

**Be Ready to Answer:  
Presenting the Truth to Others**

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# Presenting the Truth to Others

## By David Pyles

It is difficult to imagine a subject of greater importance than the one in the title of this paper. This is particularly true in these times when many Primitive Baptist churches are in decline, and when the same is being observed in most other denominations. The subject is a daunting one, particularly since I do not profess to be an expert, but evidently those who have arranged this meeting think I am qualified to speak on it, so let us hope they are correct.

If I am in fact qualified, the reason would be that I have attempted to be a student of success rather than failure. I have heard many analyses of why Primitive Baptist churches are declining, but I think this is really the wrong question to ask. Some Primitive Baptist churches are growing, and the relevant question is: Why are they succeeding? There are an infinite number of ways for a body to be sick or debilitated, but far fewer ways for it to be healthy. This means a study of success is generally much easier than a study of failure. I have attended six different Primitive Baptist churches on a regular basis in my life. Of those six, four of them were growing, so I have been blessed to witness success. In what follows, I hope to present several rules of success I think I have learned from those churches, as well as from my own personal efforts to present the truth to others.

If every one of us would commit ourselves to the task of converting one person to the truth, and if we would all carry through with our commitment, then every Primitive Baptist church in America would be doubled in size in short time. Notwithstanding, the task is more challenging than it sounds, and to be very frank, the young people among Primitive Baptists today must do a better job than the generation that preceded them. You are going to have to do a better job of converting others, maintaining peace among yourselves, avoiding doctrinal anomalies, etc, than was done by my generation. This is a simple, hard fact. But in observing you and other Primitive Baptist young people today, I have strong reason to believe this is exactly what the Lord is going to do through you. My confidence is such that I am ready to hand you the keys.

In what follows, I present a list of rules I think to be important toward building our churches through evangelical labors. I do not claim the list to be complete, but I think it is not far from complete, and am convicted that every point in the list is accurate and important.

### **1) Endeavor to Build Up Christ and the Truth and Let God Build Up the Primitive Baptists**

The first step in effective evangelism is of course that we do it with proper motivations so that God will bless our efforts. *“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it...”*, (Ps 127:1). Everyone has seen so-called ministers in so-called churches who seemed ready to do anything to gain a nickel or a nose. A convert is to them a “feather in the cap” or another line on their resume. Their first motivation is to build up their so-called church. It is not to build up Christ and His word.

Primitive Baptists are generally convicted about their principles and are therefore less disposed to this error. Nonetheless, I think we are capable of committing it in smaller degrees. Consider for example the case where we have been able to convert a person on a few points of truth, but were not able to convince

them to join a Primitive Baptist church. We would be tempted to view this as a failure, but this is the wrong way to view it. To convert someone on any point of truth is a victory, and in fulfillment of our duty to God. He will bless our churches for it in His own good time.

I have put this point first because in the remainder of this paper I will say much about converting people to becoming Primitive Baptists, but understand that the immediate objective is to convert people to the honor of Christ and His word, and having fulfilled our duties to God in this respect, then we can hope with confidence that God will increase our churches.

## **2) Understand That Churches Grow Through *Personal* Contacts**

This principle is of huge importance. I have said many times that I believe the first step toward building a church is that you must overcome the illusion that people are just going to walk into your church, just hear a few sermons, just get converted and just jump in the baptistery. This is not going to happen. I would challenge anyone to produce a single example of a Primitive Baptist church in this country that has grown on any protracted basis simply because people walked in off the streets. A similar illusion is one that says, "If we can only get Lasserre Bradley on our radio broadcast, or get Sonny Pyles to preach our annual meeting, then all we will need to do is set out the folding chairs and pay the water bills." I will assure you this is not going to happen.

When you see people joining Primitive Baptist churches, in almost every case, you will find that they had a *personal* contact with someone who was already in that church. That is, they were a relative or a friend to someone already there, or else they had an encounter with someone there who expressed happiness with that church.

God blesses our churches to grow when we both have the truth and live the truth. Living the truth means that we are going to be more engaging, personable, caring and giving than other people. Personal contacts made by such means are where growth will come.

