

Landmark Baptists

An Analysis of the Doctrinal Errors of Landmarkism

INTRODUCTION

Landmarkism is a term representing a number of convictions maintained by some Baptists, mostly in the southern United States. They are known as Landmarkers or Baptist Bride brethren. Sometimes they choose to call themselves Historic Baptists. Sometimes they are referred to as Missionary Baptists. .

Landmark Baptists hold that the NT model for the church is only the local and visible congregation and that it violates NT principles to speak of a universal, spiritual church. They also believe that Communion should be restricted to members of the local assembly and that baptism is valid only when administered in a properly constituted local Baptist congregation. They also believe that a historic "Baptist succession" may be traced from John the Baptist to modern Baptist churches in which believer's baptism and Landmark principles have prevailed.

The Landmark emphasis was propounded by James R. Graves (1820-93), influential editor of the *Tennessee Baptist*. He formulated his doctrines just prior to the Civil War and because his periodical was widely read his ideas caught the imagination of many Baptists of that day. The term "Landmarkism" takes its name from a pamphlet written by a friend of Graves, James M. Pendleton. It was entitled *An Old Landmark Re-Set (Old Landmarks Revisited)* (1856), based on Proverbs 22:28: "Remove not the old landmark." The Landmark position is the position of the million-member American Baptist Association (not to be confused with the American Baptist Convention), of the much smaller United Baptists, and of some independent Baptist churches.

Graves explains how the term "Landmarkers" originated in the following two paragraphs:

The name of Old Landmarkers came in this way. In 1854 J. M. Pendleton, of Kentucky, wrote an essay upon this question at my special request, viz "Ought Baptists to recognize Pedobaptist preachers [preachers who believe in child or infant baptism] as gospel ministers?" which I brought out in tract form, and gave it the title, "An Old Landmark Reset." This calm discussion, which had an immense circulation in the South, was reviewed by many of the leading writers, North and South, and they, by way of reproach, called all Baptists "Old Landmarkers" who accepted his conclusions, and the impression was sought to be made that Brother Pendleton and myself were aiming at dividing the denomination and starting a new sect.

From" this brief history it will be seen that we, who only deem ourselves "strict Baptists," are not responsible for the name, but our opposers. But that we have no reason to be ashamed of it will be seen by every one who will read this little book. Why should

we object to the name “Old Landmarkers,” when those ancient Anabaptists, whom we alone represent in this age, were content to be called Cathari and Puritans, which terms mean the same thing as Old Landmarkers? --The “little book” *Old Landmarkism What Is It?* originally written by Graves in 1880.

From this quote we see that Graves considered himself and others who held to his views to be the modern day representatives of the ancient Anabaptists. He is to be greatly commended for this because the Anabaptists were, in general, men and women who were valiant for the truth upon the earth. They were zealous in evangelistic efforts and they endeavored to believe and teach only what was found in the Scriptures. They were opposed to infant baptism and rightly so. They also suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, being persecuted by the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Calvinists and by the Zwinglians.

Landmarkers believe that their church originated long before the time of James Graves. They believe that Landmarkism existed in colonial days in North America, even though the term "Landmark" had not yet been coined. Curtis Pugh, for example writes the following:

The Welsh Churches, from which these Colonial Baptist Churches immediately succeeded, had practiced Landmarkism in their Churches in that island nation prior to the coming of the Welsh Baptists to North America. And those who know Welsh Baptist history will be aware of the fact that these Welsh Baptist Churches must have learned these practices from the apostle to Wales, for they have a valid claim to having been planted by no less personage than Paul himself when he made his visit to Britain in connection with Claudia and Pudens (mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21). Thus Landmarkism may with historical evidence logically be seen to be the Scriptural practice of early Welsh Churches planted by Paul and we dare suggest that these Churches must have imbibed Landmark principles from that apostle who first taught them the Word of God.

Thus these Baptists claim a heritage that traces its origin all the way back to the Apostle Paul, though not all would agree with their interpretation of Church history.

Landmark Baptists, have many distinctive doctrines, which need to be examined in the light of the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21). As already mentioned, one such doctrine is their strong denial of the universal church. Many Baptist groups share this conviction, even though they do not hold to all of the extreme teachings of the Landmark Baptists. For example, I wrote to a faculty member of the Baptist Bible Graduate School of Theology in Springfield, Missouri. He indicated that over the past few centuries Baptists have not agreed as to whether there is a universal church and that fundamental Baptists are still very divided over this issue. Churches and pastors in the Baptist Bible Fellowship (BBF) are all fully independent and are not in agreement on this matter. This faculty member's guess was that about 2/3 of the BBF pastors deny the universal church and 1/3 affirm it.

