

# **CHURCH HISTORY & PURITAN THEOLOGY**



## **PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS AND CALVINISM- SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

# Ten Reasons Primitive Baptists Are Not Calvinists

*By Elders Michael Gowens and Lonnie Mozingo, Jr.*

## Preface

In the minds of most people, Christianity is divided into two major groups, Arminians (those who advocate the theology of James Arminius) and Calvinists (those who advocate the theology of John Calvin).

The distinction between Primitive Baptists and Arminians is so clear few would confuse the two. However, when people hear Primitive Baptists proclaim the Doctrines of Grace (election, predestination, etc.) they sometimes assume that Primitive Baptists are some branch of the Calvinist family. The fact is, Primitive Baptists have never been a part of either group, since they and their ancestors have maintained their identity since the days of Christ and the Apostles.

This article shows ten basic distinctions between Calvinists and Primitive Baptists. It is the earnest desire of the authors that upon reading it, the Lord's people will remember that "My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her." Song of Solomon 6:9

**1. Baptists are not Protestants.** Calvin, the Protestant Reformer and founder of Presbyterianism, seceded from Roman Catholicism. Baptists derive their existence from Christ and the Apostles, and as such, predate Catholics, and have maintained a separate existence from them even through the Dark Ages. Hence, the name "Primitive" Baptists.

Matt 16:16-18 "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Eph 2:20 “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;”

Jude 1:25 “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

**2. The Means of Grace.** The Reformers continued the Roman Catholic idea that salvation is mediated by the "church". Though they largely discarded Roman Catholic sacramentalism (i.e. the notion that participation in baptism and the Eucharist are saving acts), they still maintained the same emphasis, namely, that redemption is applied to the individual by *external means*. In most Calvinistic camps, the “word” is the "means of grace" (*media gratiae*). Primitive Baptists, on the contrary, insist that the only mediator of saving grace is Christ and that the media of word or ordinances are applicable to discipleship, not sonship.

1Tim 2:5 “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

2Tim 1:9-10 “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:”

John 6:44-45 “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

**3. Saving Faith.** Calvinism's primary slogan is "sola fide" -- faith alone. The doctrine of "justification by faith *alone*" is the bedrock of Reformed Theology. By that phrase, they mean that sinners are justified in the sight of God only by the act of believing the gospel, not by their works. Primitive Baptists believe that Scripture teaches that the subject of justification has various phases (by grace, by

blood, by faith, and by works), some of which do not have eternal implications; hence, the word "alone" is misleading. If we were forced to employ the word "alone", we would rather speak of "justification by grace alone" or "justification by blood alone". We believe that the Calvinist errs by assuming the noun "faith" always means "the act of believing the gospel". Further, we interpret justification by faith in terms of the assurance of salvation, not the application of redemption.

Rom 3:24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"

Rom 5:9 "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

Rom 5:1 "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:"

James 2:24 "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

**4. Perseverance.** Calvinism asserts that all the elect will persevere in faith and holiness. If an individual does not persevere, then he proves by his apostasy that he was merely a professor, not a possessor, of eternal life. Primitive Baptists insist that Divine Preservation, rather than human perseverance, is the Biblical emphasis, preservation being the term employed in Scripture to describe the eternal security of God's people.

Jude 1:1-25 "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of #James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:"

1Th 5:23-24 "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

2Tim 4:18 "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

John 10:27-30 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”

Rom 8:38-39 “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

A child of God may indeed fall from his own steadfastness in the faith, but will not fall from God's covenant favor. The chastisements upon God's children in disobedience are parental and remedial [corrective], not punitive. All of God's people will be preserved for they are "kept by His power", but they are responsible for "keeping the faith", "keeping their hearts with all diligence", and "keeping themselves in the love of God" (that is, behaving in such a way that He will manifest His blessing upon them and that they may adorn rather than reproach the doctrine they believe). Their preservation, not their perseverance, is guaranteed by covenant decree.

2Sam 23:5 “Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.”

2Pet 2:7 “And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:”

2Tim 2:18-19 “Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

Heb 12:6-7 “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”

Tit 2:10 “Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

Jude 1:25 “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

**5. Double Predestination.** Calvinism, or Reformed Theology, affirms "double predestination", i.e. the idea that God has decreed the salvation of some through election and the damnation of others through reprobation. This supralapsarian model would inevitably make God the first cause of sin. Primitive Baptists believe that predestination concerns only the salvation of the elect and that the non-elect are simply left in their fallen state, to be punished for their wicked works.

Rom 8:29-30 “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Eph 1:5,11 “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, [11] In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:”

Matt 7:23 “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Rev 20:13-15 “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

**6. Absolute Predestination.** Calvinism espouses the idea that "God has from all eternity past, unchangeably and unalterably fixed whatsoever comes to pass..." Primitive Baptists believe that predestination has reference only to the

final destiny of God's people, not to the events of daily life. Yes, God is a God of providence, but providence and predestination are not synonymous. (Note that the word *predestinate* appears in its various forms four times in the Bible and always refers to people, not events of time.)

See Rom 8:29-30 and Eph 1:5,11 in section 5.

2Th 2:7 “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

John 8:44 “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

Jer 19:5 “They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind:”

Jer 7:9-11 “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.”

Isa 5:20 “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”

1John 2:16 “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

Matt 12:24-32 “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the

Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

**7. Covenant Theology.** Reformed Theology asserts a view known as "Covenant Theology". This is the view that the Covenant of Grace is administered through covenants made with men in time. It states that under the Law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, and circumcision, and under the Gospel, it is administered by means of the word and sacrament. Primitive Baptists believe that covenants made with men in time *reveal*, not *administer*, the Covenant of Redemption. The Law and the Gospel, in other words, are covenants of worship and service. They function as revelations of redemption, not instruments by which the benefits of the everlasting covenant are applied to the individual.

Gal 2:21 "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Gal 3:19,24 "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...[24] Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 4:24-26 "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

Heb 7:19 "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."



2Tim 1:10 “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:”

**8. Infant Baptism.** As a part of their view of the "covenant family," some Reformed churches, like John Calvin, practice infant baptism. The sprinkling of infants of a believing parent purportedly "seals the benefits of the covenant" to the child, thus insuring his salvation, until he/she is sufficiently mature to understand and embrace the gospel personally. Primitive Baptists reject the notion that baptism is the NT equivalent of OT circumcision, practicing Believer's Baptism instead of *paedo-* or infant baptism, believing that infants are saved in the same way as adults, by grace.

Matt 28:19-20 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

Acts 8:36-37 “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.”

John 3:8 “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

**9. Separation of Church/State.** Calvin governed Geneva as a theocracy, confounding the separate roles of Church and State. To defy the church was to be

politically seditious. Primitive Baptists have always insisted on a distinction between Church/State.

John 18:36 “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

2Cor 10:4 “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)”

Mark 12:17 “And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marveled at him.”

Rom 13:7 “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

**10. Persecution of Detractors.** Calvin's involvement in the trial and burning of Michael Servetus for heresy on Oct 27, 1553, is incriminating. Though Servetus had asked permission to come to Geneva, Calvin threatened, "If I consent, he will come here, but I will not give my word, for should he come, I will not suffer him to get out alive." Servetus came anyway, and was burned to death. In contrast to Calvin's tactics, Primitive Baptists are distinguished for their refusal to persecute detractors. They are known as the sufferers, not the perpetrators, of persecution.

Matt 10:16 “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

Php 2:15 “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”

2Cor 11:23-33 “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 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; 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; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me. And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”

1Pet 4:12-16 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

Heb 11:35-38 “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

Matt 5:10-12 “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”