## **3) Study to Show Thyself Approved**

To demonstrate the necessity of biblical knowledge when seeking to convert others, simply do a survey of Primitive Baptists who were converted from other religious orders and ask them the following question: "What scripture first set you on the path toward becoming a Primitive Baptist." My experience has been that you will be given a different verse almost every time. I have heard some say Jn 6:44; others Jn 17; others Jer 31:3-341, etc. Human minds are complex and varied, so God has provided multiple ways to unlock them. It is important that we have all of His scriptural keys at our disposal.

I have found highlighters to be of limited use when studying the Bible. I prefer to have a wide-margin Bible where I can make notes. One system that has been very useful to me is: On any particular doctrine or subject, find a cornerstone scripture whose location can be easily remembered, then, adjacent to that scripture in the margin, write down all other scriptures treating the same issue. So, for example, Jn 3:3 is the cornerstone scripture on the subject of regeneration. Its location can be easily remembered, so this is a good place to write down references to other scriptures treating the same subject (e.g. Jn 1:13, Eph 2:1-10, etc.).

#### **4) Study Such That You Can Answer, But Live Such That You Will be Asked**

The Apostle Peter said to always be ready to give an answer to every man that asks for a reason of your hope (1Pet 3:15), but this presupposes that something in you has provoked a question from them. While it is a good thing to initiate Bible conversations, it is even better when others initiate Bible conversations with you. They are not apt to do this if your manner of life, manner of speech and general attitude are no different from the society in which you live. Hence, Peter prefaced his commandment with “*sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*” To “sanctify” means to distinguish in an honorable way. These distinctions are what will provoke questions from others. These distinctions must of course include a personal morality that is biblical, but questions will be prompted with highest curiosity when you show that your concern, care and interest for them is greater than what they receive from other people. Again, if Primitive Baptist churches are to grow, then they must be more giving and more caring than others.

#### **5) Make Sure the Doctrine You are Defending is in Fact Primitive Baptist Doctrine**

Another way of stating this is: “The first step in successfully defending a position is in choosing a position that is defensible.” True Primitive Baptist doctrine is defensible, but by “Primitive Baptist doctrine” I mean what has been generally taught by our people over the ages, and what has therefore endured the test of repeated biblical examination. I do not mean “hair-brain,” novel ideas that have been advocated in Primitive Baptist pulpits and lunchrooms from time to time. I am happy to say that Primitive Baptists are much more homogenous in their beliefs than most other denominations, and the points over which they quarrel are usually viewed as trivial by others. Still, anomalous cases are inevitable. They have existed in every generation of the church. It is therefore important to be able to delineate between what is time-tested, Bible-proven, Primitive Baptist doctrine and what is either heresy or speculation.

For purposes of knowing what is true Primitive Baptist doctrine, older writings serve very well – not because they were written in the non-existent “good ole days,” but because they have endured the test of time. Bad and anomalous writings tend to make their way to the garbage dump.

Some will be critical of my previous paragraph, claiming we should go only by the Bible and not by history. I agree that the Bible should be our sole rule of faith and practice, but history dictates our affiliation. The Bible dictates *what* I believe, but history dictates *where* I am going to believe it. Also, if we go by the Bible, then a point upon which we can all agree is that the Bible commands us to be truthful. Now the term “Primitive Baptist” makes a historical assertion. It means a Baptist of original vintage. If this is not what you are, then do not represent yourself as being such.

#### **6) Achieve Conviction About What You Believe**

It is difficult to persuade others if they detect uncertainty in our own convictions, and even if we persuade them, they will rightfully feel betrayed if we afterward change our mind.

If in truth you are unsure about your Primitive Baptist beliefs, then you need to carry them into the water to see if you can drown them; build a fire under them to see if you can burn them; beat them with a stick to see if you can break them, etc. I am personally confident that you will fail on all counts, but you must learn this for yourself. Challenge your beliefs, but be objective and thorough in your assessment, and be careful about expressing your doubts until you have them resolved. Some of the worst wars I experienced

in my youth were the ones that happened between my own two ears, but none knew about it apart from God. With His help and His Bible, I came away more resolute and convicted than ever.

I have seen some people who were so unstable and impressionable that to know their beliefs you merely needed to find the last book they read. This disgusts me, especially when I observe it in ministers. I have also been very disappointed in the lack of objectivity I have seen in people. They will find what they think to be a few faults with Primitive Baptists, and become so obsessed with them that they will defect to another religious order where they willingly turn a blind eye to abominations. If you are unsure of your Primitive Baptist beliefs, then challenge them to the fullest extent of your ability, but do not lose your objectivity.

