

THE INTERNATIONAL OLD BAPTIST UNION

A Revival of the Old Baptists

by the
Rev. THOS. H. SQUIRE, D.D.

SECOND EDITION

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The International Old Baptist Union-- A Revival of the Old Baptists.

By The REV. THOS. H. SQUIRE, D.D.

This treatise might be headed in the words of the Baptist Confession of Faith of A.D. 1646 :—" For the vindication of the truth, and the information of the ignorant ; likewise for the taking off of those aspersions which are frequently " cast upon the Old Baptist Union. We do not wish to be misunderstood respecting our sentiments towards our brethren in other sections of the Baptist denomination, for, although we have here fearlessly laid bare what we cannot but consider to be a grievous departure on their part from the truth, we are nevertheless in sympathy with Baptists all the world over.

Despite their back-slidings, we love and pray for our widely spread family—for we do not forget that they are *Baptists* and fellow-workers in the Master's vineyard. The President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland for 1893—Rev. Thomas Mew Morris, in an address on 24th April of that year, upon " Our greatest need " most truly said : " We have been told often that we need more money, and more labourers, for work both at home and abroad. But the one need which dominates every other is, that the Holy Spirit should take more complete possession of us. All wants would then be met, all errors would then be rectified, all diseases would be healed, discord would give place to harmony, and strife would be forgotten in peace."

We are frequently asked why and wherein we differ from other Baptists and the reason for the appellation "*Old*" Baptist Union. It is not from a desire to exalt ourselves that we use the word " Old " but because it expresses the truth, for we are not only the oldest union of Baptist Churches now in existence—the Union having been organized in Rhode Island, U.S.A., in 1670, and having regularly held its annual conferences ever since— but we contend that we are the true successors of the Apostolic churches, the first and oldest Baptists, in that we believe in and practise all the ordinances and doctrines of the New Testament, some of which other sections of the Baptist body have neglected or laid aside.

The English Conference of our Union was organized in 1880 by the Rev. H. Augustus Squire, and mission stations have since been opened in other countries in addition to the work in the older Conferences of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Great Britain.

We are not Calvinistic but "General" or Free-will Baptists, although our membership—like that of the early Church—is confined to baptized believers. A fuller statement of our teaching is contained in the booklets, * "Who are the Successors of the Apostolic Churches?" and "The Old Baptist Union Confession of Faith, reprinted from the edition of 1660," and our other works.

The change that has taken place in the doctrine and practice of what may be termed modern Baptists during the last three centuries, is we grieve to say, not for the better, inasmuch as it is a declension from the truth rather than a contention for it. Not one of the Baptist Confessions of Faith of A.D. 1611, 1646 1656, 1660, 1678, 1688, &c., could be taken as a correct statement of the belief of modern Baptists,—Calvinistic or Arminian. Some of the doctrines of Christ taught by our fathers have been laid aside as unnecessary rites, but as *we* esteem *every* ordinance of the Gospel as of *great importance*, and believe that *none may be changed or omitted* without the loss of much power and blessing we are banded together to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints;" and with the Old Baptists of 1660, we can truly say—"And in the belief and practice of these things (it being the good old apostolic way) our souls have found that rest and soul-peace which the world knows not, and which they cannot take from us."

But perhaps the reader asks—"What are these ordinances to which you refer?" We will name three of the most striking:—

(1).—*The officers of the Church.* In many present-day Baptist Churches the only scriptural officers beside the Minister are Deacons, whereas in Apostolic times—aye, and up to recent times too among the Baptists, *Elders* as well as Deacons exercised their gifts in the government and care of the Church. *Where are the Elders in these Churches?* Is there no need for them now? or is *the unordained Pastor* considered as an Elder, and the only Elder required?

(2).—*The ordination of the officers.* Our Baptist forefathers not only had Elders and Deacons in their Churches, but their Pastors and officers were properly *ordained by the laying on of hands*. Perhaps much of the coldness and lack of Holy Ghost power in the English Baptist Ministry of to-day may be attributed to the neglect of this ordinance. But by what right have our brethren laid this Scriptural and God-honoured practice aside?

(3).—*The laying on of hands upon Baptized believers for the gift of the Holy Ghost*, is an ordinance of the Gospel and a doctrine of Christ (Heb. vi. 2.) which the Apostles and early Christians practised for eight centuries after Christ, and most of our Baptist predecessors observed it. By what authority has such a blessed and confirmatory ordinance been abolished by modern Baptists?

There are other *minor* points of difference between us, but the above are the chief; and though we detest schism, we must say with our fathers, "Such an agreement as agreeth not with the truth, we may not agree unto; therefore we desire it not."