There are different doctrinal variations among Landmark Baptists and not all of the points made in the following pages may hold true for all of them. If you consider yourself to be a Landmark Baptist and if any of the following “errors” do not apply to you, then you are to be commended.

Note: I am indebted to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, Editor, for much of the information found in this introduction.

1) The Error of Making the "One Baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 a Reference to Water Baptism.

In Ephesians 4:3 believers are told to endeavor (make every effort) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Paul then beautifully and concisely describes the UNITY or ONENESS which all believers in Christ share in verses 4-6 (the seven "ones"). Each of these seven "ones" is setting forth something that every believer has in common. If it were not something shared in common, then this would contradict Paul's argument about the UNITY of the Spirit and the ONENESS that all believers share. Thus, whatever the "one baptism" means, it must be a baptism that is shared by every believer. It must be something that is true of every genuine believer in Christ. That is, if you have not had this baptism, then you are not a true believer and you are not saved.

Consider, for example, the expression "one Spirit" in verse 4. The indwelling Spirit is something that I share in common with every believer throughout the world. Indeed, if anyone does not have the Spirit, then he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9)! It is impossible to belong to God's saved company of this age apart from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit of God dwells within every saint, and this is the basis of our UNITY. I can approach any saved person, regardless of what country he lives in or what local church he attends, and I can say, "The same Holy Spirit who lives in you is the same Holy Spirit who lives in me. We share this in common."

Water baptism is not something that all saved persons share in common. It ought to be the experience of every born again person, but in some cases it is not. There are some true believers who have not been baptized in water. Perhaps the person has been recently saved and the baptismal service has not yet taken place. In some cases new believers are not given needed instruction as to the importance of water baptism. It is the experience of every saved person to be saved for a period of time prior to being baptized in water. Hopefully it is but for a brief time. But the fact remains that water baptism is not an experience shared by every true believer.

There is a baptism, however, which is shared by every saved person. This baptism is mentioned, among other places, in Galatians 3:26-27, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST have put on Christ." Notice that there is no mention of water in these verses. It is a baptism "INTO CHRIST." It is not a baptism INTO WATER. According to these verses it is the experience of every child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. If a person has not had this baptism, then the person is not saved. If a person has had this baptism, then the person is saved and has put on Christ, whether or not he has been baptized in water. This "baptism into Christ" which is a reality for every child of God is also mentioned in Romans chapter 6, verses 3-5.

This baptism is a work of God. It took place the moment the person believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. At that moment the person was baptized or immersed into Jesus Christ (placed into Jesus Christ) with the result that the person is now "IN CHRIST" (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:1; etc.). God has positioned us in His Son. Not only is He in us (the INDWELLING) but we are in Him (the BAPTISM). The Lord Jesus predicted this great relationship in John 14:20--"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and **YE IN ME, and I IN YOU.**" This is a baptism shared by every born again person, and is the basis of our UNITY in the Son of God. It is not just the Landmark Baptists who have been placed or baptized into Jesus Christ, but it is every blood-bought child of God. Such a relationship is ours, not by virtue of some relationship to a particular sect, but by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

For a more detailed consideration of the "one baptism" or "Spirit baptism" the reader is referred to Merrill F. Unger's book entitled *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

The discerning student of Scripture needs to make a difference between REAL BAPTISM (the "one baptism" mentioned in Galatians 3:27; Romans 3-4; etc.) and RITUAL BAPTISM (water baptism which is symbolic). Water baptism is meant to picture and depict and symbolize real baptism. When a person is baptized in water he is saying, "I want to present a picture of what happened to me the moment I was saved. When I was saved God baptized me into Jesus Christ. God placed me into His dear Son. I am a new creature in Christ and in Him I have a new life!" Water baptism is an outward portrayal of the inward spiritual reality.

The "one baptism" which every true believer has experienced is also set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the passage which we shall now consider.

2) The Error of Understanding 1 Corinthians 12:13 as a Reference to Water Baptism.

