

ADDRESS TO PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS

I was born the 11th day of April, eighteen 11, and was baptized the 2nd Sunday in May, eighteen 26, by Elder Wilson Thompson, a member of the Regular, or Primitive Baptist church, in Lebanon, Ohio, with twelve others, who were baptized at the same time, and, as far as I can learn, they are all called to their long home, and I am, of the thirteen, the only one left to enjoy your fellowship and Christian love, and to suffer with you the trials and afflictions which we all have to bear in this world of sorrow, sin, and death. You will notice that in this book I have invariably used the name PRIMITIVE BAPTIST when speaking of the church. About the first open and full division that took place between us and the Missionary or new order of Baptists was in the Kehukee Association, in North Carolina. The party maintaining the doctrine and order of the old Apostolic church took the name PRIMITIVE BAPTIST, because they thought it was the proper name for them to bear, and expressed what they truly were as the church of Christ; and this name was adopted by the Baptists of the Southern States, and a large portion of those in the Western States. About the same time there was a split took place in the Presbyterian church, and the Calvinistic party took the name of Old School, and the Arminian party took the name of New School. Some of our Eastern brethren thought, that as these names distinguished between the Calvinistic and Arminian parties in the Presbyterian church, they would be proper names to distinguish between the Arminian and Predestinarian parties in the Baptist church, and so adopted the name Old School, but that name was never accepted by a large majority of the denomination. While the names Old School, and New School, might do among Presbyterians, who were a school people, and believed that no man should be allowed to preach the gospel unless he had been educated and prepared for the work in a theological school, or college. But we, as PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS, believed that God chose, called, and qualified his servants to do the work to which he had called them, and with this conviction we had declared non-fellowship for all theological colleges, or schools, gotten up for the purpose of preparing and fitting young men for the ministry. This being true, we thought the name Old School was not a proper cognomen, and would never adopt it. A great many of our churches in the Middle and Western States have never adopted either name, but still retain the name Regular Baptists, and are as sound and consistent PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS as we have, and we are all in full fellowship, and are the same people and church. If the party which we call New School have ever adopted that name I have never learned it from them. They have very readily adopted the name Missionary, and are proud to wear it, and have adopted all the modern and humanly-devised societies, associations, and conventions, with their salaried officers and traveling agencies, with schools to furnish them with an educated ministry. Against all these things the PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS, like their brethren of the 12th century, have declared non-fellowship, because they were not found in the commands of Christ, or in apostolic example or teaching, or in the pattern given us in the New Testament of preaching the gospel to every creature. We therefore claim to practice the true and primitive missionary plan, commanded by Christ and practiced by his apostles, and that those who have adopted their worldly systems, and humanly-devised machinery unknown to the gospel are the antics, for in rebellion against the command of Christ, they are getting up societies, institutions, and practices unknown to the gospel, and teaching the observance of things not commanded by Christ, which is rebellion; for the command of Christ is specific and specifies what we shall teach, and therefore every thing else is forbidden, for the rule of law is, Where one thing is specified, every thing else is forbidden.

I was with you when this modern, humanly-devised system was introduced among you in the West and South, and with what feeble ability I had as a soldier in the cause of Christ I stood side by side with Joshua Lawrence, Stephen Card, Wilson Thompson, and a host of others, who bravely met the foes to truth and the primitive doctrine and order of the church of Christ, and in the hottest of the battle kept the banner of truth displayed, and drove the enemy from the primitive church and its communion. These brave soldiers in the cause of truth counted their lives not dear unto themselves that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus Christ. They died at their post, and their Father called them home to receive a faithful soldier's reward - Of the old band of soldiers that kept our banner displayed, and never surrendered to the enemy, fifty years ago, but few now remain. Their heads are gray and their limbs palsied with age; they are upon the verge of the grave, and feel that their discharge will come very soon; and now, in their closing days, when they look back over the war and the battles fought, there is not a truth, nor an inch of territory for which they contended, that they would now yield, and they want to die at their post, like their brethren who have passed off before them, Their hearts have been filled with sorrow of late, in seeing some of the young ones who have come into the ministry since the war was over, trying to introduce in some shape or form the new things we had to battle against, and thus make history repeat itself. I feel confident that I express the feelings of every one of these old veterans, and give the counsel they would give, could they all speak to you, when I say; Mark those engaged in this unholy work, and do not bid them God speed, nor invite them into your houses. They are nothing but the old enemy. Their dress may be a little different, but the end and object aimed at is the same, and equally without gospel command or example. Remember the warning which Paul gave when he said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them;" Ac 20:29 to 30