#### **7) Do Not Expect Too Little. Do Not Expect Too Much.**

A man that expects too little is very apt to fall short of his full potential. A man that expects too much is very apt to get discouraged and quit. It is important that our expectations be reasonable.

You can expect too little by supposing that because you are not a preacher, then your ability to convert others is limited. Exactly the opposite may be true. When people see I am preacher, highly educated, etc, I believe many of them say to themselves: "That guy is so smart, he could make a fool of me even if I were right." Then they avoid or dismiss me on that account. The fact is that you may be able to do better on a one-on-one basis than your preacher. Do not expect of him what you can better do yourself.

You can also expect too much. If you are entertaining ideas of converting thousands of people to the things you believe, then go ahead and enjoy your fantasy, but at some point you need to wake up. True Bible believers have always been a minority in this world and always will be. The fact is, that given current trends, you need to be mentally prepared for the possibility that you will see even smaller numbers in your church than you see now. Never surrender to this conclusion, but neither should you disallow it.

You can also set yourself up for disappointment by expecting too much of Primitive Baptists. You need to decide now what the term "Primitive Baptist" means to you. To some it is a body of people. To me and others it is a body of truth. Now if it is to you a body of people, then be sure that anytime you are dealing with people, you are going to experience disappointments that could discourage you. But if it is to you a body of truth, then you will have all the basis you will ever need for being a Primitive Baptist, even if you are the last one standing on the planet.

#### **8) "The Servant of the Lord Must Not Strive"**

Argumentative people are seldom persuasive, and are oftentimes counter-productive. That is, they create hostility toward what they are advocating rather than support. On the other hand, a cool, competent head is a formidable force. When seeking to convert others, you already have a sufficient challenge in overthrowing their intellectual errors. You surely do not want to add their emotions to your opposition.

Some people seem to be argumentative because they believe it their Christian duty to be passionate about what they believe. But it is better to show your passion by how you walk rather than how you talk. Besides, the primary purpose of our evangelical efforts is to create passion in others, not to demonstrate our own.

Remember that few people will be converted during the course of conversation itself. At that point, they are so bent on defending their own position that their minds are not truly in an unbiased state. The conversion is more apt to happen in the quietness of their reflection. It is very important that they walk away from the discussion with favorable feelings because this is where your victory is most apt to begin.

You must also be conscious of who is watching the conversation. Many times I have had conversations with people when I knew there was little hope of converting them, but I did it for the sake of the audience. The audience is apt to scrutinize your demeanor and attitude even more than the person who is resisting you.

If a person begins to revile you personally, or if their criticisms degenerate into absurdities, then it is crucial that you realize this is a reliable sign that you have won the intellectual battle, especially before the eyes of any audience. Do not squander the victory by descending into the same behavior.

My last point here may be the most important of all: Remember the old saying, “Easy come, easy go.” My personal experience has repeatedly taught the truth of this. If a visitor in our church is not asking questions and is not challenging me, then I have learned to be cautious with my optimism. But if they are asking questions, and respectfully challenging my Primitive Baptist views, then I have learned that chances are better than not that I am looking into the face of a future Primitive Baptist.

The same principle can hold with those who are already church members. Along with the victories, I have had my fair share of losses in those who defected the church I pastor to other orders. One thing nearly all of them had in common was that they left without resistance. That is, almost none of them came to me to see if I could answer their questions, resolve their doubts, or reply to the false doctrines they were hearing elsewhere. It is my firm belief they did not do this because they were afraid that I could in fact defend Primitive Baptist beliefs against the views they were entertaining. As another old saying goes, “Their minds were made up, and they did not want to be confused by the facts.”

The bottom line is, be grateful and encouraged by a respectful challenge. Do not be offended by it.

## **9) Remember the Power of Questions**

Humans are great lovers of symbols, whether crescent moons, swastikas, mascots, flags or whatever. But they do not consider that the question mark (“?”) is a more powerful symbol than them all. It is the key to success. Your success will depend on how many of them you can answer, which will in turn be dictated by how many of them you have asked. We should aspire to ask more, and be able to answer more, than anyone else.

