

The Blood of Baptists

“Losing the Trail”

(Some Comments on the Baptist Trail of Blood Theory)

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The Trail Theory

The “Trail of Blood” was written by J. M. Carroll in 1931 and is published by Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington Kentucky. It is a small booklet of fifty-six pages containing a proposed timeline of Baptist churches back to the days of Jesus. By 1994 over 1,955,000 copies had been printed and it has gained great popularity among some Baptist fundamentalist groups. The perpetuity view is often identified with this booklet and successionist pamphlet. In it the author contends that the Baptist brethren have a direct link back to the days of John the Baptist, Christ, the apostles, and the first churches.

It’s alleged that John the Baptist was commissioned by Jesus to start the Baptist Church, that the true churches would eventually bear his name, and that John the Baptizer taught Baptist doctrine. The apostles and first churches followed in this same train and started a Baptist trail that independent Baptist churches have followed since the times of the apostles. In some Baptist books and colleges, it is taught that only independent Baptist churches are part of the true Bride of Christ.

Landmark Baptist Theology (the name derived from Proverbs 22:28 - “Remove not the ancient landmark), also called heritage theology, is the belief among some independent Baptist churches that only local, independent Baptist congregations can truly be called “churches” in the New Testament sense. They believe that all other groups, and even most other Baptists, are not true churches because they deviate from the essential teachings of landmarkism.

These essentials are 1) church succession—a landmark Baptist church traces its “lineage” back to the time of the New Testament, usually to John the Baptist or Jesus’ calling of the disciples in Galilee 2) a visible church—the only church is a local (Baptist) body of believers; there is no such thing as a universal Body of Christ; 3) opposition to “alien immersion” (any baptism not performed under the authority of a landmark Baptist church is not a true baptism).

As mentioned above, another belief is that only faithful landmark Baptists will comprise the Bride of Christ. Other Christians (non-landmark Baptists) will either be the guests or the servants at the marriage supper of the Lamb. These other Christians are called the “family of God” or sometimes the “kingdom of God.” So, in Heaven there will be all the redeemed (the “family of God”), but only those who have been duly baptized by immersion in an independent Baptist church will have the special honor of being the Bride of Christ. The landmark Baptists use the story of the choosing of Isaac’s wife to illustrate God’s choosing of Christ’s Bride (Genesis 24).

Other Baptist writers holding the perpetuity view are Thomas Crosby, G.H. Orchard, J.M. Cramp, William Cathcart, Adam Taylor and D.B. Ray. In fact, some have erroneously suggested that this view was also held by English Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, by his statement in one sermon in the “New Park Street Pulpit,” page 225.

“We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel under ground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents.”

It’s interesting that Spurgeon did not promote a *historical* trail of blood theory that went back to the days of the apostles but that the *principles* by which the Baptists have historically adhered to have been with us since the days of the apostles (“and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten”).

Of course, any group could make this claim that stands with the doctrine of the original apostles.

Baptist historian John T. Christian (1854–1925) wrote:

"I have throughout pursued the scientific method of investigation, and I have let the facts speak for themselves. I have no question in my own mind that there has been a historical succession of Baptists from the days of Christ to the present time."

Actually, the facts do not speak for themselves, since there are no legitimate historical facts that would ever point to a single group of Christ's followers going back to Christ and the days of the apostles. No reliable and honest historian would ever make this claim. It is simply an imaginary link that does not exist. Very few Baptists hold to this alleged historical view.

The "trail of blood" view of history affirms that all independent groups were simply Baptists under the *disguise* of other names. Thus, such early groups as Donatists (fourth century), Cathari (eleventh century), Waldenses (twelfth century), and Anabaptists (sixteenth century) represent an unbroken continuity, or succession, of true biblical (Baptist) churches. In short, Baptists have an unbroken line of churches since the days of Christ. Baptists are traced back through the centuries by a series of connected red dots representing the blood of those who have suffered for the true faith, thus a "trail of blood." This view primarily holds that Baptists originated with John the Baptist and the Church that Jesus founded (Matt. 16:18) was the universal Baptist Church taken after the name of John the Baptist.

Those espousing this theory assume that John the Baptist represents a denominational affiliation, and that Jesus formed a Baptist church based upon his name (John the Baptist), promising in Matthew 16:18 that Baptist churches would never vanish from the world. However, even among successionists, few have been willing to go so far as one Baptist historian, who traced Baptists back to Adam!

