

Pt 5 Why We Are Baptist, Baptists in America

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney 09-26-2018

We continue this week with Part 5 of Why We Are Baptist. Last week we looked at a lot of the history of Baptist persecution and the beginnings of Baptist churches in other parts of the world such as Amsterdam and England. We talked about John Smyth and Thomas Elwys. Tonight, I want us to turn our attention on Baptist history in America. I want to begin by reading Scripture in

Romans 14:1-9

- 1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.
- 2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.
- 3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.
- 4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.
- 5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
- 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.
- 7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.
- 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.
- 9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

The verses we just read is Paul teaching the Church about individual soul-liberty. The Jews wanted to oppress Christians and force them under the Jewish laws. But Paul, the Apostle of Grace, knew full-well the necessity to break off the yoke of bondage of the law and for each person to live their life in Christ based solely on the merits of what Jesus had done for them. That is why he makes that statement in **verse 5**... **Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind**. This is what we refer to as **Individual Soul-Liberty**, and that is really what the subject of tonight's message is although we are going to look at it through two Baptist pioneers; **Roger Williams and John Clarke**.

I am not going to re-teach you Elementary school American History but quickly let me refresh your memories.

- In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue and "discovered" the "**New World**," landing around the area of Puerto Rico.
- In 1513, Ponce De Leon discovered Florida
- In 1539, Hernando de Soto brought 9 ships and 620 men and landed in the Tampa Bay.
- In 1607, John Smith founded the **Jamestown Colony** on behalf of England, thus declaring it "**New England**."
- In 1620, The Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock with 100 **Brownists**, which were **Puritan Separatists** who had fled England because of religious persecution by the King James I and the Church of England.

- We talked about the Brownists last week, they were not called "**Pilgrims**" until some 200 years later when Daniel Stewart referred to them as that.
- **Puritans** = Those that sought to "**purify**" the Church of England from many of its Catholic practices but **remained** in the Church.
- **Puritan Separatists** = Those that wanted to "**purify**" the Church of England but could not remain in it, so they **separated** from it.
- Puritans maintained strict adherence to the Scriptures. They were more than just a religious group, they were also very influential in politics and the government, so they were a political party as well.
- **In 1630**, a man named, **Roger Williams**, who was a member of the Church of England, separated from the Church of England, (so he was as the Pilgrims, a Separatist).
- Children are not taught about Roger Williams in public schools, I suppose he was too religious for them to mention. I mean, we would hate to teach our children that this nation was founded by Christians, wouldn't we??? (sarcasm). But, Roger Williams played a key role in the establishment of America.
- According to historical records, when King James I, took the throne of England, he stated that anyone who did not support the national Church (which was the Church of England) he would "**make them conform, or harry them out of the land**." And, that is exactly what he did.
- We talked about that last week when we talked about **John Smyth** and the reason that he fled across the English Channel to **Amsterdam, Holland** with his followers (who were Brownists). Those that had fled to Holland became dissatisfied with things there because the King of England still wielded great influence in that area and they began to be afraid of losing their English ways, language, and conforming to the ways of the Dutch, so they sought a new land where they could practice religion and live life the way they pleased and keep their English heritage, and that is what drove them to America.
- Roger Williams did not flee to Holland, instead he tried to remain in England but finally persecution of Separatists became so bad, especially after King Charles took the throne, that he had to leave England as well, and instead of going to Holland he went to the New World, America, just as the Brownists (Pilgrims) did just 10-years before him.
- He landed in America in the Boston Harbor on **February 5th, 1631**.
- There were two major colonies established in "**New England**" at that time:
 - **The Plymouth Colony** = which was made up of **Separatists**.
 - **The Massachusetts Bay Colony** = which was made up of **Puritans**.
- For reasons only known to Roger Williams, he chose to settle among the Massachusetts Bay Colony with the Puritans instead of the Plymouth Colony with the Puritan Separatists.
- At first the Puritans were delighted to have him and called him a "**godly minister**," however, their delight soon turned into dread over differences in beliefs, and they expelled him from their colony and forbid him to ever return.

