

Church History (59): Early American Baptists

In this lesson, we want to consider early Baptist and Baptist Associations from the early seventeenth-century through the nineteenth-century.

I. Early American Baptists

1. *The Seventeenth-Century* (1600s). The first wave of Puritan Christians came in the 1620s-1650s. "Between 1629 and 1642 some twenty-five thousand Puritans migrated to New England" (Shelly).¹ From Plymouth, the early settlers (Separatists) moved to Massachusetts (1630), Connecticut and Rhode Island (1636). "The intolerance that reigned in the Puritan colonies forced some to abandon them. Most famous among these was Roger Williams (1603-1683)" (Gonzalez).² "Roger Williams came to Massachusetts in 1631. He accepted a call to pastor the church in Salem in 1634. He came into conflict with Governor Winthrop and other Massachusetts Bay officials. He questioned the validity of infant baptism, denied that Puritan New England was particularly special in God's eyes, and insisted that the civil magistrates had no authority in matters of religion and conscience" (Carden).³ In 1636, Williams was eventually banished from the Bay Colony, and so he and some of his followers, established the settlement of Providence, southwest of Boston. "In 1644 Williams was able to receive from the Parliament a patent unifying and recognizing Providence and a few other scattered settlements, thus forming the basis for the colony of Rhode Island" (Carden).⁴ "Not long after his settlement at Providence, Mr. Williams, with several of his brethren, embraced the views of the Baptists" (Sprague).⁵ "The advanced views of Williams in regard to the need of personal regeneration in a Christian and his utter rejection of infant baptism, clearly show his Baptist convictions. In a letter to George Fox, written later in life, he states that a Gospel Church must be made up of such regenerate men, and calls them 'actual believers, true disciples and converts, living stones, such as can give some account how the grace of God has appeared unto them and wrought that heavenly change in them'" (Armitage).⁶

"Williams soon found a theological soul-mate joining him in his haven of escape, Rhode Island, when John Clarke arrived. Clarke left for America in 1637, arriving in November. After consulting with the magistrates in Plymouth, Clarke settled on a place outside the jurisdiction of any other colony 'to get clear of all, and be of ourselves.' This place was soon particularized as Newport, and it became the home of another Baptist church, the second in America" (Nettles).⁷ "The first Baptist church in Newport, was formed and set in order about the year 1644, under the ministry of Mr. John Clarke" (Backus).⁸ Both Williams and Clarke were severely persecuted for their Baptist views, and wrote appeals to Parliament for relief. Williams first wrote *The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody* (1644), which was a public response to a tract by John Cotton, and Clarke wrote *Ill News from New England* (1652), wherein he described the public whipping of Obadiah Holmes (a Baptist minister). Both Williams and Clarke argued for churches to be governed by Christ alone. "Clarke made his case for liberty of conscience built upon a correct understanding of New Testament Christianity and the nature of the church. Much of the theology of Clarke's presentation reminds one of the arguments of Roger Williams, but the freshness and tenderness of the whole has the ring of originality and heart conviction" (Nettles).⁹

¹ Bruce Shelly, *Church History*, 317

² Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2:284

³ Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America*, 199

⁴ Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America*, 200

⁵ William Sprague, *Annals of the American Baptist Pulpit*, 1:14

⁶ Thomas Armitage, *The History of the Baptists*, 2:661

⁷ Tomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:45

⁸ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England Baptists*, 1:125

⁹ Tomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:46

Clarke's basic argument is that Christians have the right to worship God as conscience demanded. "Clarke maintained a sharp and clear distinction between freedom of conscience in the realm of civil society and the necessity of purity within the church. This distinction takes account of the regulative principle, the distinction between the covenants, and the nature of church purity within a free society" (Nettles).¹⁰

I testify that no such believer, or servant of Christ Jesus has any liberty, much less authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow servant, nor yet with outward force, or arm of flesh, to constrain, or restrain his conscience, no nor yet his outward man for conscience sake, or worship of his God, wherein injury is not offered to the person, name or estate of others. Every man, being such as shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and who must give an account of himself to God, therefore, he ought to be fully persuaded in his own mind, for what he undertakes, because he that doubts is damned if he eat, and so also if he act, because he does not eat or act in faith, and what is not of faith is sin.¹¹