The True Trail

When Baptists attempt to discover the origins of their tradition they are faced with a historical dilemma. The search for Baptists roots is generally found in the sixteenth century. Most historians are in agreement with this conclusion. In fact, many unbiased historians trace the origin of the Baptists with the name of John Smyth, pastor of a church at Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, which had separated from the Church of England. About 1606, this pastor and flock wanted to escape persecution and immigrated to Amsterdam, where they formed an English congregation in 1609.

The group's embracing of "believer's baptism" became the defining moment which led to the establishment of this first Baptist church. Shortly thereafter, Smyth left the group, and layman Thomas Helwys took over the leadership, leading the church back to England in 1611. Most Baptist historians teach that Baptists originated from the English Separatist (Congregationalist) movement in England at the end of the Sixteenth Century. This view of Baptist origins has the most historical support and is the most widely accepted view of Baptist origins. Representative Baptist writers of this historical view include William H. Whitsitt, Robert G. Torbet, Winthrop S. Hudson, William G. McLoughlin and Robert A. Baker.

The two figures of John Smyth and Robert Brown are often viewed as fathers of the Baptist church. John Bunyan (1622-88), the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was a Baptist who suffered for his faith in Bedford England. It is generally held that the first Baptist congregations in the United States were in Newport, Rhode Island (1638) and Providence, Rhode Island (1639). The Baptists have a godly heritage. They were one group, among many others, who stood for doctrinal purity and godliness during distressing times, when truth and morals were abandoned. However, they were not an exclusive group.

The Fairy Tale Trail

Some of the Baptist brethren of today seem to possess a Baptist "better than thou" attitude. I have been increasingly alarmed by the claims of some Baptist believers who are my brothers, sisters and fellow companions in the

Lord. The claims are being made and propagated that their Baptist heritage and blood goes back to John the Baptist or the days of Jesus and the apostles, and because of this, they have an exclusive edge on all Christians, even among those who are fundamental and seeking to live a separate and holy life, both ecclesiastically and personally.

To reiterate, the Baptist successionism theory is the claim of some Baptist groups that their church is the true Church founded by Jesus Christ. They attempt to trace their heritage all the way back to John the Baptist. Their primary proof for the historic roots of Baptists is found in the 56-page booklet titled, "The Trail of Blood," written by J.M. Carroll in 1931. In the book, the author attempts to show that historical groups, Montanists, Novatianists, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigensians, Catharists, Waldenses, and Anabaptists were really early Baptists, and they were pursued by Catholics and wiped out. Since there is *no written evidence* of their Baptist heritage to show, they claim the 'evidence' was destroyed by the Catholic Church. Interestingly, Baptist theologians reject this story as unfounded and not credible. Nevertheless, some Baptist splinter groups called "Landmark Baptists" continue to teach it, to the embarrassment of the great majority of Baptists.

Interestingly, Darwin's theory of evolution postulated that there were missing links between monkeys and men; however, true science concludes that there NEVER were any missing links, which proves that evolution is based on human fantasy – not facts. There simply is no proof of any missing links. The same is true regarding the Baptist succession theory. There are no missing links that can be found between Baptists and the apostles because the whole theory of "landmarkism" is an errant position not supported by history. True and unbiased history does not substantiate the claims that some Baptists are making today. In fact, honest historians observe there are no missing links, written or recorded down in the historical records, which proves Baptists are the direct descendents of the apostles. Man did not come from apes, nor did Baptists directly descend from the apostles. This is a false evolution not supported by the facts of history.

These divergent Baptist groups believe that a historic "Baptist succession" can be traced from John the Baptist to modern Baptist churches in which believer's baptism and other landmark principles have prevailed. As previously asserted, some of the landmark brethren go so far as to teach and preach that the true Bride of Christ is only comprised of their exclusive Baptist groups (Baptist Briders). They claim that all other believers would not be part of the true Bride of Christ but be servants at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Anyone who is a genuine believer, but who is not part of one of their churches, would be in the "family of God," but would not actually be part of the true Bride of Christ which originated with John the Baptist.

Of course, this is an absurdity based upon multiple errors. Are only Baptists placed into the body of Christ or the Church (Rev. 21:9) at the time of their salvation? The Bible teaches that every believer is placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of belief ("all baptized into one body" - 1 Cor. 12:13) and as a result they become part of the ORGANISM (the true Bride of Christ universally composed of all believers) - not some type of ORGANIZED Baptist church. The idea that one must join an independent Baptist Church to become part of the Bride of Christ is erroneous. Must a person be saved in a Baptist Church to become a member of the true body of Christ? Must a believer in Christ join a local Baptist Church in order to become part of the New Testament Church?