- It is ironic that the same people who fled England because they were being persecuted for not being allowed to worship according to their own religious conscience, were now persecuting anyone who did not believe the same way that they believed. They too persecuted those desiring to worship according to their own religious conscience.
- Roger Williams is known for many things but probably he is best known as the first person to stand up for, and push for, **religious soul-liberty**. Some have even went as far as referring to him as "**The Apostle of Soul Liberty**." He was determined to push the idea of separation of Church and State and freedom to practice religion as dictated by your own souls conscious. I mean, the whole reason for the persecution of those in England was due to the Church ruling the State government. Well, the same thing was happening in the New World of America.
- In the **Spring of 1631**, the Puritans in Boston passed a law that said only Church members should have the privilege of citizenship. Of course, Roger Williams, publicly spoke out against this which greatly angered the Puritans.
- Williams soon after moved to Salem where he preached for a few months but was labeled a troublemaker and so he moved then to the Plymouth colony where he lived peaceably for about 2-years until he started speaking out against the way **Native American Indians** had been mistreated by the settlers. He believed that they should have been paid for the land that the settlers took from them and of course the settlers disagreed. They called him "**disloyal**" because they had been granted the land by King James himself!
- Williams took a great interest in the Indians and visited them often. He even learned their language and tried to help them. He was also able to serve as a translator between the Indians and the settlers when the Indians decided to mount an attack against them. It is said that Roger Williams prevented more bloodshed between the Indians and Settlers than any other man in history.
- Williams eventually moved back to Salem where he once again preached. He pastored a church there. It didn't take long for him to get into more controversy though – this time over a pamphlet that he had written concerning the mistreatment of the American Indians. The pamphlet was labeled as **treasonous** because they perceived it to be **against the King of England**. So, he was in trouble once again.
- Williams also spoke out against requiring anyone to **take oaths**, as he felt that it was sinful to make anyone take an oath for something he did not believe in. This really got him in trouble with the government and eventually is what got him banished from the colony. His Church also turned their back on him because they were being sanctioned for his actions, so Williams lost everything, his citizenship and his church. At this point he had only been in the New World (America) for 5-years.
- After losing his church, he started meeting with some people in his home and preaching, but word got out about this and he was summons to Boston to be put on trial. Someone warned him that they were planning to deport him, so he left his home and family and set out on foot to escape.
- For the next several months, during the harshest part of winter, he drudged from place to place but never finding anywhere he could stay for very long. He finally got in a canoe and crossed the river to an island where he was warmly greeted by American Indians who were happy to see him. The place where he went is what he named "**Providence**" because he believed it was God's providence that he go there. We know it today as **Providence, Rhode Island**.
- Williams intention was to just settle among the Native American Indians and live peaceably with them and help them, but more and more people began coming to where he was that were also looking for a friendly place that they could be free and practice religion however their conscious allowed. One thing led to another and Williams purchased the land from the Indians and established his own **English Colony of Providence** in **1636**.
- The Government that was established in Providence was one of separation of Church and State. It was an actual democracy of laws governed by the people and not the Church. The people of Providence were free to practice religious liberty without fear of the state dictating them and they could be citizens without being members of the Church, although they did not have a charter from England to do so.
- In **1637** another man named, **John Clarke**, from London, who was both a physician and a Baptist preacher, left England and came to the New World. He attempted to settle in the Massachusetts Bay Colony but no sooner than he had arrived a new Law was put into place barring anyone new with intentions on settling there. There was also an uprising against several religious beliefs that the Puritans did not accept, and several people were banished, one of them being John Clarke. Naturally, these folks gravitated to **Providence**.
- Upon arriving in Providence, Clarke met up with Roger Williams and together the two of them became "**co-founders**" of the **State of Rhode Island**.
- Many of the people that migrated to Providence were AnaBaptist (or Baptists) including of course, John Clarke. Their views were not quite as strict as the Puritans and they of course believed in **Baptism of the Believer** and they rejected **infant baptism**.
- This is when Roger Williams became interested in the Baptist faith and asked a man named, **Ezekiel Holliman**, to Baptize him. I do not know why he did not ask John Clarke, seeing as how he was a Baptist Minister, but nevertheless, he didn't. Afterwards Williams then Baptized Holliman and several other people. It is at that moment that a lot of history books state that the first Baptist Church in America was established in 1639 with Roger Williams being their Pastor.
 - But, if Roger Williams is truly the founder of Baptists in America, then that would break the chain of succession going back to Jesus and his Disciples, because Williams came out of the Church of England and therefore was a Protestant and not a true Baptist or AnaBaptist. Some say that he never did really ever accept the Baptist faith and regretted his baptism and left the church within 4-months.
- If you read Dr. Carroll's book on page 49, you will see that he also believes things happened a little differently than what most history books state, and that William's church was NOT the first Baptist Church established in America but