The Bible denounced all unbiblical religions as abominations except one. This was worship of the unknown God at Athens. The shrine they erected to him had a confession of their own ignorance of him written on it. Hence, the shrine was in effect a huge question mark engraved in stone. Now it is a remarkable thing that of all the unbiblical religions in the world, this is the only one God accepted, and this ought to show anyone the power underlying the question mark!

Questions are also powerful tools toward effective conversation. I learned this long ago as a young professor at Oklahoma State. On every day at mid-morning, much of the faculty would gather in the “coffee room” for conversation. At first I disdained this, and opted to continue working in my office

instead, but later I learned that the coffee room was a good place to gain knowledge and information. So after a few visits there in search of knowledge, I noticed that on some days the conversation was dead and uninformative, whereas on others it was lively and profitable. Further, I noticed that whether it was one or the other was mostly dictated by the presence or absence of a single professor – an older man who had spent many years on the faculty there. The key was that all the others were anxious to give their opinions, but this one man had a habit of asking others for theirs. His questions are what gave impetus to the good conversation. The truth is that he was more knowledgeable than most in the room, but this did not stop him from asking questions. The irony was that after he had shown others the courtesy of valuing their opinion, they then felt obliged to return the same courtesy to him, which meant that he was the one who always had the last word! He was a wily old fox, so observe and learn.

Nothing gets a conversation rolling like a question, and people are generally appreciative at expressions of interest in their opinion. It is of course important that our questions be in sincere interest and not merely tactical tools. Even if we are settled in our opinion on a particular issue, we cannot persuade others until we understand how they think and why they think that way. I have learned that while being raised a Primitive Baptist has been a great blessing to me, it has also impaired my ability to understand others. I am very limited in my ability to understand why other Christians believe and worship as they do because I have never been on their side of the fence. So I commonly ask them questions so that I can better understand what is inside their heads. Good treatment must begin with proper diagnosis.

Nearly all people like to be asked questions about their views, but they are wearied by people whose conversation is a continual effusion of personal opinions. Indeed, these types of people are real conversation killers. If you begin by asking them for their opinion about a particular issue or scripture, this will then commonly result in them asking you for yours. This will open the door for you. If they do not ask for your opinion, this is good indication they are not a likely convert anyway, and this will serve to save your valuable time.

#### **10) Remember That Things Are Not What They Seem: Jesus Came to Save Sinners, Not the Righteous**

One of the most difficult illusions to overcome is the idea that people who are vastly different from us will be difficult to convert, whereas people who are similar to us will be easy to gain. This is usually an illusion. Because of this illusion, our tendency is to consider a Hindu, Buddhist or Roman Catholic as being so hopelessly in error that any effort toward their conversion will be in waste, whereas someone like a conventional Calvinist we think to be an easy gain because they only need to be corrected on a few points. The truth is that those in the former group are more apt to make good, faithful Primitive Baptists, and do it in short time, whereas the Calvinist will still be arguing with you a decade from now. Do not forget that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He did not come to call the righteous. Things are not what they seem.

## 11) Give Priority to Youth

When the Lord sent out preachers for the first time to make disciples, His instructions included the following:

*“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.” – Mt 10:14*

*“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.” – Mt 10:23*

The idea is that we are to keep moving, not allowing ourselves to be bogged down by stubborn people who insist upon ignorance and rebellion. Now this implies that we should give priority to youth. The reason is that older people in errant religions already have a well-established record of either commitment to error or apathy to truth. Younger people have a greater degree of innocence in this respect. While we should be ready to give an answer to *every* man, it is wrong to neglect younger people because we are preoccupied with banging our head against the wall with an old fool.

I reject the idea that Primitive Baptist churches have less to offer youth than churches in the denominational world. In truth, most of those churches are only offering youth what they already had in excess before they ever walked in the church-house door, namely, recreation and amusement. In this modern era, none of us are in need of more of this! What youth truly need is personal attention, personal care and biblical guidance. Who better to give this than Primitive Baptists?

## 12) Do Not Speak in Unknown Tongues

Sometimes Primitive Baptists put definitions on terms that are not the same as those used by other people. When conversing with others, it is important that these terms be used as people expect, or that our own terminology be carefully explained.

