

Primitive Baptists - True Hyper-Calvinists

This article is the result of several months of dialog with Primitive Baptists (also known as Hardshell Baptists) and a good deal of time spent reading their literature. The dialog primarily consisted of email correspondence with a particularly outspoken apologist for that sect along with some interaction with several people on a Facebook Primitive Baptist discussion forum. I read articles by Primitive Baptists and former Primitive Baptists and I listened to a number of Primitive Baptist audio messages. In this article I am not out to convince the unconvinced (i.e. diehard Primitive Baptists with their minds made up already). I am only out to warn those people who may be wondering where Primitive Baptists are coming from. There are links below to Primitive Baptist articles for further study should the reader want additional information on this aberrant Christian sect. And please note, no ill-will is intended towards anyone who is currently a Primitive Baptist. I just strongly disagree with their “no gospel means” doctrine and wish to point out from the Bible why I disagree. May God bless you as you seek to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.

No Evangelists Allowed?

What I discovered was several things, namely that this group holds to a heretical doctrine regarding evangelism: they genuinely believe that there is no point to conventional evangelism – preaching to the lost as a “means” of salvation. They believe that salvation only involves the Holy Spirit without any assistance from preachers or evangelists or other persons preaching the word of God to effect salvation in unsaved sinners. They mistakenly believe that these two scripture passages:

“salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9) and

“not of works” (Eph 2:9)

are saying that salvation does not even involve the efforts of an evangelist preaching the law of God to bring conviction of sin to the unregenerated.

What About James 1:18?

If the Primitive Baptists are correct in saying that God does not use preaching as a **means** to effect salvation, to bring about the new birth, then what are we to make of James 1:18 which says:

*“Of his own will begat he us **with the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”*

Isn't this verse saying that God "begets" (gives birth to) sinners with the Gospel (i.e. the word of truth)? Regarding the phrase "with the word of truth", the renowned theologian Bible commentator John Gill has written:

"not Christ, who is the Word, and truth itself; though regeneration is sometimes ascribed to him; and this act of begetting is done by the Father, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead; but the Gospel, which is the word of truth, and truth itself, and contains nothing but truth; and by this souls are begotten and born again; see (Ephesians 1:13) (1 Peter 1:23) and hence ministers of it are accounted spiritual fathers." [John Gill's Exposition Of The Bible, RE: James 1:18]

And as referenced by Mr. Gill, Ephesians 1:13 and 1Peter 1:23 point out the following:

"In whom ye also trusted, after that **ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" - Eph 1:13

"For **you have been born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, **through the living and enduring word of God.**" - 1Pet 1:23

What About John 6:68?

"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." - John 6:68

John 6:68 clearly points out the significance of **the Word of God** with regards to salvation (i.e. eternal life), else Peter should have said "You have eternal life"... There would have been no need to mention "**the words** of eternal life" in that scripture passage.

They confuse the forest for the trees

One trap that Primitive Baptists may be falling into is equating the "GOOD NEWS" of the Gospel as a means of salvation, with the entire message of the Gospel, which includes the "BAD NEWS" of the Gospel: judgment, wrath, sin, hell, God's holiness, God's Law, sinners=law-breakers and so on. God indeed uses these things as a schoolmaster to bring a person to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10) and so the **bad news** of the Gospel is an essential element of the Gospel and an important tool used of God, by way of a preacher and the Holy Spirit, to convict and convert sinners. Certainly, a sinner cannot see his need for the Good News (i.e. a Savior for sin) if he is not shown WHY he needs that Savior, via the preaching of the Bad News. And true Christians will admit that any preaching will fall on deaf ears if the power of God is not behind those words.

Redefiners Of Theological Terminology

Determining that these folks were teaching heresy regarding evangelism took a while to figure out for a couple of reasons. I sort of fell into a trap, following a trail of crumbs they laid out before me that led me down the Primitive Baptist path of redefined words and reinterpreted scriptures... Yes, they look at words like *regeneration* and *conversion* differently than most Christians. And this causes them to interpret certain Bible verses differently than most Christians. So, what should have been obvious to me early on in my investigation, became obscured by my own tunnel vision as I followed that trail of *Primitive Baptist* crumbs.

They Miss The Two Types Of Preaching In The Bible

Primitive Baptists apparently MISS two important things when they read the Bible, perhaps because they have already adopted their own definitions of things and perhaps because they are missing the overall picture of what was going on in the New Testament Church. These two important things are the 2 distinctions in the types of preaching documented in the Bible, as being engaged in by the early Church...