From Rhode Island, Baptist churches spread to Boston, Main, and Massachusetts. "The First Baptist Church of Boston was founded in 1655. In 1680, they published an apology, that is an explanation for its existence. This was signed by various English Baptist such as William Kiffen, Hanserd Knollys, William Collins, and Nehemiah Coxe. They said: 'The authors of this apology have declared their perfect agreement with us both in matters of Faith and Worship, as set down in our Late Confession'" (Walker).¹² From the Northern Colonies, Particular Baptist Churches began to populate Middle Colonies such as New Jersey and Pennsylvania (1684), and then Southern Colonies such as South Carolina and Virginia (1685). Eventually, three kinds of Baptist Churches arose: General Baptists (Arminian), Seventh-Day Baptists (they worshiped on Saturday), and Particular Baptists (Calvinistic and Confessional). By the year 1700, more than 30 Particular Baptist Churches were founded in early colonial America.¹³

2. *The Eighteenth-Century* (1700s). "Although the earliest Baptist churches were founded in Rhode Island and Massachusetts in the 1600s, it was not in seventeenth-century New England but in the Middle Colonies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the eighteenth-century that the Particular Baptists achieved their first associational structure in 1707 with the formation of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, and thereby were able to promote a doctrinal uniformity with the greatest measure of success" (Wolever).¹⁴ "The Philadelphia Association set the pattern for other Associations. In 1766 the Keston, Virginia Association adopted The Confession as did the Charleston, South Carolina Association, and the Warren, Rhode Island Association the following year. Through these Associations, and others, and the member churches, the doctrine and practices of The Confession molded much of the early thinking among Baptists in America" (Walker).¹⁵ Throughout the eighteenth-century, Particular Baptist Churches would multiply. According to Sam Waldron, there would be more than ninety churches by 1740 and almost five hundred by 1780.¹⁶ He attributes three basic causes of this growth: British immigration, the Great Awakening, and Baptist polity.

The roots of Particular Baptists in America are to be traced first to the immigration of English and Welsh Baptists. In addition to this, was the effects of the Great Awakening.

¹⁰ Tomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:48-49

¹¹ John Clark, *Ill News from New England*, 60-61

¹² Austin Walker, *A New Exposition of The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, 29

¹³ Sam Waldron, *Baptist Roots in America*, 7

¹⁴ Terry Wolever, *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith*, 7

¹⁵ Austin Walker, *A New Exposition of The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, 30

¹⁶ Sam Waldron, *Baptist Roots in America*, 7

This revival with its injection of spiritual life into the religious scene in the American colonies gave tremendous impetus to evangelism and church growth in America. The spiritual life generated by the Awakening caused a reaction to the established church. Whitefield's and others' emphasis on the all-importance of the new birth created a desire for churches where spiritual life, rather than formal religion, was the controlling reality. Naturally enough, many of the separating churches spawned or actually became Baptist churches. Also contributing to this growth was the tremendous freedom and flexibility of Baptist church polity. It was peculiarly suited to church-planting on the frontier as it moved constantly westward. Before the great influx of Catholic immigrants beginning around 1850, the Baptists had become the largest religious group in America. They remain the largest Protestant grouping to this day.¹⁷