"For by [in] one Spirit are [were] we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

First we should notice that this baptism is the experience of every believer: WE WERE ALL baptized into one body. Have you had this baptism? If you are a born again believer in Christ, then indeed you have! It is something true of every child of God and it happened the moment a person is saved. This baptism is a reality for every believer, even for those who have not yet been baptized in water and even for those who are not "Historic Baptists." The issue is HAVE YOU BELIEVED ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?, not HAVE YOU JOINED A PARTICULAR LOCAL CHURCH?

We should also notice that there is no mention of water in this verse. It is not a baptism into water, but a baptism into ONE BODY. The ONE BODY is the church of Jesus Christ over which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). How does a person become a member of the ONE BODY? How does a person become a part of the true church? Is it by joining a Historic Baptist church? No, it is by being baptized by the Spirit into one body.

Spirit baptism is the supernatural work of God whereby a believer in Christ is immersed or placed into the body of Christ, which is HIS CHURCH. This happens the moment a person is saved, not at the point of water baptism. Every saved person is in this ONE BODY; every unsaved person is WITHOUT (outside of Christ and outside of His body--compare Col. 4:5). A person can join a local church, including a Landmark Baptist church, and not really be saved. This does not put him in the ONE BODY. Only God can do that, and God only does that for true believers of this present age.

Water baptism does not place a person into the ONE BODY. Only God can do that. Only God can BUILD HIS CHURCH (Matthew 16:18) and only God can ADD TO HIS CHURCH daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

Spirit baptism was predicted by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11) and by the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:5). It was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the "one body" was first formed (Acts 11:16) and takes place today the moment a person is saved (1 Corinthians 12:13). All four of these passages are talking about the same baptism, and the Greek construction in all four passages is closely equivalent, as the following literal rendering reveals:

Passage	Greek Construction
Matt. 3:11	He (Christ) shall baptize you in Holy Spirit
Acts 1:5	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) in Holy Spirit
Acts 11:16	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) in Holy Spirit
1 Cor. 12:13	We were baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) in one Spirit into one body

The order of the words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 has been altered in order to show that the same Greek construction is used. It is the proper understanding of these passages which clearly pinpoints WHEN the church (the ONE BODY) began. This brings us to our next doctrinal issue.

3) The Error of Beginning the Church before Pentecost and before the Cross.

We have seen from 1 Corinthians 12:13 that Spirit Baptism is that supernatural work of God whereby the believing sinner is placed or immersed into the ONE BODY of Christ. In Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18 we learn that the BODY OF CHRIST is identified as the CHURCH. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus referred to it as "MY CHURCH."

The key question is this: When did God first begin placing believers into Christ's body, the Church? To re-phrase the question: When did Spirit baptism first take place? If we can determine when God first began placing believers into the ONE BODY, then we will know when the church began.

The Scripture is very clear about this matter. The beginning of the church is carefully pinpointed in God's Word.

First of all, in Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said, "**I WILL** build My Church." The future tense of the verb indicates that the building of the church had not yet begun when Jesus said these words. He did not say, "I have built My church." He did not say, "I am building My church." No, the building project had not yet begun and thus the Church was yet future. At the time Jesus spoke the words of Matthew 16:18 the church had not yet begun.

Today Christ is building His church. He is adding to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). But the question is, when did this building program first begin?

In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist predicted that Spirit baptism would take place some time in the future. It had not taken place when John spoke these words. We have already noted that the Greek

construction of Matthew 3:11 is parallel to the construction of 1 Corinthians 12:13. John was predicting the same baptism that Paul was talking about. The baptism Paul was talking about involved placing believers into the body of Christ. When did this first take place?

In Acts 1:5 the Lord Jesus predicted that Spirit baptism was still future. It had not happened yet. No one had yet been immersed into the body of Christ. Thus, the church could not have begun prior to Acts 1:5. When Jesus spoke the words of Acts 1:5 His death and His resurrection had already taken place, and yet Spirit baptism had not yet taken place and the church had not yet been formed. But the announcement of Acts 1:5 was very significant because Jesus said that Spirit baptism would take place "not many days hence" (not many days from now). This means that it would happen soon, in a matter of days. Indeed, as we shall learn, it happened just 10 days later on the day of Pentecost.

The Day of Pentecost and the unique events that took place on that day are described in Acts chapter 2. In this chapter Spirit baptism is not specifically mentioned. It is not until Acts chapter 11 that we are specifically told that Spirit baptism took place on the day of Pentecost: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, **as on us at the beginning** [on the Day of Pentecost]. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 11:15-16). Based on the clear statement of this passage we know that Spirit baptism first took place on the Day of Pentecost. It was then that believers were first placed into the body of Christ. It was then that the church began.