Preaching type 1: The early church was evangelizing the unsaved, (unbelievers/unregenerated) as can see by the biblical accounts of Paul preaching at Mars Hill and in the synagogues, Peter preaching at Pentecost, and Stephen preaching to the Sanhedrin. In fact, it is beyond obvious that they were preoccupied with this mission.

Preaching type 2: The early church leaders were teaching the saints (believers/regenerated) through the letters to the churches (along with direct, in person teaching of course). And one of the primary things they were teaching was the need to evangelize the lost, by their example and by their epistles. And yes, the early church leaders also spent time teaching about the importance of godly (Christlike) living.

The Pattern In Scripture Of God's Word Bringing Forth Life

Primitive Baptists must have ignored a whole lot of Bible verses to not have noticed the BIBLICAL PATTERN of the Word Of God being used as a MEANS God has employed in Creation, in bringing the physically dead to life and in imparting spiritual life.

1. God spoke the universe into existence, with His own voice (Genesis 1:3 - "**And God said**, *Let there be light: and there was light.*").
2. God used Ezekiel's voice to bring life to a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel

chapter 34:9 – “Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and **say** to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”).

3. Jesus shouted “Lazarus come forth” to bring a dead man to back to life (John 11:43 – “And when he thus had spoken, **he cried with a loud voice**, Lazarus, come forth.”).

4. Jesus commanded a lame man to “take up his bed and walk” and instantly the man got up and walked (Mark 2:9 – “Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or **to say**, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?”).

5. Peter spoke and a girl arose from the dead (Acts 9:40 – “But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body **said**, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”).

John 5:25 makes it pretty clear that the preaching of the Gospel really is the “means” God uses to effect salvation:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when **the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God**: and they that hear shall live.”

“by “the voice” of Christ is intended his Gospel, which is a voice of love, grace, and mercy, of life and liberty, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by him; and which being attended with his power, is the means of quickening dead sinners” – John Gill’s Exposition Of The Bible, RE: John 5:25

They Become Focused On Their Uniqueness

And as much as Primitive Baptists may try to focus on Christ, what they end up doing is focusing on the uniqueness of their group, perhaps inadvertently, but never-the-less that’s how it looked to me as an outsider. I admire their desire to thoroughly examine Biblical issues. However, I believe Primitive Baptists have locked themselves into a compartment of doctrine with the words they have redefined and with the teachers and elders they put so much faith in, preventing them from any positive changes away from their erroneous soteriological doctrine.

Why Would A New Believer Be Concerned About The Lost?

Looking at my own change of heart upon regeneration, I can strongly testify, by way of the Spirit within me, that a genuine believer will have a burden to evangelize the lost. One must question their salvation if they do not have such

a burden. Also, any doctrine that teaches and encourages Christians to not evangelize the lost (and to look for scriptural justification for that stance that involves redefining theological terms) is simply not of God and is of the evil one.

The Unique Primitive Baptist View Of The Words Regeneration & Conversion

The central point that shows the error of Primitive Baptist doctrine regarding salvation (“no gospel means” as they refer to it) is regarding the biblical patterns for the 2 types of preaching in the New Testament. Those patterns don’t go away, no matter how they define things. Whether they believe that regeneration is separate from conversion (which they do) or whether they believe in something they call “time salvation” or not. **They believe in the idea that conversion takes place over time**, gradually and can even take a lifetime. And so to them, conversion does not necessarily coincide with regeneration.

The Unique Primitive Baptist Concept Called “Time Salvation”

Primitive Baptists also believe that you can be saved and not know it until some time after regeneration, at some time down the road, at which someone explains salvation to you from the Bible. They call this “Time Salvation”. I guess they have not heard that the Scriptures are not of any private interpretation and yet they have this unique view of salvation – unique from the rest of biblical Christianity. Of course if you consider salvation to be a work of man, then, it could be looked at as something that takes place over a period of time, though Primitive Baptists don’t believe salvation is a work of man.

The New Testament Church Was Preoccupied With Evangelism

The very thing that Primitive Baptists don’t believe in is the very thing that the early Church was preoccupied with. Primitive Baptists apparently don’t seem to understand just how much the New Testament church was actively involved in preaching to the lost. They were as mission-minded as you can get. They supported Paul in his missionary journeys. In addition, the Bible is chock full of examples of God sending messengers to preach to the unconverted. This is the way God does things historically. He sends His messengers out into the world to preach to the converted and unconverted alike. Just do a word search on the word “hearken” in the OT starting with Jeremiah and this fact becomes painfully obvious.