All of the early Particular Baptist Associations were Confessional. This means they formally held to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. "Though essentially a reprint of the Second London Confession of 1677/1689, the Philadelphia Confession nevertheless has assumed a unique and separate identity of its own for a number of reasons: the first and obvious one being its place of publication, Philadelphia; the second reason was the inclusion of two additional articles – Chapter 23, on the Singing of Psalms in Public Worship and Chapter 31 concerning the Laying on of Hands. Both of these added articles were direct carry-overs from articles 27 and 28 composed by the English Baptist ministers Benjamin and Elias Keach, which they had added to their own edition of the Second London Confession" (Wolever).¹⁸ In fact, it was largely through Elias Keach (1665-1699) that the Baptist Confession came over to America. "Elias Keach would become the first minister of the historic Pennepeck Baptist Church located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, when the son of the famous preacher first arrived in North America as a twenty-one-year-old, he was unconverted" (Weaver).¹⁹ And yet soon after his arrival, after being converted through his own preaching, "he founded the Baptist church at Pennepeck and became a means of starting many churches throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey" (Weaver).²⁰ In 1707, the first Baptist Association in America was formed, and in 1742, The Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted as its Confession of Faith the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith. "This Confession became the basis on which almost all the Associations of this country were established, until what is called the New Hampshire Confession (1833) was drawn up by John Newton Brown" (Armitage).²¹

The Philadelphia Association serves as a bridge between much of the Baptist life and self-conscious identity taken on by English Baptists and that which defined the growth of Baptists in America. The impact of its theology and church life in the South is seen in the confessional identity between the Philadelphia Confession of Faith and the Charleston Confession of Faith, both of which duplicate, with minor variations, the Second London Confession. The exchange of leading preachers between the two associations for mutual edification and engagement in evangelistic work also shows their continuity.²²

3. *The Nineteenth-Century* (1800s). "In the United States, the nineteenth century began just as the nation's mourning the death of George Washington was ending. President John Adams was soon to be

¹⁷ Sam Waldron, *Baptist Roots in America*, 1-5, 8

¹⁸ Terry Wolever, *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith*, 7-8

¹⁹ Steve Weaver, *The 1689 Baptist Confession and Its Influence on Early American Missions and Church Planting*, 8

²⁰ Steve Weaver, *The 1689 Baptist Confession and Its Influence on Early American Missions and Church Planting*, 8

²¹ Thomas Armitage, *The History of the Baptists*, 2:716

²² Tomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:75

defeated soundly by Thomas Jefferson. A malicious fever, devastating Philadelphia, had forced the Baptist Association, which normally met there, to convene outside the city for some years" (Nettles).²³ It was in this context, that Baptist missionaries (Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice) left America to preach the gospel, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed (separating northern and southern churches), and the Particular Baptist Churches saw a decline. With respect to the latter of these, Sam Waldron has suggested several causes for the decline of Particular Baptist Churches in America:²⁴ (1) The American, Democratic Ethos. "While the Particular Baptists' independent polity thrived in America, their Calvinistic theology did not. There was something in the political philosophy associated with the American Revolution which was profoundly antithetical to Calvinism." (2) An anti-creedal and confessional mindset. "The growing popularity of the New Hampshire Confession and the tendency for it to displace the Philadelphia Confession certainly did nothing to stem the anti-Calvinistic tide among Baptists later in the 19th Century." This led to the rise of Arminian and Free-will Baptist Churches. (3) Hyper-Calvinism. "So dominant was Calvinism in the 18th and 19th Centuries among Baptists that at that period hyper-Calvinism rather than Arminianism was probably the greatest danger." (4) Modernism. "Modernism or Liberalism began to creep into the Baptist churches after the Civil War. By the dawn of the 20th Century, it was a flood of heresy among Baptist. Such Modernism was simply the emphasis of Arminianism on human rights, freedom, and ability taken to its logical extreme of the denial of biblical authority itself. Naturally enough, it saw in Calvinism its deadly enemy, Thus, its most vehement assaults were directed against it."

In the mid-1800s many of the southern churches broke from northern churches over the issues of liberalism and slavery. The Convention began with about 300 churches. "The first president and single most influential architect of the Southern Baptist Convention was W.B. Johnson, who was active in the founding of the South Carolina Baptist Convention in 1821 and the only man present at the founding of both the General Missionary Convention in 1814 and the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. For twenty-eight years he served as president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and from 1841 to 1844 held the same office in the General Missionary Convention. In 1845 he became president of the Southern Baptist Convention, a position to which he was elected through the year 1851" (Nettles).²⁵ R.B.C Howell (1851-1859) and Richard Fuller (1859-1863) succeeded him as presidents. From the start, the Convention adopted the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. Written in 1833, this Confession was a reduction of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. It contained twenty-eight Articles and was clearly Calvinistic, Covenantal, and Sabbatarian. "It soon became the most widely distributed statement of doctrine among Baptists in America, although Baptists in the South initially preferred the Philadelphia Confession of Faith" (Nettles).²⁶