We that have had a name among you for sixty years know what we had to pass through on account of these false accusers of the brethren; the charges they brought against us to alienate the affections of the brethren from us, and to make us odious in the eyes of the world; and when we hear them reiterated by those who speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them, we are familiar with the language, and know the spirit from which it comes. Sixty years ago they called us a set of ignorant bigots, who were governed by an intolerant spirit, opposed to the spread of the gospel, and every thing that was calculated to build up Christianity in the world; that we preached nothing but dry Calvinism, and our churches were all dying out; that we were antinomians, and did not believe in good works; saying we were anti-means, and opposed to all good and efficient means now used for the conversion of sinners, and the salvation of the world. Even before that time, Mr. Benedict, in his history, called us by these names, and, in substance, said that before the stereotype edition of his history would reach the churches, our churches would be dead, and could never be resurrected again. He is dead, and his history has so sunk in repute that it is hardly known among the people. But these old, hated, and misrepresented people still live, and are numerically stronger than they were when he wrote. When you hear men of yourselves, begin to utter these false and slanderous charges against the brethren, know that there is a wolf in your flock, and if he is not put out he will tear and rend you, for such do nothing but devour the flock, and carry off all the disciples they make to strengthen antichrist. I hope that you will hear my feeble warning, and the warning of Paul on this subject, and "watch," and use the discipline of the church, turn all such intruders out, and shut your doors against them.

There is one thing more that I must speak of in this, my last address to you all, and I believe it is prompted by love and an ardent desire for your peace and prosperity. In some of our churches the baptism of those we have excluded from our communion and fellowship is received as valid. This is an inconsistency that has already caused great trouble in some parts of the country, and must and will, sooner or later, make trouble wherever it is practiced. It is palpably inconsistent for us to receive part of their works, and reject the other parts. You will not sit down to the communion table with them, and take the emblems from the hands of their minister, because you do not believe he has any gospel right to administer that ordinance, and his church is not the church of Christ. If you are correct in that view, how can you, in any consistency, or good conscience, receive baptism administered by him, and in the fellowship of a false church? This, to me, is an inconsistency that if persisted in, must make trouble, and cause distress in your own body sooner or later.

There is a difficulty connected with this subject that should cause us to act cautiously, and in the spirit of Christian love. I have known several able and beloved preachers among us who were received on their alien baptism, and they have baptized numbers among us. These things are past and cannot now be remedied. The only thing that can be done now, so far as I can see, is for our churches to resolve that they will not be guilty of the inconsistency any more, and upon that let peace and Christian fellowship abound among us. To attempt to dissolve these churches, and reconstitute them, would, it seems to me, cause great confusion without effecting any good. I hope the dear brethren will think upon this subject, and act with an eye single to the glory of God and the peace of Zion. A church, like an individual, may commit an error which she cannot remedy and in that case all she can do is to turn from the error and do so no more. In that case we should all forgive, and let brotherly love continue. Zion's peace and happiness demand of us a great deal of Christian love and forbearance. There are vital points that do and should affect fellowship, and if we disagree upon them we can not walk together, but in mere matters of opinion we may differ, and should be very tender and forbearing with each other, for in such matters we may both be wrong. But where a truth is positively taught in the Bible, it must be subscribed to by all or we cannot walk together. To illustrate: The Savior says, "Except a man be born again he can not see the kingdom of God." Here is a truth affirmed that must be subscribed to by all if we walk together in Christian union. I cannot believe that we have a church that would receive a person into its fellowship who would deny the new birth, or that the sinner has to experience such a change of affections, that he is made to hate things he once loved, and love things he once hated. I might go on to name a number of things of equal importance, but this is sufficient to bring before your minds the point I wish to enforce. Paul tells us that we are not to make a brother an offender for a word. But a brother that loves his brethren, and respects their feelings, and desires the peace and happiness of Zion; if he uses a word that is offensive to any of his brethren, if it is not a Scripture word; or if it is, and he uses it in a sense in which the Holy Spirit has never used it, will quit the use of it if he has a proper regard for the feelings of his brethren. We may use the words of the Holy Spirit to prove false doctrine, but to do so we have to pervert them, so as to make them give a different idea from what was intended, for if used in the same way and for the same purpose as by the Holy Spirit they will always teach the truth. For instance, the word means is a Scripture word, and when used as the Scriptures use it, should give no offense to any one, but as the Scriptures have never used it in reference to the giving of eternal, or

spiritual life to the sinner dead in sins, if we have the love of our brethren and the peace of Zion in our hearts, we will quit using it in that sense, and use such words as the Bible uses to convey our ideas.