Trying To Make A Case Based Upon A False Premise

Primitive Baptists try to **blend together** the works of the lost sinner with the work of the ministry of the Gospel in an effort to build a case for not preaching to the lost. That blending is obvious in this Primitive Baptist article <http://pbgrace.org/means.htm>. But when you read that brief article, you can see that the author is presenting what is called a “straw man” argument... stating a false premise and then attacking it.

The false premise of the Primitive Baptists can be stated this way: Since “evangelism” is a “work” of man, and knowing that the Bible states that salvation is “not of works”, God therefore cannot use evangelism as a “means” of saving someone. Who, other than a Primitive Baptist, would ever jump to the conclusion that Ephesians 2:9 is referring to both the sinner being preached to and the person doing the preaching?

But “Not Of Works” Is NOT Referring To The Work Of An Evangelist

However, the problem with the above stated PB premise, is that verse 9 in Ephesians chapter 2: “Not of works lest any man should boast”, is only referring to the lost sinner, not to the evangelist. There are no biblical grounds for **conflating** the two parties (lost sinner and evangelist) as Primitive Baptists do in their effort to discount the need for evangelism – by their false claim that “not of works” also applies to the work of the evangelist in his preaching to the lost sinner.

Regarding evangelism, Paul said to Timothy:

“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, **do the work of an evangelist**, make full proof of thy ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:5

If Primitive Baptists were correct about “no gospel means” being needed or wanted by God for the saving of souls, then Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 4:5 would make no sense. Timothy WAS experiencing **afflictions** because he WAS doing the work of an **evangelist**.

The rest of the Church (those outside the Primitive Baptist camp) who believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, would never deny that the sinner is dead in sin and cannot possibly reach out to God for salvation, cannot choose Christ, cannot accept Jesus as their savior. But they would not deny that God uses “means” – sends His laborers – into the fields to participate in the harvest. God is not ashamed to use mere vessels of clay as his messengers and as his laborers in the fields. But Primitive Baptists seem to think He should be ashamed. They claim that not only is the free-will gospel robbing God of His glory but that the evangelist is robbing God of His glory.

I guess if Paul had had some Primitive Baptists to “straighten him out” by telling him to not bother preaching to the lost as a means of salvation, he could have saved himself a whole lot of trouble, which trouble he summarized in 2 Corinthians, chapter 11:

24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. (2 Cor 11).

Believers Evangelize For Rewards? Really?

The insinuation in that pbgrace.org article mentioned above, that Christians who don’t believe like Primitive Baptists, are just looking for rewards and crowns in heaven (as a result of their evangelism efforts), is what I would call a low blow. A true believer in Christ is interested in pleasing his Master, his Savior, his redeemer. He shares his faith and evangelizes the lost out of a genuine love of God and a genuine concern for those who are perishing. That does not mean that Christians’ motives for serving God are always entirely pure. Never-the-less, I personally believe that our reward in heaven, our crown, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who should be more than enough reward for any sinner saved by grace:

Genesis 15:1 –

“After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”

Isaiah 28:5 –

“In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people.”

Primitive Baptists’ Cult-Like Attributes

This very small, exclusive group of Christians who call themselves Primitive Baptists, seem to exhibit some characteristics of a Christian-like cult.

1. They have cult-like “gatekeepers” who guard the truth “as they see” it for their organization. These are a few individuals who write the stuff that everyone else is expected to subscribe to, like a creed or confession would have been used by protestant denominations of years gone by and similar to how the Jehovahs Witnesses use their *Watchtower Society* to print and

promulgate Witnesses dogma. So Primitive Baptists have their teachers and spokespersons who write books and post teachings in online blogs and forums. Yes, it is true that many legitimate groups do this also.

2. They exhibit extreme exclusivity: They claim to be the ONLY group currently around that represents the truest and purest form of Christianity today, the most biblically accurate branch of the true Christian Church.
3. They claim to be able to trace their roots back to the first century church, a totally unverifiable claim that they never-the-less use, as a means of attempting to add validity to their group, a validity that no one can either prove or disprove... but the claim sure sounds impressive.
4. They have a unique view of certain passages of scripture that enables them to support their totally unorthodox doctrines.