These conclusions are so outlandish and unlearned. In John 3:29 we read that John the Baptist was a FRIEND of the bridegroom (Christ) – not part of the Bride of Christ. John the Baptizer was never linked to the Bride of Christ (the New Testament Church). The Bible actually teaches that John the Baptist (Baptizer), along with all the Old Testament saints represented by him, will actually be a friend of the Bride of Christ (the Church) at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb which will occurs on the earth during the Millennium. He will not be part of this Bride (the Church) and certainly he should not be recognized as the founder of the Church. Let's study our Bibles!

The truth is this, if Baptists existed since the time of John the Baptist, then the history books should have many references to them. The writings of the

Early Church Fathers, who lived shortly after the apostles, and the historians of their day, do not mention Baptists at all. In fact, there is no mention of Baptists being linked to the days of the apostles until the alleged theory of the trail of Baptists was espoused in 1931, which is nothing more than a fairy tale and hoax.

The Short Trail of John the Baptist

J.M. Carroll said in his booklet, "Trail of Blood:"

"The name "Baptist" is a 'nickname,' and was given to them by their enemies (unless the name can be rightfully attributed to them as having been given to them by the Savior Himself, when He referred to John as 'The Baptist'). To this day, the name has never been officially adopted by any group of Baptists. The name, however, has become fixed and is willingly accepted and proudly borne. It snugly fits. It was the distinguishing name of the forerunner of Christ, the first to teach the doctrine to which the Baptists now hold."

Elsewhere Carroll states:

"Under the strange but wonderful impulse and leadership of John the Baptist, the eloquent man from the wilderness, and under the loving touch and miracle-working power of the Christ Himself, and the marvelous preaching of the 12 Apostles and their immediate successors, the Christian religion spread mightily during the first 500-year period."

Carroll concludes:

"Mark well! That neither Christ nor His apostles, ever gave to His followers, what is known today as a denominational name, such as "Catholic," "Lutheran," "Presbyterian," "Episcopal," and so forth--unless the name given by Christ to John was intended for such, "The Baptist," "John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11 and 10 or 12 other times.)"

Was John the Baptist "the first to teach the doctrine to which the Baptists now hold" as Carroll states? Did John even know anything about Church truth? Absolutely not! His trail and teaching stopped before the Church was ever formed. It was a short trail to say the least. For instance, the great New Testament mystery about the Church (Eph. 3:4, 5, 9) contained

precious truths about the Church, which had been locked up in the loving heart of God and hidden from God's people (Eph. 3), until it was God's time for these truths to be revealed by Paul. God primarily used the apostle Paul to make known these great truths which had previously been unrevealed since the Church did not exist prior to the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; 11:15-16).

Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah knew nothing of these mysteries. These truths were never revealed to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet and he was totally ignorant of the church truths set forth by the Apostle Paul in the epistles. Since this is true, how could the Church be linked in succession to a man who was so ignorant of Church truth? Apollos was taught by John the Baptist but he knew nothing of Church truth (Acts 18:24-26). If this is the case, how could John the Baptist be the head of the first Baptist church? It's absolutely erroneous to come to these conclusions. The Church was not formed until the Baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit took place, which began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5). John the Baptist was already dead!

John was known more literally as a "baptizer" as the name "baptist" means (not a denominational Baptist). This is because he baptized Jewish people in preparation for the arrival of the King and Christ's earthly Messianic Kingdom (Matt. 3:2). John's water baptism was Jewish and had nothing to do with Christian baptism (Matt. 28:19-20) or the present Church Dispensation in which we live today (Eph. 3:10). This is clearly seen by the fact that John's followers needed to be baptized again in view of their entrance into the Body of Christ (the Church) and the new dispensation (Acts 19:1-7). John's baptism had nothing to do with Christian baptism for this age. Those who teach that it does are teaching blatant error and dispensational confusion.

The Beginning of the Trail

The founder of the Church was Jesus Christ, not John the Baptist. Christ is the foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:11), the Chief Cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20), the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23), the Builder of the church (Matthew 16:18), and the rock of the Church (Matthew 16:18).

John the Baptist is none of these things. John wanted to DECREASE (John 3:30) but the "Historic Baptists" want him to INCREASE. What we should really desire is that Christ might have FIRST PLACE and preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18).

There is no trail of blood that historically ties modern-day Baptists to John the Baptist, nor is it possible to maintain that that the first church in Jerusalem was a Baptist Church in disguise! This is a theory that is neither historically nor Scripturally accurate. We must follow truth and not the false trails and fairy tales of some extreme Baptist groups of today. There is no group who has an exclusive heritage back to the days of John the Baptist, Jesus, Pentecost, and the days of the apostles (Acts 2).