* Cloth-binding, post free 1/6d., paper covers, 6d.

We shall refer the reader to some of the early Confessions of Faith of the Baptists (collected and re-printed in book form by the Hanserd Knollys Society in 1854, Edited by Edward Bean Underhill), to prove that the Old Baptist Union in contending for and practising the above doctrines, is simply reviving the truths taught by the Old Baptists hundreds of years ago.*

OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH AND THEIR ORDINATION.

The Baptist Declaration of Faith of A.D. 1611, (Articles 20 and 21), states :—“ That the officers of every church or congregation are either *Elders*, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls ; or *Deacons*, men and women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies, Acts xx. 28 ; 1 Peter v. 2, 3 ; Acts vi. 1, 4. That these officers are to be chosen when there are persons qualified according to the rules in Christ’s Testament, by election and approbation of that church or congregation whereof they are members, with *fasting*, *prayer* and *laying on of hands* ; and there being but one rule for elders, therefore but one sort of elders, 1 Tim. iii. 2, 7 ; Tit. i. 6, 9 ; Acts vi. 3, 4 ; xiii. 3 ; xiv. 23.”

The London Confession of Faith of A.D. 1646, Article 36, says :—“ Every church hath power given them from Christ for their well-being, to choose among themselves meet persons for *Elders* and *Deacons*, being qualified according to the word.” Another Confession of Faith published in the same year (1646), Article 19, says—“Preachers of the Gospel . . . may settle such officers so chosen by a church, in the places or offices to which they are chosen, by *imposition of hands and prayer*, Acts vi. 3, 6 ; xiv. 23 ; Titus i. 5.”

The Confession of the Churches of Somerset and the adjoining counties (A.D. 1656), Article 31, declares :—“That the church of Jesus Christ, with its ministry, may from among themselves make choice of such members as are fitly gifted and qualified by Christ, and approve and *ordain such by fasting, prayer, and laying on of hands*, Acts xiv. 23, ‘ And when they had ordained them Elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed.’ ”

In “ A brief Declaration or Confession of Faith ” of 1660, it states that “ Elders or Pastors ” and “ Deacons ” shall be “ chosen by the church, and *ordained by prayer and laying on of hands* to that work.”

In the Confession of Faith of 1678, Article 31, we read that, “ The officers appointed by Christ to be chosen by His church, for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of the power and duty Christ hath enjoined them to the end of the world, are these three, viz., Bishops or messengers ; and *Elders or pastors* ; and *Deacons* or overseers of the poor ; and the way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person fitted and gifted by the Holy Ghost unto the office of Bishop or messenger in the churches is, viz., that he be chosen thereunto by the

* See “ Confessions of Faith, &c., 1611-1688.” Published by the Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854.

common suffrage of the church, and solemnly *set apart by fasting and prayer with imposition of hands* . . . And the particular Pastor or Elder, in like manner is to be chosen by the common suffrage of the particular congregation and ordained . . . The Deacons are in like manner to be chosen by election and ordination."

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1688, says (chap. xxvi. 9) :—
 "The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit unto the office of *Bishop or Elder* in the Church is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common (Acts xiv. 23 ; see the original) suffrage of the church itself ; and *solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer with imposition of hands* of the (I Tim. iv. 14) Eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein ; and of a *Deacon* (Acts vi. 3, 5, 6) that he be chosen by the like suffrage and set apart by prayer, and the like *imposition of hands*."

Those old Baptists—the Waldenses—who for centuries endured persecution and reproach unmoved, also practised the laying on of hands in ordination. The historian *Muston* says of their Ministers, that after a necessary training they were "Consecrated to the Ministry by the laying on of hands." They were then sent out two and two to preach over a large portion of Southern Europe.

The ordination of officers by the laying on of hands, has not—comparatively speaking—been long discontinued in some Baptist Churches, as doubtless there are those living at the present time who can testify. The following extracts from the *Baptist Magazine* for 1854-5, will also bear witness to this ;—"On Wednesday, the 12th of March, 1806, Mr. Chater, afterwards a Missionary to Ceylon, and Mr. Wm. Robinson, were solemnly set apart to the Ministry, in the Baptist Chapel at Oxford where Mr. Hinton was pastor . . . Mr. Sutcliff then descended from the pulpit, and by prayer and *imposition of hands* in which the other brethren joined, solemnly set them apart to the work and committed them to God."

Many of the Baptist Churches of America have continued this ordinance to the present day, and it would be well if the serious attention of *every Baptist Minister and Church* were drawn to this subject, that no qualification, blessing, or gift might be lacking through disobedience to this important matter.