For a very helpful discussion of when the church began, see Renald E. Shower's book, *There Really Is a Difference--A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*, Chapter 15 (published by the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry).

There are serious problems involved with beginning the church prior to the cross in the days of the Lord and His disciples. Here are some of them:

- 1) The Lord Jesus had not yet died. The Scripture says that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). This statement can only be true after the death of Christ is an accomplished fact. The church, which is based upon the finished work of Christ, could not exist until that work had been accomplished.
- 2) The Lord Jesus had not yet ascended, nor had He been glorified. "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). There can not be a CHURCH until the Lord Jesus is ascended, exalted and glorified. It is only the exalted Christ seated in heavenly places who has been made HEAD over the church (Eph. 1:20-22). If He is not exalted in the heavenlies as Head, then there can be no church.
- 3) The Holy Spirit had not yet been given. You can't have the CHURCH apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:22 and 1 Corinthians 3:16 we learn that the Holy Spirit inhabits the church in a unique way. How can you have the church existing apart from this unique indwelling?

"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). "THAT DAY" refers to the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was sent and given. Apart from Pentecost the "YE IN ME and I IN YOU" relationship would be impossible (compare John 14:17--"shall be IN YOU"). Apart from the "YE IN ME and I IN YOU" relationship, there can be no church.

In John chapters 14-17 everything is pointing to that day when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would come. The Lord placed great significance upon that day. It was then that the church began. The building project commenced at that time, to be completed only when the "fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25).

4) The Error of Denying the Universal Church

We have already established the fact that there is "one baptism" which places every true believer (not just certain Baptist believers) into the "one body." This one body is not the local Landmark Baptist church, but it is the body of Christ, the church. We also learned that every true believer has been placed into this ONE BODY by a supernatural work of God the moment he or she is saved. We also learned that God first began placing believers into His body on the day of Pentecost which was when the church began.

It is very true that the term "church" or "assembly" (Greek-*ekklesia*) is often used of local churches. "Unto the CHURCH of God **which is at Corinth**" (1 Cor. 1:2). "The CHURCHES of **Galatia**" (Gal. 1:2). The word is commonly used to refer to local assemblies of believers.

We must not deny the local church nor the importance of it. We also must not deny the universal church and its importance.

If we say that the term CHURCH only refers to local churches, and if we also teach that the only legitimate local church recognized by God are the "Historic Baptist" (Landmark) churches, then this creates enormous problems for any serious student of the Bible.

1) "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be **THE HEAD** over all things to the **CHURCH**, Which is **HIS BODY**, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). If Christ is the Head over all things to the church, and if the church is composed only of local Landmark Baptist churches, then does this mean that true believers who are not part of Landmark congregations **HAVE NO HEAD**? How can a true believer be without Christ as Head?

2) "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22). Are only the Landmark churches indwelt by the Spirit? Have all other assemblies of believers been abandoned by the Spirit?

3) "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Is God demonstrating and pointing out His wisdom only through the Landmark Baptist churches? Does God say to the angels: "If you want to learn of My manifold wisdom, consider only the Landmark Baptists, but don't consider all of the other born

again believers whom I have saved by My grace"? What a strange message to give to the angels who are so intently interested in what God is doing in this present age.

4) "There is one body" (Eph. 4:4). Are only the Landmark Baptists included in the one body? Are all other godly saints in the world therefore excluded from this body? How can such a teaching be used to promote CHRISTIAN UNITY?

5) "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). Is Christ the Head only of the Landmark Baptists? Is Christ the Saviour only of the Landmark Baptists? What about true believers who are not associated with Landmark churches? How can they be saved if they have no Saviour?

6) "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Did the Lord Jesus give Himself on the cross only for the Landmark Baptists? Are they the only "church" that Christ loved and gave Himself for? Are we so narrow as to limit God's love and Christ's death to a certain sect?

7) "That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Is it only the "Baptist bride" that is going to be presented to Christ faultless and spotless? Is not this the certain hope and expectancy of every child of God? Compare Jude 24-25.

8) "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). When people get saved does God add them only to Landmark churches? Why are there so many true, genuine believers who are in no way associated with Landmark assemblies? Has God failed to add them to His true church?