rather it was another Church started by **John Clarke** in **1638** in **Newport, Rhode Island**. Dr. Carroll writes:

- *“In this colony two Baptist churches were organized even prior to the legal establishment of the colony. As to the exact date of the organization of at least one of these two churches, even the Baptists, according to history, are at disagreement. All seem to be agreed as to the date of the organization of the one at Providence, by Roger Williams, in 1639. As to the date of the one organized at Newport by John Clarke, all the later testimony seems to give the date at 1638. All the earlier seems to give it later, some years later. The one organized by Roger Williams at Providence seems to have lived but a few months. The other by John Clarke at Newport, is still living. My own opinion as to the date of organization of Newport church, based on all available data, is that 1638 is the correct date. Personally, I am sure this date is correct.”*
- I have read dozens of history books on Baptist History and personally I agree with Dr. Carroll. I find more evidence of John Clarke’s church being the first established Baptist Church than I do Roger Williams’.
- One thing you must remember when doing historical research, is that many of the books are biased toward the beliefs of the writer. You can read two different books written basically around the same period and one will give all the credit to Roger Williams and the other will give all the credit to John Clarke. It depends upon whether the author of the Book is a Protestant or a Baptist. The Protestants which includes the Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and the Reformed will all push the narrative that Roger Williams is the hero, but Baptist authors will state it is John Clarke.
- Another thing I want you to keep in mind. Whenever you start talking about the Puritans, you immediately get an idea that they were the best of the best, the salt of the earth and as their name implies **“Pure,”** but that is far from the case. The Puritans were some of the most legalistic, mean-spirited, vindictive, and brutal people on earth.
- We think of those **godly Puritan Pilgrims** stepping off the Mayflower and surviving the harsh winter and then sharing a bountiful harvest with the Native American Indians the next Spring... Hey, don’t believe everything they teach you in Elementary school. They only teach what they want you to believe.
- I’m not going to go into full details but very quickly let me tell you a few truths about the Pilgrims. Of the 102 that came over, only 40 of them survived the winter. Due to disease and their lack of knowledge of how to grow crops and survive, they had to rely upon one Indian that we know as **Squanto**. Squanto was an Indian that had been enslaved and sent to England where he learned English. He managed to escape and returned to America and found all his tribe members dead. So, he served as an interpreter between the Pilgrims and the Indians. As for that first Thanksgiving, well... when 90 Indians show up with weapons as opposed to your 40 Puritans with very little fighting skills, you can only imagine it wasn’t really that great of a Thanksgiving Charlie Brown.
- After that first Thanksgiving, there were numerous wars between the Pilgrims and the Native American Indians. As more and more Puritans came to the New World looking for religious freedom, they also killed thousands of Native American Indians and took their land.
- Not only were there hostilities between the Puritans and the Indians, but anyone that did not agree with the Puritan’s beliefs was forced out of the colonies and banished into the wilderness where they had to survive on their own. The Puritans also beat and killed numerous people that opposed them.
- So, before we go singing the praises of the Puritans, we need to know that they were just like the Catholic Church when it came to Baptists and AnaBaptists, they persecuted people with our beliefs.
- That is why we must be careful when reading historical accounts of the pioneering of America or of the Baptist faith in America. It depends upon which side you are on as to how history is presented.
- One book that I have found that provides a lot of in-depth, and as far as I can tell “accurate” information on Baptist History, is called **“Baptist Succession, a Hand-Book of Baptist History”** that was published in **1870** by a man named, **D. B. Ray (David Burcham Ray) who was a Baptist pastor and the editor of the Baptist Sentinel in the 1880’s**. Just go to Archive.org and do a search for: **“Baptist Succession”** and it’s the first thing that pops up: <https://archive.org/details/baptistsuccessio00rayd> that book claims that Roger Williams actually left the church within 4 months of being baptized and the church dissolved after he left.
- Ray goes on to say in his book: *“It is both offensive and invidious, for those who ought to know better, to persist in the circulation of the false representation that Roger Williams was the founder of the American Baptists. Those who make this charge are wholly inexcusable; for, if they are ignorant of Baptist history, they should not affirm concerning that about which they are not informed; but, if they know the facts in the case, and still persist in the charge, they are evidently dishonest and unworthy of respect.”*
- Also, according to Ray, he states this about **John Clarke**: *“He received his baptism in Elder Stillwell’s church, in London, and that church received hers from the Dutch Baptists of Holland—sending over a minister to be baptized by them. These Baptists descended from the Waldenses, whose historical line reaches far back, and connects with the Donatists, and theirs, to the apostolical churches.”*
- So, based off my research of historical accounts, I’m going to stick with the founder of the Baptists in America being **John Clarke**, the true Baptist preacher that did not come out of the Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, or the Church of England, but succeeded from the long line of faithful Baptists leading back to Jesus and the disciples.
- One of the issues that the citizens of Providence faced was the fact that the rest of “New England,” would not accept them. Williams was still banished from Massachusetts and whenever any aide came from England, Providence was cut off. So, they had to fend for themselves and there was a lot of poverty and hunger among the people. They were also in danger of being taken over by the other colonies and losing their independence. To resolve this, Williams and John Clarke, knew that they would have to appeal to England for a charter. So, in 1651, they got on a ship and sailed back to England to make the appeal.