In the Confession of Faith of the church worshipping in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, (published in 1881), revised by the late Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, occurs the following in the identical language of the Confession of 1688 :—(p. 29, section 29), "The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of *Bishop or Elder* in a Church, is that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself, and *solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer with imposition of hands* of the eldership of the church if there be any before constituted therein ; and of a *Deacon* that he be chosen by the like suffrage and set apart by prayer and the like *imposition of hands*."*

* See also, "The Laying on of Hands." Post free 4d.

Why should not every Baptist Church carefully and prayerfully examine the faith of our fathers, and so far as that faith is in accordance with God's word—revive it? “Ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein” (Jer. vi. 16), is surely God's message to our brethren as it has been to the Old Baptist Union.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS AFTER BAPTISM.

That the first Baptists—those in the Apostolic churches—believed in this principle, is proved by—Acts viii. 14, 19; Heb. vi. 1, 2; Acts xix. 6; II Tim. i, 6;* and that many of our Baptist forefathers in the 17th Century “continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine” in this particular, will be seen from the following:—

The Confession of Faith of the Baptist Churches in London, A.D. 1660, which was endorsed by many names of “Elders, Deacons, and brethren, on behalf of themselves, and many others unto whom they belong, in London, and in several counties of this nation, who are of the same faith with us,”—Crosby tells us, contained after the names, the following sentence—“*Owened and approved by more than twenty thousand.*” This Confession of Faith may be taken as the expression of the belief and practice of the Old Baptist Union to-day, so exactly do its tenets concur with our own. In its 12th section it declares:—

“That it is the duty of *all such who are believers baptized*, to draw nigh unto God *in submission to that principle of Christ's doctrines*, to wit, *prayer and laying on of hands*, that they may receive the promise of the Holy Spirit Heb. vi. 1, 2; Acts viii. 12, 15, 17; &c., whereby they may mortify the deeds of the body, Rom. viii. 13; and live in all things answerable to their professed intentions and desires, even to the honour of Him, who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

In Article xxxii. of the Baptist Creed of 1678, occurs the following:—*Of prayer with laying on of hands.* Prayer, with *imposition of hands* by the Bishop or Elder, on *baptized believers*, as such, *for the reception of the Holy promised Spirit of Christ*, we believe is a principle of Christ's doctrine, and ought to be practised and submitted to by every baptized believer, in order to receive the promised Spirit of the Father and the Son. Acts viii. 12, &c.; xix, 6, 7; II Tim. i. 6, 7; Heb. vi. 2; John xiii. 16, &c.; xvi. 7; Eph. i. 13, 14; Acts ii. 38, 39.

Knight's History of the General Six-principle-Baptists (published in 1829), says:—In 1688 there were in the City of London, six General Baptist churches, which were associated together to maintain the doctrine of the laying on of hands after Baptism, and all the principles of Christ's doctrine set forth in Heb. vi. 1, 2. And it is an indisputable fact, that even in the eighteenth century, a large number of Baptist churches adhered firmly to this Scriptural practice, and Knight gives the names of over 200 of those churches, which had not given up this truth as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century.

* See also “The Metropolitan Tabernacle, its history and work,” by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon; pp. 17, 18.

†The first pastor of the church known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle was William Rider, who, about the year 1652, published a work in vindication of the laying on of hands, and as late as nearly a century afterwards during the ministry of Benjamin Stinton, the laying on of hands after Baptism for the gift of the Holy Ghost was practised in that church. Indeed in some churches there is evidence that this ordinance has been laid aside only during the last century.

In conclusion, let me ask—Is it not a most serious thing to “change the ordinances” of the unchangeable God? If these ordinances are not of God, the Apostles and early saints were not led of God, their statements of God having honoured the observance of these things (Acts viii. 17, 18, &c.) were terrible errors that should be blotted out of the New Testament, and Paul’s including the laying on of hands in “the principles of the doctrine of Christ,” proves that he knew nothing whatever of the matter.

On the other hand, if they *are* of God—does not sin lie at the door of those who treat them with contempt or indifference, and seek to abolish their observance? However we may feel with regard to these important truths, the fact remains that not one of God’s ordinances was ever neglected or rejected without its attendant blessings departing with it. By God’s grace, we in the International Old Baptist Union, desiring every obtainable blessing and gift of God, will continue to advocate and observe every one of His precepts and ordinances. Others may do as they please—but by God’s truth we will stand or fall.

† “The Metropolitan Tabernacle,” &c., p. 58; and “Baptist History,” by Dr. J. M. Cramp, pp. 342, 343.