"The first Seminary in Southern Baptist life rested on a Calvinistic foundation. The seminary's four faculty members, J.P. Boyce (1827-1888), John Broadus (1827-1895), Basil Manly Jr. (1825-1892), and William Williams (1821-1877), as well as its most ardent promoter, Basil Manly, Sr. (1798-1868), shared a common and aggressive commitment to the Doctrines of Grace" (Nettles).²⁷ This seminary, the Southern Baptist Seminary, was first located in Greenville, SC (1857), and then relocated after the Civil War to Louisville, KY (1877). Boyce became the first president of the Seminary, Broadus prepared the outline for a course of instruction, and Manly Jr., wrote an abstract of doctrinal principles (which were a truncated version of the New Hampshire Confession). The Seminary confessed: "Every Professor of the Institution shall be a member of a regular Baptist Church; and all persons accepting

²³ Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 131

²⁴ Sam Waldron, *Baptist Roots in America*, 9-29

²⁵ Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 162-163

²⁶ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 378

²⁷ Thomas Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 187

Professorships in this Seminary, shall be considered by such acceptance, as engaging to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the Abstract of Principles hereinafter laid down." Again, these Abstract Principles were Calvinistic and Covenantal. Thus, the Southern Baptist Convention began as a Calvinistic and Covenantal Seminary, built upon twenty Abstract of Doctrinal Principles, derived from the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, which is a summary of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.

James P. Boyce was born on January 11, 1827, in Charleston, SC. His parents were members of the Baptist Church in which Manly Sr. was pastor, and his father was "considered the wealthiest man in South Carolina" (Reisinger).²⁸ "Boyce entered Princeton in September of 1847, under the instruction of Charles Hodge. In 1851 he accepted the call to be pastor of the Baptist Church in Columbia, SC, at that time a city of seven thousand. He became a professor of theology in 1855 when the trustees of Furman University elected him to the faculty in their theology department" (Nettles).²⁹ At the end of his first year of teaching, Boyce delivered a lecture that was immediately published. It was entitled, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions*. This would actually become "the founding structure of the Southern Seminary in 1859. This address proposed three principles on which to establish a seminary which would meet the needs of the educated and uneducated man" (Reisinger).³⁰ (1) "A Baptist theological school ought not merely to receive college graduates, but men with a less general education, even men having only what is called common English education, offering to every man such opportunities of theological study as he is prepared for and desires." (2) "Besides covering, for those who are prepared, as wide a range of theological study as could be found elsewhere, such an institution ought to offer further and special courses so that the ablest and most aspiring students might make extraordinary attainments, preparing them for instruction and original authorship, and helping to make our country less dependent upon foreign scholarship." (3) "There should be prepared an *Abstract of Principles*, or careful statement of theological belief, which every professor in such an institution must sign when inaugurated, so as to guard against the rise of erroneous and injurious instruction in such a seat of sacred learning."³¹

"Boyce first printed his *Abstract of Systematic Theology* privately in 1882 for use in his classes at the seminary. The American Baptist Publication Society printed the first public edition in 1887" (Nettles).³² B.B. Warfield gave a review of the book in 1889, in *The Presbyterian Review*. He said: "The special note of the late Dr. Boyce's Abstract of Theology is judiciousness. In the selection and ordering of the matter, in the proportion of its distribution, and in the method of presentation, the same fine judgment is displayed which has governed his theological conceptions themselves. He has given us a text-book which we are glad to place on the same shelf with our A.A. Hodge, and R.L. Dabney. We find the treatment of the topics which fall under the caption of Theology, in the narrow sense, especially excellent. The long and interesting chapter on the Being of God, for instance, is one of the best in the volume; while those on the Decrees of God, the Trinity, and Providence are scarcely inferior to it" (Warfield).³³ "On Friday, December 28, 1888, James Petigru Boyce was called home to be with his Lord" (Reisinger).³⁴

"John Albert Broadus was born January 24, 1827, in Virginia. In 1851 and 1852, while he was pastor of the Charlottesville Baptist Church, he also served as a tutor in Greek at the University of Virginia.

