

## BAPTIST'S DECAY BECAUSE OF SINFUL SENTIMENTALISM

Before we look at this let's look at some important scripture and a couple of good quotes.

*"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."* **Daniel 3:16-18**

*"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."* **Acts 5:29**

*"If the Baptists are right, they are the only Christian church on the face of the earth."* - **George W. McDaniel**

*"We recognize at this point, no room for division, either of practice or belief, or even sentiment."* - **J. M. Frost**

*"Christ has made no provision for changing the ordinance. Neither churches, nor synods, nor general assemblies, nor ecumenical counsels, nor pontiffs nor earthly power, have the show of authority for altering it. It is their province to obey, not to legislate."* - **Jeremiah Jeter**

**Pastor Jim Alter's said in his book "Why Baptist":**

The New Testament church is marked by **what it believes and what it does**. When these essential principles are diluted in even the slightest sense, it is a step toward apostasy and irrelevance. Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry, the luminary Baptist educator and United States Ambassador to Spain, stated clearly that Baptist people are "traced by their vital principles and gospel practices." No one understood this more than the Baptist and author, J. R. Graves. The significance of Graves' ministry can be seen in some of the writings of the early Alabama Baptists. In his book, *A Book of Memories*, Washington Bryan Crumpton (1842-1920) tells about attending his first Southern Baptist Convention, held in Mobile, Alabama, in 1873. Crumpton tells the story:

*"I had been a country pastor for two years, was thirty-one years of age. In these days, we had a few papers, the Alabama Baptist was not yet. The churches never dreamed of sending a pastor to the Conventions, and not many of the pastors thought about going. It was easy for me to step aboard a steam-boat and head to Mobile."*

One of the things to make a lasting impression upon the mind of the young Baptist preacher, W. B. Crumpton, was the sermon J. R. Graves preached to a great audience at the Broad Street Baptist Church. Graves' preaching was evidently something to experience because Crumpton said he never failed to "stir up the animals." He was known to preach long sermons and agitate those of other denominations, simply by his firm adherence to Baptist principles. Graves called this being a "strict Baptist" versus being a "liberal Baptist."

Crumpton gives his appraisal of Graves' influence with a telling slant. He said:

*"Graves could certainly [preach] when it came to pleasing the strenuous Baptist gang. But as a **church builder**, preaching a world-wide gospel to move people to undertake great things for God, he was a failure, as are most of the preachers who are eternally whetting knives to go out after the scalps of errorists. They get the scalps, **but the world is not evangelized**.*

*"I am glad I heard Graves and read after him. I am all the better for it; **but long ago I have concluded to weigh Baptists by what they do, not by their soundness in doctrine. Soundness that doesn't move people to open their purses is simple rot. The worst heresy on earth is anti-missionism and omissionism is not a whit better.**"*

At this point, one has to ask two questions: One; did the "strenuous Baptist" position of J.R. Graves translate into genuine anti-mission sentiment? Two; how would one put the two different viewpoints personified by Crumpton and Graves into context? Or, where did their ideas lead? As to the first question, let the historian William Cathcart answer the question. He said about graves, *"In his early ministry, Dr. Graves had many converts under his preaching...Before he was thirty years of age over 1,300 persons had professes religion in special meetings which he held.*

That doesn't sound like the ministry of a man who had no heart for souls, but when personal agendas become more important than principle, slander is the first refuge for the ill-equipped and the misinformed.

The charge of anti-missionism in reference to J.R. Graves was due to his disagreement over the manner in which mission money and missionary issues were handled by the Convention mission board. In *A History of Florida Baptists*, Edward Earl Joiner explains this further by saying that Graves' type "Landmarkers" believed that "such organizations as the Foreign Mission Board or the Sunday School Board ought not exist." So clearly, Graves didn't oppose missions and evangelism – he opposed the intrusions and abuses of denominational boards! Typically, when you take issue with methods of the "movers and shakers," you can expect to be charged erroneously.

J.R. Graves understood the issue clearly. Writing about the spiritual declension of the times, Graves identified the root of the problem. Graves dated the beginning of the baptists loosing their aggressiveness as being 1776 and writing about the privileges that would be abused in those following days, he said:

*...The church in Europe and America ceased to suffer from the civil rulers the rigorous persecutions that had followed it onward from the days of John the Baptist. From this period the churches multiplied...commenced to rapidly increase in 'this world's goods' – on account of their great numbers and wealth they began to be esteemed respectable, and treated with consideration, by those who had persecuted and shed their blood.*

The most common date for the ushering in of apostasy is the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when following England's 1889 RV and America's 1901 ASV, the church was first faced with the devastating dynamic of dual authorities. If one considers Graves' assertion, the combination of the abuse of freedom's privilege (1776) and the reluctance of Christianity to submit to authority (1901), would be the two strongest components contributing to modernity's unprecedented apostasy. Of course, these dates are speculative, but the reality which allows for such speculation is not.