9) "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). Was this a promise to build Landmark Baptist assemblies? Does this mean that only Landmark Baptists escape the gates of Hades? [Note: It is interesting that the gates of Hades will not prevail against any church-age believer. Not one church age believer will ever enter through the gates of Hades. Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and even John the Baptist all entered through the gates of Hades upon death, but when church age believers die they immediately go into the presence of Christ in the third heaven--2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 2:21,23.]

10) "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). Does this mean that we are to be careful not to be a stumblingblock to unsaved Gentiles, unsaved Jews and Landmark Baptists? Does this mean that it does not matter whether we are a stumblingblock to non-Landmark brethren who are truly saved? This verse is obviously dividing all of humanity into three groups: unsaved Jews, unsaved Gentiles, and the church (saved Jews and Gentiles of this present age). In spite of what the Landmark Baptists teach, every truly saved person is considered part of the CHURCH, and for this to be true there must be a universal church composed of all saved people of this present age.

These ten passages illustrate the absurdity of equating the church with local Baptists assemblies and denying that every true child of God is part of the church.

We should note that the word CHURCH is often used in the singular, and this does not exactly fit the Landmark concept of ecclesiology. For example, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Why

did not He say, "I will build my churches"? When Paul had local churches in mind he used the plural: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, **neither the churches of God**" (1 Cor. 11:16). "And all the brethren which are with me, **unto the churches of Galatia**" (Gal. 1:2). If Paul used this term to ALWAYS REFER TO LOCAL CHURCHES then why was not Paul consistent with his use of the plural? Why didn't he say the following:

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things **to the churches**" (compare Eph. 1:22).

"might be known **by the churches** the manifold wisdom of God" (compare Eph. 3:10).

"Unto Him be glory **in the churches**" (compare Eph. 3:21).

"**There are many bodies**" (compare Eph. 4:4).

"Christ is the Head **of the churches**" (compare Eph. 5:23).

"Christ loved **the churches** and gave Himself **for them**" (compare Eph. 5:25).

"Give none offence to....**the churches of God**" (compare 1 Cor. 10:32).

etc.

If local churches were intended, it would seem that the plural would better convey the intended meaning.

The hymn writer had a much better concept of the church: "*Elect from every nation yet one o'er all the earth, Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth; One holy name she blesses, Partakes one holy food, And to one hope she presses with every grace endued*" (Samuel J. Stone).

For a saved person not to be a part of Christ's body is Biblically impossible. Believers are united to Jesus Christ. They are not excluded from Him. To become a member of the church you do not have to go through the Landmark Baptists. You have to go through the cross! We fully admit that every born again Landmark Baptist is saved and a member of Christ's body, the church. But why do they deny this as being true concerning those who are not a part of their particular fellowship?

5) The Error which Insists that the True Churches are Linked to John the Baptist (the Successionist Theory).

John the Baptist was part of the old order, not the new order. He lived under the dispensation of law, not under the dispensation of grace. To trace the origin of the churches to John the Baptist is to mix law and grace resulting in total dispensational confusion.

If John the Baptist is so important to the churches, then why is he never mentioned in the great CHURCH EPISTLES which set forth church truth (such as Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, etc.). If our church family tree goes back to John the Baptist, then why are the epistles silent about this?

Apollos traced his roots back to John the Baptist and he was quickly corrected by Aquila and Priscilla and taught the true doctrine (Acts 18:24-28). In Acts 19:1-7 there were about 12 men who, like Apollos, knew only of John's baptism but who had never been SPIRIT BAPTIZED and placed into the body of Christ. It is interesting that these men were re-baptized. John's baptism was not sufficient for the new dispensation. They had to be baptized in the name of Christ. Thus, instead of a succession from John the Baptist, there needs to be a distinct break. There is a distinct difference between Christian baptism and John's baptism. John's baptism has no place in the present dispensation.

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). This passage makes it clear that John the Baptist belonged to a former dispensation. Those in the kingdom of heaven have a position and standing that far exceeds that of John the Baptist. Those belonging to the church have a high, heavenly, holy position in God's exalted Son which John the Baptist never knew.

"Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ **which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit...**And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, **which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God**, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:4,5,9). The great NT mysteries involve precious truths relating to the church which had been locked up in the loving heart of God and hidden from God's people until it was God's time for these truths to be revealed. God primarily used the Apostle Paul to make known these great truths which had previously been unrevealed. Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah knew nothing of these mysteries. These truths were never revealed to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was totally ignorant of the church truths set forth by the Apostle Paul in the epistles. How could the church be linked in succession to a man who was so ignorant of church truth?