²⁸ Ernest Reisinger, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, ii

²⁹ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 203-204

³⁰ Ernest Reisinger, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, iv

³¹ Ernest Reisinger, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, iv-v

³² Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 207

³³ B.B. Warfield, as quoted by Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, 196

³⁴ Ernest Reisinger, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, xvi

The combined load became so heavy for him that he was forced to surrender his position at the university in 1853 and invest all his time in the ministry through the church at Charlottesville" (Nettles).³⁵ "When Southern Baptists established their first seminary, in 1858, John A. Broadus was one of four professors elected. Storms of protest assaulted Broadus from his church members, who were determined that he should not quit his position as pastor. He became the Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Homiletics at the newly formed seminary in the fall of 1859" (Nettles).³⁶ Having closed during the Civil War, the seminary reopened on November 1, 1865, with just seven students. "Broadus had only one student, a blind one at that, for whom he had to produce detailed oral presentations. These served as the background for his *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870)" (Nettles).³⁷ The volume contains five parts: Part I: Materials of Preaching (text selection and interpretation, different occasions of sermons, the use of argument and illustrations); Part II: Arrangement of a Sermon (parts of a sermon and different species of sermons); Part III: Style (clarity, energy, and imagination); Part IV: Delivery of Sermons (different types of delivery and use of the voice); Part V: Conduct of Public Worship (reading Scripture, hymns, public prayer, length of services, pulpit decorum and concluding remarks). In May of 1876, he delivered five lectures at Newton Theological Institute near Boston, which were printed under the title, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*. "In 1889, he delivered the Yale lectures on preaching. These eight lectures demonstrate that Broadus never stopped laboring to improve the effectiveness of the Christian pulpit in America. The eight messages were entitled: (1) The Young Minister's Outfit, (2) Freshness in Preaching, (3) Sensational Preaching, (4) Freedom in Preaching, (5) The Minister's General Reading, (6) The Minister and His Hymn Book, (7) The Minister and His Bible, and (8) The Minister's Private Life."³⁸ Revolutionary

Basil Manly, Jr was the son of Basil Manly, Sr. "Though deeply influenced by his father's commitment to the work of the Lord, he attained prominence and recognition out of the force of his own commitment to Christ and his unusual intellectual power" (Nettles).³⁹ He was one of four first professors at Southern Baptist Seminary in 1859; he left in 1863 to serve as the first president of the newly formed Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, and returned to the Seminary as the new professor of Old Testament in 1879. "Upon returning to the Seminary, Manly was asked to deliver a formal opening address. He delivered the address on September 1, 1879, and it was printed in full in September 4, 1879. Manly's title for the address was *Why and How to Study the Bible*. There are three grades of Bible study, he said. First there is devotional study, and second there is exegetical study of the English Bible. But Manly pleaded for Bible study 'in the original tongues' in which God had given the Bible" (Nettles).⁴⁰ "In 1888 Manly published his only major volume, entitled *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*. In the preface, he writes that this book represents his studied opinion. The views expressed in the book were the product of more than a quarter of a century of discussion on the subject of inspiration. His sense of the importance of the subject had increased each year, he says, until he finally determined to present a study of it to the public 'specially from a Biblical standpoint'" (Nettles).⁴¹ "An outline of Manly's theology is preserved in Southern Seminary's Abstract of Principles and has doubtless extended his influence into the lives of literally thousands of Baptists" (Nettles).⁴² He died on January 31, 1892. John A. Broadus said at his funeral: "He was the most versatile man I ever met. I never saw him try to do anything that he did not do it well. The worth of such a man only God can measure."

³⁵ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 221

³⁶ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 223

³⁷ Thomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:300

³⁸ Thomas Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:301

³⁹ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 211

⁴⁰ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 211-212

⁴¹ Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 212

⁴² Thomas Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 218