A prime example of this is the term “Calvinist.” One question I have been asked a countless number of times is: “Are Primitive Baptists Calvinists?” I have heard other Primitive Baptists speak of being asked the same question, and then they boasted of how they adamantly denied it. The problem is that, to all the world, a “Calvinist” is by definition one who believes in: the depravity of man, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the preservation of the saints – all of which are doctrines that Primitive Baptists resolutely affirm. So what is there for the inquirer to conclude but that Primitive Baptists reject one or more of these doctrines? The curious thing about the Primitive Baptist who answers the question with emphatic denial is that they would also emphatically deny that Primitive Baptists speak in unknown tongues, yet this is exactly what they did when disclaiming Calvinism. Paul warned (1Cor 14:23) that if we speak in unknown tongues before unbelievers, then they are apt to conclude that we are “mad” (i.e. “insane”). We should speak to people in language they can understand.

A typical answer I give to this question is: “Yes, we are Calvinists by the usual definition of the term, but there are points we consider to be important wherein we differ from most Calvinists, though it would require a trained eye to see these differences.” This type of reply usually prompts questions, which is of course exactly what we want. Notice also that I claim a difference from “most” Calvinists. There have



been reputable theologians outside of Primitive Baptists who were very similar to us, even on points where we differ from typical Calvinists.

What I have here said of “Calvinist” would also apply to the term “reformed.” Primitive Baptists are “reformed” under a strict definition of the term, even though they differ from most reformed theologians on other significant points.

“Time salvation” is an expression that will be unfamiliar to anyone except a Primitive Baptist. While I endorse what Primitive Baptists generally intend by this term, I am cautious about using it when speaking to others. You will see that later in this very paper I defend the concept intended by “time salvation” but without using the term itself. Terms like “*timely* salvation” or “*timely* deliverance” should be avoided because they misuse the word “timely.” “Timely” means “on time” (e.g. “He attended class in a *timely* manner.”). It does not mean “in time.” The proper word in that case is “temporal.”

Upon several occasions in my life, I have seen Primitive Baptist ministers who were ambiguous even when speaking to their own people. Even their fellow Primitive Baptists went away with an uncomfortable feeling, wondering exactly what the preacher intended by what he said. In all such cases, the outcome of this was *very bad*. It is imperative that people clearly understand what you believe and what you do not believe. “*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech...*” (2Cor 3:12).

I have seen people in my life who were very unclear in their explanations, but then blamed their failure to persuade on lack of ability in the hearers to ascend to the high plane of intellect and spirituality where they (i.e. the speakers) dwelled. While such explanations could be true, they are more apt to be very convenient and conceited excuses. My observation has been that if something is unclear in a man’s mouth, then this is typically because it is unclear in his head also. If we have failed to explain a thing clearly and convincingly, this is not a good time to be commending ourselves as geniuses. After having known several geniuses in my life, I would say that the mind of a genius works about like the mind of anyone else except that a genius has an unusual ability to reduce complex problems into simple terms. This is why the genius can solve the problem when others cannot.

### **13) Appeal to Personal Experience**

If you are talking to a born-again person, then bear in mind that they are a living, breathing, walking example of what you believe about salvation by grace. This explains why they will become much less resistant to you when the conversation moves from their abstract, man-made ideologies to their own personal experience.

A conversation I have had on more than one occasion goes like this: The other person says, “But, but, but, I believe everyone has a choice, whereas you are saying some were elected and some are not...” My common reply: “Yes, I agree with you that what I am calling ‘non-elect’ were left to their own choices; however, I deny that God left you personally to your choices. I believe He overruled what would have been your choices when He put a change in your mind and heart.” Now I suppose that one day someone will have a reply to this, but thus far it has never happened!

As another example, if a Christ-loving person claims that salvation is partly by their own good works, then ask them: “What good work do you claim to have done without the grace and help of God?” An

unregenerate man may be proud to answer this question, but if a regenerate man undertakes to answer it, my prediction is that his conscience will not feel better for doing so.