No, the founder of the Church was Jesus Christ, not John the Baptist. Christ is the Foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:11), the Chief Cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20), the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23), the Builder of the church (Matthew 16:18), and the Rock of the Church (Matthew 16:18). John the Baptist is none of these things. John wanted to DECREASE (John 3:30) but the "Historic Baptists" want him to INCREASE. What we should really desire is that Christ might have FIRST PLACE and preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18).

6) The Error of Believer's Baptism Not being Recognized as Legitimate unless it is Performed by one of their Men in one of their Churches.

The attitude which seems to be conveyed is this: "If you don't do it our way, in our church, according to our system, then it is not legitimate." May God keep us from such a narrow-minded sectarian spirit.

Water baptism is for true believers, based upon their confession of faith. The Bible makes it very simple: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, **If thou believest with all thine heart,**

thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36-37). What made this baptism in water legitimate? The man simply believed in Christ with all his heart. He was a true believer. He was baptized. Water baptism is a one time act of obedience which takes place soon after one is saved. It is not to be repeated. It pictures REAL BAPTISM (Spirit baptism--Galatians 3:27) which was a one time act of God, never to be repeated. God placed us into Jesus Christ and this was done once for all, never to be repeated. It is done and finished forever.

If a person were baptized and later realized that he was not really saved, then certainly a re-baptism would be in order. His first baptism was not legitimate because it was not a believer's baptism. But how wrong it is to say that the baptism of a sincere believer is not legitimate because it was not performed in a certain baptist church. This is tantamount to saying, "Our church is right and all other churches are wrong. Even acts of obedience and faith are not legitimate unless they are carried out in our way, in our local church."

Paul labeled such thinking as carnal and divisive (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-4). It is the wrong attitude and it is utterly condemned by God. It is divisive: "I am of Paul!" "I am of Apollos!" "**I am of John the Baptist!**" "I am of the Historic Baptists and because of this I am legitimate before God but other blood-bought believers are not!" All of this stinks of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21).

7) The Error of "Closed Communion" which Involves not Allowing True, Genuine, Obedient Believers to Partake of Communion merely because they are not Members of a Landmark Assembly.

The Lord Jesus said, "This do...in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25). If the Lord said, "This do" then why do the Landmark Baptist say, "This thou shalt not do!" If the Lord Jesus invites sincere believers to His table, then why do the Landmark Baptists forbid them to come? Why do they close what God has opened? Why do they forbid what God has allowed?

Is the Landmark position in harmony with Paul's exhortation in Romans 15:7--"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." How thankful we should be that Christ has received poor, rebellious sinners such as us. If God were to act as the Landmark Baptists act, would any of us be saved?

If a person is a blood-bought believer who is seeking to live for Christ and obey His Word and glorify God in all that he does, then what right do we have to bar such an one from the Lord's Table? What right do we have to exclude a dear brother or sister from remembering the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Certainly if it is known that a certain brother is disobedient to the Scriptures and living in sin, then there is just cause for a local assembly to refuse to serve communion to such a person. But this is because of an obvious problem in a believer's life, not because the believer attends an assembly that is not recognized as legitimate.

Instead of closing our Communion we should open our hearts towards all of our brothers and sisters in Christ no matter where they be from. We may not agree on every matter, but the important thing is that we know Christ as our Saviour and Lord and that we recognize His great finished work on the cross with the result that we are resting all our weight on WHO HE IS, WHAT HE HAS DONE and WHAT HE HAS SAID. If a person is resting on this rock solid foundation, how can we forbid them to do what Christ told them to do: "This do...in remembrance of Me."

8) The Error which Identifies the Bride of Christ as being composed only of Landmark Baptists, excluding all other true believers.

The bride of Christ is composed of those who will someday fall before the Lamb and sing a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood **out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**" (Rev. 5:9). The great marriage supper of the Lamb is described in this way: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Some of the Landmark brethren go so far as to teach and preach that the Bride of Christ is only comprised of their Baptist groups and that all other believers would be servants at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Anyone who is a genuine believer but who is not part of one of their churches would be in the "family of God," but would not actually be part of the Bride of Christ.

