” – G.H. Orchard, “*A Concise History of Baptists*,” pt. 1521.
- B. In almost all the countries of Europe (Catholic and Protestant) an unspeakable number of Baptists preferred death in its worst forms, says Mosehiem.
1. Neither the view of the flames that were kindled to consume them, nor the ignominy of the gibbet, nor the terrors of the sword, could shake their invincible constancy, or make them abandon tenants that appeared dearer to them than life and all its enjoyments.’ – G. H. Orchard, “*A Concise History of Baptists*” pt. 1536.
- C. The early reformers, without exception, were violently opposed to the Anabaptists” – G.F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pg. 202.
- D. Says, Mosheim, “The simple denial of infant baptism, and consequent baptism of all on believing, were looked upon as flagitious and intolerable heresies” – R. Babcock. “*The Baptist Memorial and Monthly Record*.”
- E. These are all references to Reformer’s persecution in 16th century Europe.
1. We could spend just as much time listing Protestant persecutions against the Baptists in this country.
 2. Here Baptist families were jailed, robbed of their property and exiled by the Puritan/Congregationalists.
 3. Obadiah Holmes was whipped for the truth. Preachers were jailed in Virginia by the Episcopalians.
 4. Good men, like Henry Dunster lost their jobs and positions because they held to Baptist principles.
- F. To deny the persecutions of Protestants against our Baptist forefathers is blindness at the best and historical revisionism at the least.