#### **14) Be Prepared to Defend Your Insistence Upon Logic**

One rule instinctively followed by nearly all Primitive Baptists when reading the Bible is that if an interpretation of scripture does not make sense then it cannot be right. Now as incredible as it may seem, there are some Christians who do not think this way. They have an unexpected level of comfort with contradictions, dismissing them to mystery, or else they may even go so far as to say that God has a different kind of logic than us, so that things appearing contradictory to us may actually be sensible to God. Even some highly-educated theologians claim this. The same people may even appear to express pride for believing contradictions, thinking this shows what great faith they have! Indeed they do, but it is faith in their heresy, not faith in God. As for the idea that God has different logic than us, this is preposterous to anyone who will carefully think about it.

To establish that two assertions are contradictory, we must of course use some degree of logic. Now if went to prove that God's logic can be contradictory to us, how could we know that the logic we used to establish the contradiction was in fact God's logic? This exposes us to the preposterous conclusion that God's logic could be different from our logic when compared using our logic, but God's logic could be identical to our logic when compared using His logic! Accordingly, if we claim that a contradiction with us can be sensible to God, then we must also allow that what is sensible to us could be a contradiction to God. So while such people claim to go strictly by the Bible and not by logic, the truth is they had just as well cast the Bible aside also because the Bible must surely be interpreted, but how can one do this without logic?

While Jesus very commonly used scripture in defense of the truth, He also oftentimes argued entirely from reason, not quoting any scripture at all. Never did he endorse any contradiction or impracticality. Further, there is not a religious teacher in the Bible who did more to scathe men for their inconsistencies and absurdities than Jesus Christ. God's logic is surely the same as ours, though His knowledge is infinitely greater.

While a particular logical argument may not have been inspired, be sure that God did inspire logic itself. This means that any logical argument is a valid argument, either with God or man.

While the Bible may assert some things that *appear* contradictory (e.g. God is both three and one, or Christ is both man and God.), these should be construed as accommodations to our limited understanding, not as contradictions.

#### **15) Do Not Present Primitive Baptist Doctrine in Ways that Diminish the Importance of Believing on Jesus Christ**

In my frank opinion, some Primitive Baptists have damaged their testimony with this error. Statements like "you don't have to believe..." or "you don't have to accept..." are atrocious ways of explaining Primitive Baptist doctrine. The reason is that anyone who has read the Bible with even half a brain knows that the book puts enormous importance on believing in Jesus Christ. These types of explanations are therefore justifiably shocking to Bible readers, and instantly give them a negative first-impression of Primitive Baptist doctrine.

The plain teachings of the Bible are that a man *must* believe on Jesus Christ in order to *know* he is eternally saved. Accordingly, no man has a right to lay claim to eternal salvation *unless* he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. The point we wish to make is that belief on Jesus Christ is the *effect* and *confirmation* of eternal life – not the *cause* of it. Stated differently, a distinction must be made between the *reality* of eternal life and the *realization* of it. In *reality*, eternal life is entirely by the grace of God, bought entirely by the death of Christ, and administered entirely by the Holy Spirit, but the *realization* of eternal life is entirely through the effects it produces, the chief of which is belief on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the realization of eternal salvation is a thing of utmost importance. A mountain may in *reality* be filled with gold and silver, but this is of no practical use whatsoever until someone *realizes* it.

This distinction between reality and realization was made by the Lord Jesus Himself in the cornerstone text on the new birth (Jn 3:3-8). He said the Holy Spirit is the real and exclusive force in regeneration, but because the Holy Spirit and His regenerating work are themselves unobservable, they can be realized or perceived only through the effects they product. The same distinction is also needful in understanding what the Bible said of Jesus Himself. Paul said, “*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,*” (Heb 5:8-9). As the eternal Son of God, Jesus has no imperfections and He had nothing to learn, but by His condescension and suffering, he became perfect in our realization.

#### **16) Do Not Present Primitive Baptist Doctrine in Ways that Diminish the Severity of Rejecting Jesus Christ**

While Primitive Baptist doctrine allows for saving power sufficient to reach even those who cannot, or have not, heard the preached gospel, such people are not to be ranked with what the Bible condemns as “unbelievers.” A person can neither believe nor disbelieve a thing they have never heard. So, for example, an infant is neither a believer nor an unbeliever, or at least not in an evangelical sense. When the Bible speaks of “unbelievers,” usual reference is to those who are willful rejecters of what the Holy Spirit has revealed concerning Jesus Christ. The Bible is very clear and emphatic in its condemnation of such unbelievers. It says they are damned (Mk 16:16); that the wrath of God abides on them (Jn 3:36); that they shall die in their sins (Jn 8:24), and that they shall be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). Primitive Baptist doctrine should never be presented in a way that denies or diminished this fact.