In John 14:2-3 we learn that at the time of the rapture Christ will come to receive His Bride unto Himself to take her to be with Him in heaven. Does this mean that He will receive only the "Historic Baptists" (thus resulting in some kind of partial rapture)?

This error stems from the error that the church consists only of Landmark Baptist congregations. Thus Ephesians 5:22-33 is seen through this erroneous assumption. Once it is understood that the church is made up of all true believers of this age, then it is a very simple thing to recognize that the bride of Christ will likewise be made up of all true believers of this age. To correct this error of eschatology, it is first necessary to correct the error of ecclesiology. If they understand the true nature of the church, then they will understand who the bride really is.

* * * * *

James R. Graves, according to an article by Harold S. Smith [*Baptist Theologians*, Broadman, 1990, pages 223-248], held the following erroneous doctrinal positions: 1) He denied the eternal Sonship of Christ, saying that the idea of an Eternal Son is "inadmissible" and that the phrase "Eternal Son of God" is of "human coinage." He taught that Christ "*became* the Son" in time; 2) He denied that the Lord Jesus Christ died for all men, teaching a limited atonement. He taught that Christ did not die for the one who refuses to believe.

Grave's error regarding the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is documented below:

J.R. Graves, "The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption; Developed in Seven Dispensations". Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928 (Originally Published in 1883).

The heading of Chapter 4 (pages 61-65) reads: "Definition of Creation--Time--In the Beginning, etc.--The Relations of the Father and Son not Eternal, therefore no 'Eternal Father,' nor 'Eternal Son,'--The Covenant of Works and Consequences of its Violation considered."

On pages 61-62, he clearly denies the eternal Sonship of Christ:

"Therefore, before the birth of creation there could have been no relationship existing as that of the Father and Son, for these are terms **relationship**, and imply **order** of being, and consequently demand **time**. If this be so, then evidently the phrases 'Eternal Father,' and 'Eternal Son,' are not admissible, since they involve a manifest contradiction. As certainly as the Creator must exist before the thing created, the begetter must exist before the begotten--Father before Son. And it is no less contradictious to say that Father and Son eternally existed in these relations; we may as consistently affirm that the creature and its Creator co-eternally existed. One must exist before the other, else creation is as eternal as the Godhead,--never had a beginning. Every effect must exist in its cause. The phrases "'Eternal Son of God,' 'the Eternal Father,' are manifestly of human coinage,--not the selection of the revealing Spirit. . . . The relationship, expressed by the terms Father and Son, originated with the conception of the Covenant of Redemption and Work of Christ, and when that work is consummated, the relationship and its inferiority will cease ."

Concerning Graves' understanding of the atonement, I have found evidence that he taught that there was a sense in which Christ died even for who were not among the elect, even for all those who will ultimately perish. At this point I have not found convincing evidence that he taught a limited atonement.

The following literature addresses these last two mentioned doctrinal issues: 1) *The Eternal Sonship of Christ* by George Zeller and Renald Showers (\$6.00); 2) *For Whom Did Christ Die* (50¢). Each of these literature items may be ordered from the Middletown Bible Church.

* * * * *

This very troublesome sectarianism known as Landmarkism would do well to learn from our Lord's words in Luke 9:49-50, "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and **we forbid him, because he followeth not with us**. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

J.C.Ryle's comments on this passage are very fitting:

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us a warning against a bigoted and illiberal spirit. Who this man was and why he did not consort with the disciples, we do not know. But we do know that he was doing a good work in casting out demons, and that he was doing what he did in the name of Christ. And yet John says, "we forbade him." Very striking is the reply which the Lord at once gave him: "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

Thousands, in every period of Church history, have spent their lives in copying John's mistake. They have labored to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined, in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment. They have been ready to say of every Christian who does not see everything with their eyes, "Forbid him! Forbid him! for he followeth not with us."

The plain truth is, that we are all too ready to say, "We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us" (Job 12:2). We forget that no Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil's kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like. We must try to believe that men may be true-hearted followers of Jesus Christ, and yet for some reason may be kept back from seeing all things in religion just as we do. Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified,—no matter who the preacher may be, and to what Church he may belong. Happy are those who can say with Paul, "If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yea and will rejoice," (Phil. 1:18) and with Moses, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that all did prophesy." (Numbers 11:29)

[Taken from *Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, under Luke 9:49-50]

George Zeller
Middletown Bible Church
349 East Street
Middletown, CT 06457
(860) 346-0907

www.middletownbiblechurch.org