Obvious "Gospel Means" Passages In Scripture

There are plenty of passages in the Bible that indicate rather clearly, that preaching the gospel is the "means" by which God uses His messengers to effect salvation in the sinners He intends to save – in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit of course.

Case study #1: Acts 14

Primitive Baptists say that there is no point in preaching the gospel to the unsaved, unregenerated, because God is going to save them by way of **immediate Holy Spirit regeneration** without any Gospel preaching (without any Gospel "means"). They believe that Christians should only preach to **believers**, those who need to be taught of God about the "Good News" of salvation through Jesus Christ and taught how to live the Christian life. PBs say that once Christians hear the "Good News" and understand it, they will then have become "converted", even though they may have been regenerated a long time ago. Is this idea really biblical?

If, contrary to PB teaching, God really does use the preaching of the Gospel to actually convert sinners to Christ, then we ought to be able to find examples of that in Scripture. And indeed, that is the case as we see here in Acts 14:12-17 where Paul and Barnabas are preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people who they surely know are not yet saved or regenerated – people who just called Paul "Mars" and Barnabas "Mercurius"...

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their

clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,
15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, **and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God**, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:
16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.
17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

If the preaching of God's word was not a "means" used by God to convert souls to Christ, would the apostle Paul have bothered to say: "We ... preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God"?

Clearly Paul understood that his preaching to the lost was not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). And clearly he understood the proper meaning behind this passage in Ezekiel 37:4...

"Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." - Ezekiel 37:4

With God all things are possible... If dead dry bones can hear the word of the Lord, then surely a spiritually dead sinner can also - if the Lord wills it.

*"So shall **my word** be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it **shall not return unto me void**, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." - Isaiah 55:11*

Case study #2: 1Thes 2:16

In 1 Thessalonians 2 we see a strange statement of the apostle Paul, if in fact Primitive Baptists are correct in saying that God does not use the "means" of gospel preaching to SAVE sinners:

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:
15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:
16 **Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved**, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Was Paul unaware of something that only Primitive Baptists happen to be aware of regarding salvation? Why would Paul say what he said in verse 16 above if God was not using Paul's preaching to bring about the salvation of souls? Of course the Holy Spirit would have to be involved in the conviction and regeneration of these souls. No one is denying that. But to say that

preaching is not a part of the process is to deny the Word of God.

Additional passages related to evangelistic gospel preaching

*"Yea, so have **I strived to preach the gospel**, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation" - Rom 15:20*

*"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God **by the foolishness of preaching** to save them that believe." - 1 Cor 1:21*

*"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means **save some**" - 1 Cor 9:22*

*"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. ... For **we are labourers together with God**: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." - 1 Cor 3:6&9*

How Did Primitive Baptists End Up With Their Unbiblical Ideas?

As convincing as Primitive Baptists can be, I could find no solid evidence that traces their beliefs back to the early church as they claim, nor do I think that they can convincingly deny that the beliefs they have, simply originated with a certain group of Baptists who splintered off from the "Missionary Baptists" in the 1800s. And then, over the years, their group developed this anti-missionary and anti-evangelism theology with corresponding new word definitions regarding the gospel, to suit their original position against missionary societies. And now that so much time has passed, they no longer realize the occurrence of that transition themselves, that such a theological metamorphosis has taken place in their denomination.

I personally have not found the Primitive Baptist brand of Christianity showing up in the preaching and teaching of men of God who are I've grown to trust and whom so many other Christians have grown to trust over the centuries. That observation of mine in and of itself is not a "rock solid" case against the Primitive Baptist "no gospel means" doctrine. But it is noteworthy when taken into consideration with the points I mentioned above about the two types of New Testament preaching and teaching. Some PBs will say "Well what about John Gill? He shared our views regarding "no gospel means" in salvation." To that all I can say is that John Gill seems to be on both sides of the fence. Some of his commentary seems to lean on the Primitive Baptist "no gospel means" side and some commentary seems to lean more towards the traditional, historical, orthodox "gospel means" side.

Primitive Baptists are in a very narrow camp, dangerously narrow. Which is a mark that other groups have, groups who claim to be the exclusive purveyors of the truth. Granted, narrowness does not necessarily negate the possibility

of truth. But, it is a pretty common characteristic of a cult or unbiblical Christian sect.