Of course, there are people in the world who claim to be believers when in fact they are not, and there are no doubt people who claim to be unbelievers when they are not. The true state of the heart is something we cannot perfectly judge, so we should refrain from attempting to do it, but our humility in this respect should not be perverted into a denial of what the Bible has said about unbelievers.

In close connection with this point, I have seen some Primitive Baptist attempt to defend their belief that God can save in un-evangelized lands by adducing the religiosity of the people in those lands. This is a serious error. The Bible never endorses false religion as a mark of the spirit. It is rather a mark of the flesh, and is generally ranked as an abomination. When we see true fruit of the spirit in people, i.e. love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc. (Gal 5:22), this gives reason to entertain hope for them, but their false religious ideas are a liability in this respect, not an asset.

## 17) Do Not Assert More Than You Must to Establish Your Position

Asserting too much is a common error and I think potential converts have been lost because of it. Some examples of this error are:

- a) To defend vocal music by asserting that instruments are evil, or to defend family-integrated worship by contending that Sunday schools are evil, or to defend church-based evangelism by contending that mission societies are evil. Even if these things were in fact evil, one need prove this to defend Primitive Baptist practice. All one needs to show is that our methods imitate inspired methods and must therefore be *best* under the wisdom of God.
- b) To defend rebaptism by contending that God considers the former baptism to be bogus. Again, even if this were true, it asserts more than one can prove and therefore asserts too much. What we can prove is that the Lord blesses us for doing the best we can given what we know at the time. If a person knows better, then they should also do better.
- c) To defend Primitive Baptist churches as being the only churches acknowledged by God. Even if this were true, it is far more than one can prove. God is very forbearing, and He almost surely blesses other bodies of people as being churches notwithstanding their errors. The relevant point is that Primitive Baptists have *discernible* churches. That is, they have what we can tell to be churches. With other denominations we cannot have the same confidence because we cannot surely know where the forbearance of God ends.
- d) To defend the doctrines of grace by pressing all five points of it. The truth is that once the depravity of man is established, one has no recourse but to accept most of the other points. The same may be said of the eternal love of God. All of the doctrines of grace tend to follow from this single point. So instead of five points, the doctrines can be built upon either of two. Stated simply, the doctrines of grace will follow if either one has a correct understanding of the nature of man, or if one has a correct understanding of the nature of God.

Understand what is needful to prove your position, and assert no more than this.

## 18) Do Not Assume the Burden of Proof When the Burden of Proof Is Not Yours to Assume

This point is really a corollary of the one just made. It seems that Primitive Baptists are almost invariably expected to bear the burden of proof in any scriptural discussion, but more times than not, the burden properly belongs to the other party. While it is of course a good thing to be able to prove anything we affirm, it is entirely reasonable that we hold other people to the same responsibility.

One common example of this is the question: “Why do you *not* have musical instruments?” See how the question presupposes that the burden of proof is ours to bear. But the real question is: “Why do you *have* musical instruments?” After all, there is no precedent for them in the New Testament Scriptures, and it is a veritable fact that most denominations did not have them, and openly opposed them, until recent centuries.

Yet a better example is: “Why do you rebaptize?” The burden of proof on this question is squarely on the other party. The proper question is: “Why do you *not* rebaptize, given that you have withdrawn yourself

from these other orders, denounced them as heretical, denied them your pulpits, and have re-ordained all of their ministers that converted to you? Upon what basis then do you receive their baptisms but reject their doctrine and reject their ordinations?”

### **19) Do Not Allow Others to Impute to You a Position That Is Not Yours**

This is a tactic commonly called “straw-manning.” It has been used against Primitive Baptists many times, and many times have I seen them allow it go unchallenged.

A common example is in a statement like: “So, you are saying that even if a non-elect were to believe, repent and obey, then God would still send him to hell because he is non-elect...” Now Primitive Baptist doctrine never made any such claim. Rather, it said that the non-elect *will not* believe, repent and obey. The case being supposed is purely hypothetical, having no practical relevance, so you can believe whatever you want concerning it.