I have witnessed the wars through which our church has passed in the last sixty years. I have seen the dark clouds gather over us, that filled our hearts with sorrow, and our eyes with tears. I have heard the boasting of our enemies when they thought our little army was defeated and scattered, and could never make battle any more. I have heard their shouts of victory suddenly stop, followed by an inglorious retreat, when they would hear the voice of a Lawrence, Gard, Thompson, Carpenter, Thomas, or Clark, who never surrendered, or were driven from their post. These were dark and sorrowful days for the children of Zion. They were passing through the fires. Their harps were on the willows, and they could not realize that it was God's work to cleanse them, and to separate them from the dross, that the pure gold might shine. We can now look back and see the hand of the Lord in the matter, and how his almighty power was with, and sustained the little band who stood firm and unmoved at their post, and boldly kept the banner of truth displayed in the thickest and darkest hours of the battle. I shall never forget the words of that faithful man of God, Stephen Gard, made one evening at my father's house, where they were talking about the trials through which they had passed, when he remarked, "Brother Thompson, I never doubted for one moment the final victory of truth, but for years we had been accumulating dross, until we had vastly more dross among us than gold, and it had to be separated, and we had to pass through a heated furnace to effect it. Our God is a consuming fire. He is as the refiner's fire, and the fuller's soap, and when his church has to be cleansed, we must bear the consuming flames. They are for our good, and will only consume the dross."

The name of Wilson Thompson is so identified with the history of the PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS of the last seventy-five years that one cannot well write about them without referring to him. He was reared in the canebrakes of Kentucky, without even a common English education, but God called him from his plough-handle to stand in defense of the truth, and, as with Gideon of old, the enemy always suffered defeat, and had to retreat in disorder when they met him and his little army. And side by side stood Stephen Gard, Minor Thomas, Stephen Oldham, Samuel Carpenter, John Lee and Hezekiah Stites, as brave and noble soldiers of the cross of Christ as have ever lived. Their names can never be lost in the history of our church, and they must ever be regarded as gifts of God bestowed upon us, to lead us through the severe ordeal through which we had to pass. Such men we should love and cherish in our memory for their work's sake.

War is always a calamity to be dreaded, but a civil war is the worst of all; for it can never be settled until one party is conquered and makes a full surrender to the other, or a complete separation is effected. In the time of war, parties become embittered against each other, and use all their powers for each other's destruction. The country is made a waste, and ruin and desolation may be seen wherever you go. It is even so in a religious, or church war. We have witnessed it, and have seen the destruction which marked its path wherever it went. Oh how sad we have felt as we have passed the old church-houses, where in days past we had met large congregations and loving brethren and sisters, who filled the house with their voices in sweet songs of praise! But now there is no coming together of the saints there. There are

no sweet songs heard within the old and crumbling walls, which stand as a sad monument of war. But, as before said, the war had come. We had been collecting dross for years, and the ancient simplicity, and beauty, and purity of the church, had become so buried under a mass of dross of worldly institutions, societies, and systems of worldly speculation, and money gathering, that she had almost lost the last marks of her primitive identity. But He who had said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against her," determined to consume this mass of dross, and to separate her from it, and restore her to her original purity, as a separate people who should dwell alone, and not be numbered with the nations. In effecting this, ism after ism arose among us and carried off their parties, until the little band whose garments were not stained with their unholy things were separated from them, and could look over the sea that was between them, and sing praises to Him who had by his power, delivered his church, and once more purged her from the dross that was concealing her beauty, and destroying her primitive identity. Thank God! the war is over, and we are separated from them, so that we cannot any longer be held responsible for any thing they may do or teach. It is now our duty, as the friends of God, of truth, and of Zion the city of our solemnities, to go to work earnestly and faithfully to repair the breaches that war has made. Let us spend but little time in shooting across the river at our enemies. They are in their own territory; let them possess it in peace. But let us turn our attention to Zion, and with united effort go to work to repair the breaches, and strengthen the cords of love and fellowship, for love is the bond of union between us and our God, and love is the sweet cord that holds us together here, and makes our communication pleasant. Oh it makes the house of the Lord a sweet place to visit! It is a place of feasting, while we feel that his banner of love is over us.

Blessed be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love.

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

Beloved ones, with whom I have suffered much, and with whom I have enjoyed sweet seasons of love and pleasure, and comforts that have more than paid for all, be entreated to let brotherly love continue. And may the God of grace and of love, who brought again our Lord from the dead, bless you, and keep you in love and sweet fellowship; and, Oh may we all feel that our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ; and may he, by his grace, give us a home in heaven, where all but love shall be done away.

G. M. THOMPSON.