Believe me, I have had to sort out many unusual ideas and doctrines since God saved me 31 years ago. Like with many cults and unorthodox sects, a lot of what Primitive Baptists teach seems to make a lot of sense and sounds biblical, and on many points even is biblical, especially regarding the sovereignty of God in salvation. But then there is a little bit of leaven that leavens the whole lump. Meaning something snuck in there that does not belong, and so certain words had to be re-defined to accommodate the unorthodox and unbiblical beliefs that are being promulgated by Primitive Baptists.

To see things the Primitive Baptist way, you have to put on a certain special pair of “glasses” ... you have to use “the Primitive Baptist dictionary” if you will, before their views make sense. And for me personally, I would have to throw away the heart of God that I’ve had for the 31 years since my new birth... a heart for lost souls to come to Christ, a burden to warn the lost to flee the wrath of God. The very thing representing the greatest change in me since my conversion (and I use the word ‘conversion’ in the traditional sense, not the Primitive Baptist sense), is the thing that Primitive Baptists say we should not even be doing, sharing God’s Word that souls might be saved.... sharing God’s Word that the Lord of the harvest might see fit to convict and convert the Elect among those being preached to – that the Spirit of the living God would “give ears to hear” to some in the field where the Word is being sown. Just as God used Noah to bring salvation from the Flood to that small elect group of eight individuals, so God uses mere mortals to bring salvation to a lost and dying world.

Sometimes we are so busy “selling” something for so long that we don’t even realize that what we are selling does not have the “features” that we think it has. We get to the point where we just repeat a script and stop thinking critically about some foundational points that would undermine our sales pitch. Also, we can get into trouble theologically if we avoid – and look down on – the creeds and confessions that were put in place to guard against the kind of error that the Primitive Baptists have developed. Similarly, in conjunction with a disdain for the “old paths”, we can get off track theologically if we trust the views and interpretations of any one particular man, in our local church, in our denomination, or anywhere. I personally believe that ignorance of the respected creeds of historical Christianity (The 1689 London Baptist Confession & Westminster Confession for example) is a major reason why the false “free-will” gospel is so prevalent today.

Conclusion

If Primitive Baptists are wrong on gospel “means”, which I believe they are, then there is no other conclusion that they have a doctrine that is the one doctrine that the Devil himself wishes all Christians would have, a doctrine that tells them they should not be doing the very thing that God commands

them to do to:

bring salvation to lost souls

The Bible is replete with examples of God using weak, sinful, fallible mortals to accomplish His purposes here on earth. We dare not think we have a “higher” view of God, that does not require God Himself to use such broken tools, such broken vessels of clay as those He has adopted into His family.

It does not seem to matter to Primitive Baptists that their founders came up with their unique views “out of nowhere” after more than 1800 years of church history. The way I see it, some person or group simply wanted to justify their case against missions and/or mission societies back in the 1800s and so they came up with an unorthodox view of regeneration and conversion to accomplish their “mission”, no pun intended. After repeating their fabricated story often enough and long enough, and embellishing that story as time went on, they came up with what they consider to be a lock-tight case for no gospel means. And they now point to errors in theology of modern day Reformed churches, as if those errors somehow validate the PB “no gospel means” doctrine. — *RM Kane*

It is interesting to note that the 1800s was a time in the history of America when a number of significant aberrant offshoots of Christianity were born:
Mormonism – Founded by Joseph Smith in Western New York in the 1820s.
Jehovah’s Witnesses – Founded in the late 1870s by Charles Taze Russell as “Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society”.
Seventh Day Adventists – Founded in 1863 by William Miller with additional doctrine coming later on from Ellen G White.
Primitive Baptists – Founded around the time of the Kehukee Association Declaration of 1827.

Additional information about Primitive Baptists and their heresy:

[Online Book About Hardshell Baptists by Stephen Garrett](#)

[BaptistGadfly Blog](#)

[Old Baptist – Where the real primitive or old Baptist faith is defended](#)

[Responding to Hardshell Comments](#)

[History and Heresies of Hardshell Baptists](#)

[Why We Are Not Primitive Baptists](#)

[The Killing Effects of Hyper-Calvinism by Bob Ross](#)

[Spurgeon versus Hyperism by Bob L. Ross & Ian D. Elsasser](#)

[Cultic Hyper-Calvinistic Doctrines of the Primitive Baptist Church Part #1](#)

[Cultic Hyper-Calvinistic Doctrines of the Primitive Baptist Church Part #2](#)