Another example concerns predestination, where it is common as dirt to hear an objection that goes: “So, you are saying that God predestined people to hell without any consideration to their actions.” Again, Primitive Baptist doctrine never said any such thing. Besides, the objection is dubious within itself. There is no need to predestine a falling rock from hitting the ground; rather, it must be predestined *not* to hit the ground.

### **20) Do Not Allow Others to Retreat to a Position That is Not Theirs**

Violations of this type can take several forms: a) The person upon seeing that the official position of their religion cannot endure scriptural scrutiny will then retreat to a self-concocted position that possibly makes even less sense. b) The person asserts in one place what is contradicted by assertions they elsewhere make. c) The person complains of Primitive Baptist doctrine, but then advocates a position that only superficially differs in its implications. So they seek refuge in a facade. In all such cases, the contradiction should be exposed, but of course in a respectful way.

You cannot replace an old house with a new house without first tearing the old house down. For purposes of converting others, more progress may be made at first by showing them the problems with their present belief system than by showing them the strengths of yours. Any heretical system I have ever seen has internal inconsistencies that are not difficult to expose. Nothing will get the attention of a reasonable man any faster than showing him that his position has contradictions.

When a person retreats to a position that authorities in his own denomination will not support, then I will be quick to call his attention to this fact. This establishes that either of two things must be true: a) His church membership is in the wrong place, or b) His position is so far-fetched that he needs to seriously rethink it.

As to the second type of error, or what is simply an outright contradiction, I will illustrate with a conversation I have had with several Baptists on musical instruments. The conversation begins with them asking me why Primitive Baptists do not have instruments. A common reply I give to this goes as follows: “Since you are a Baptist, I will be able to explain that to you more easily than to others. When you as a good Baptist read the Bible, you saw that everyone in that book was baptized by immersion, and that all of them were professing believers. Now the Bible never actually stated that you could not

sprinkle, and it never actually stated that you could not baptize a baby, but because you think like a Baptist, and therefore believe we are obligated to both the precepts and precedents that are set by the Bible, you concluded it was your duty to imitate the Bible in baptizing professing believers by immersion only. Now to be a Primitive Baptist, all you have to do is be consistent in your application of that same principle, including, of course, in your church music.” Thus far, I have never received a reply to this answer.

Now to illustrate the third case, or where one objects to Primitive Baptist doctrine when their own doctrine leads to the same conclusions, consider the common objection: “I think your doctrine of election is unfair.” Now you can answer this by arguing the sovereignty of God if you wish, but the truth is that their own position does little to obviate their complaint. The reason is that they advocate an omniscient God the same as us. It is inconsistent for them to say it is wrong for God to favor one man over another, but right for God to impose a system that He *knows* will favor one man over another. The intent is the same either way, and the final effect is the same either way.

### **21) If We Mix We Win; If We Isolate We Lose**

In His final commandment before ascending to heaven, Christ began His statement with the word “go.” Even a good dog knows the difference between “stay” and “go.” We are of course to “stay” in the truth, but having done this, it is then our duty to “go” – to go spread the word, even so far as the ends of the earth. Typical Primitive Baptists are personable, caring and giving people, and a stronger case can be made for their religious views than for any other religion in the world. This being the case, it is not only our duty to “go,” but we are apt to be successful when we do. If we mix we win. I think the testimony of experience will confirm this. The word “go” applies especially to our immediate communities. It is important that we be active in our communities, and seek opportunities to interact with other people and to help them.

Accordingly, it is important that we not develop an “iron curtain” mentality. The term “iron curtain” came from the old Soviet Union where the Communists, for fear of their people being drawn to western thinking and ways, took extreme measures to deny all freedoms that could result in such interaction. The iron curtain did not work for the Soviet Union and it certainly will not work for us. If we isolate we lose. While it is very true we must not be changed by the world, the reason is that we are commanded to change the world. How can we possibly do this without having some degree of interaction with it? Now if there are some among us who are so simple, weak and impressionable that they cannot be trusted to change the world without being changed by it, then I believe the sooner they defect to the world the better off we will be. If, as a general rule, we are no better than this, then why should want to convert anyone to what we are?

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. – Mt 5:13-16*

8/12/15