- By this time the government in England was in turmoil. It wasn't until 12-years later, in 1663, that they were able to obtain the charter from King Charles II, but he finally signed off on it and **Rhode Island and Providence Plantations** became a legitimate New England Colony.

- For time sake, we won't go into it tonight but there was an incident that took place that involved John Clarke and two other men; **John Crandall**, and **Obadiah Holmes**. Dr. Carroll gives an account of what happened in his book starting on page 49. You can read that for yourself – but in a nutshell, those 3 men had crossed over into Boston territory where they had been banned, to visit a sick church member. They were holding a service in the house and the constables came in and arrested them for unlawful assembly. They were locked up in a Boston prison for 2-weeks and then sentenced to pay very large fines or be whipped.

Church members raised the money to get them out and John Clarke and John Crandall were released but Obadiah Holmes refused to let anyone pay his fine and took the beating instead; **thirty-lashes with a three-corded whip**. It is said that the beating was so brutal that the blood ran down and filled up his shoes. He was unable to lie down in a bed for 2-weeks.

- So, regardless of which Church was first, or which man is considered the founder of the Baptists in America, we can certainly say that a lot of what we do today as Baptists can be attributed back to both these two men, Roger Williams and John Clarke, and the religious liberty that was established in the founding of Rhode Island and the first Baptist churches.
- The beliefs of soul-liberty and separation of Church and state would be the foundation of what was written into the Constitution of the United States of America. Of course, the liberal school history books will not give any credit to either of these men, but real history certainly does.
- Listen Church, we owe a great debt to these faithful men and women in history who stood up for religious freedom and the right to worship according to one's soul-liberty. That is why in our Baptist Acrostic we state the **I** in **Baptists** stands for **Individual Soul-Liberty**.