Pedo-baptist Protestants, are the crowd that the more liberal minded Baptists were joining at that time in union evangelistic campaigns... "for souls." More of Graves' own words are in order:

*We, as a people, have vastly increased in numbers – over two million of adult members in America alone; and we are continually boasting of this sort of wealth... Doubtless there never was so large a proportion of our membership unregenerated as it is today, and becoming yearly more so through the specious revivals and periodical excitements that sweep over the land under the control of professional revival makers and their singers, by which thousands are pressed into our churches unrenewed in heart and with sadly perverted views of Christianity.*

Revival makers were in reference to the Unionism or joining together in co-operation with Pedo-baptists and other false churches for evangelism and mission work. The common misconception is that unionism was an acceptable practice in those days because "most Protestants were Fundamentalists." Firm Baptists did not think so. They were concerned that such loose affiliation dishonored our heritage of suffering and opened the door to apostate concessions in the future. They were right.

While today's independent Baptist laud the accomplishments of Fundamentalism's crusade evangelists like Billy Sunday, R.A. Torrey and Sam Jones, this old Baptist, J.R. Graves with others, was opposed to their Ecumenical and ecclesiastic irresponsibility. While I would not agree with Graves' every doctrinal assertion, I certainly agree that he understood compromise with false churches and their ministers to be destructive to Baptist principles. Mr. Graves recognized as far back as the 1850's that joining with those who had formerly persecuted us for our convictions would dissolve the distinctive marks that made us Baptists. He called such ecclesiastical open-mindedness "a sickly and sinful sentimentalism." This reality is even more severe when you realize that Baptist principles are, in essence, New Testament principles.

Crumpton's crowd were those Baptists who longed for respectability. They wanted to "work together" with Protestant superstars that they might have the opportunity to dance on the big stage instead of always being the separated, hard-nosed, backwoods, old-paths Baptist. All of this, of course, they would declare was for the sake of souls and the cause of Christ (ignoring such important biblical principles as those found in John 15:14; 12:26 and Luke 16:15). Graves, on the other hand, represented the group of Baptists that would rather die in obscurity while honoring God, than sacrifice biblical principles on the altar of progress. According to the biographical article in Cathcart's *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, Graves was kind, educated, eloquent, lucid, logical and interesting. It wasn't his quirks and spirit that made him objectionable; it was his refusal to compromise ***the old Baptist principles, codified in the New Testament and identified as the apostles' doctrine!***

I wonder what Graves would think if he could see us today. The obvious, more extreme examples of modern offenses in the seeker-sensitive movement are legion, from Rick Warren using the music of Jimmy Hendrix and John Lennon to promote his programs, to Ed Young, Jr. preaching sermons on forgiveness with a series title that is far too suggestive and inappropriate to put into print (both Warren and Young are presumably Baptists). When you see these perversions of ministry and worship entertained by mainstream Christian leaders, you have to wonder how things could get so far off course.

The dilemma that has so many succumbing to seeker-sensitive ideology and methods isn't a matter of "liberal versus conservative," as if to say, there are two extremes of behavior in the same basic group – that group being "the church." No, it's much more severe than that. The vast majority of groups calling themselves churches do not bear the slightest resemblance to the New Testament church. The modern church is the natural development of a religious organization unbridled by the principles of the Word of God. The material of which their "church" is made is far different from apostolic material. The ordinances administered by their churches and the definitions thereof are different from what Christ taught His church. As a result, the mission is different as well. In other words, ***they aren't churches at all.***

How do our ordinances affect our mission? For instance, if the ordinance of baptism precedes church membership and genuine conversion precedes baptism, then our first responsibility is to preach the gospel (as the preaching of the gospel is that which produces conversion – Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 1:17-21). Our mission begins with the preaching of the gospel and the fruit which God provides as a result will then, through the proper maintenance of the ordinances, become members of the local churches where the Lord's Table will be offered for their participation. By altering the ordinances, like the Pedo-baptists have done, we open the door to an altered mission. This is how you line the church rolls with the unconverted.