The Anabaptist Trail

The link that some Baptists groups make to the Anabaptists in their alleged "Trail of Blood" is also lacking evidence. Since the Anabaptists practiced believer's baptism, it is maintained by some groups that they are the predecessors of the Baptists, who also practice believer's baptism. Baptist successionists have, at times, pointed to 16th century Anabaptists as part of an apostolic succession of churches ("church perpetuity") from the time of Christ. This view of successionism is held by some Baptists, Mennonites, and even some Churches of Christ.

Some Baptists make the claim that they can trace the roots of Anabaptists within two centuries or two hundred years from the time of Christ. They base this on Zwingli's statement, the Swiss reformer (1484-1531), who stated: "The institution of Anabaptism is no novelty, but for thirteen hundred years has caused great disturbance in the Church." They then deduce that this takes the Anabaptists, who are predecessors of the denominational Baptists of today, within two centuries of Christ, and therefore proves without a doubt that there is a Baptist link dating back to the earliest of times.

Again, there is no solid historical evidence that links Anabaptists to modern-day Baptists and most historians attest to the fact that the *name* "Anabaptist" was not officially used until the time of the Reformation. Of

course, the practice of opposing infant Baptism, baptizing converts of Christianity, and opposing all apostasy was being practiced by *independent* groups everywhere, prior to the Reformation, and many of these independent groups were lumped together and given this descriptive title (Anabaptists), due to their opposition of Roman Catholic teaching.

Somewhat related to this is the theory that the Anabaptists are of Waldensian origin. Some extreme Baptists hold the idea that the Waldenses are part of the apostolic succession, while others simply believe they were an independent group out of whom the Anabaptists arose. Estep asserts "the Waldenses disappeared in Switzerland a century before the rise of the Anabaptist movement." Ludwig Keller, Thomas M. Lindsay, H. C. Vedder, Delbert Grätz, and Thieleman J. van Braght all held, in varying degrees, the position that the Anabaptists were of Waldensian origin. Whatever the case might be, we know that many groups were given this title (Anabaptist), as they opposed the state religion and Church of Rome.

I agree with the historians who have suggested that the name "Anabaptists" (rebaptizer) was more of a *descriptive title* than an organizational name for many years. In other words, many individual and independent groups were given this title due to their rejection of the Romanish infant baptism and the person's need to be rebaptized following their salvation. However, it was during the Reformation (1517-1648) the Anabaptists became a specific group of people seeking to make their imprint upon the Church.

Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity says this of the Anabaptists: "They did not consist of a single, coherent organization, but a loose grouping of movements. All rejected infant baptism and practiced the baptism of adults upon confession of faith. They never accepted the label 'Anabaptist' (meaning rebaptizer) – a term of reproach which was coined by their opponents." It was during the Reformation when these people sought to renew the Church and when Anabaptist beliefs spread like wildfire throughout Europe. Unlike the other Reformers, the Anabaptists were not committed to the notion that "Christendom was Christian." During the Reformation era distinct groups were formed that were specifically labeled Anabaptists and some groups today (Mennonites,

Amish) can trace their origins back to those who were originally known as the Anabaptists during the time of the Reformation.

Let's dig a little deeper. Starting in 401 A.D., with the fifth Council of Carthage, the churches under the rule of Rome began teaching and practicing infant baptism. With the advent of infant baptism, the separatist churches began re-baptizing those who made professions of faith, after having been baptized in the official Church of Rome. At this time, the Roman Empire encouraged their bishops to actively oppose the separatist churches, and even passed laws condemning them to death. The re-baptizers became generally known as Anabaptists, although the churches in various regions of the empire were also known by other names. Hence, there was a *descriptive title* that eventually was assigned to groups who opposed Roman Catholic teaching. These Anabaptist congregations grew and prospered throughout the Roman Empire, even though they were almost universally persecuted by the Catholic Church. By the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther's assistants complained that the Anabaptists in Bohemia and Moravia were so prevalent, they were like weeds.

As stated above, most historical evidence ties the modern-day groups of the Mennonites and Amish (not the Baptist groups of today) to those people who eventually became specifically labeled as Anabaptists, and this occurred during the Reformation era of history. Some historians teach that the relations between the later emerging Baptists and Anabaptists were actually strained. In 1624 the five existing Baptist churches of London issued an anathema against the Anabaptists (Melton, J.G. *Baptists* in "Encyclopedia of American Religions". 1994). Anabaptists held extreme views on pacifism and rejected conventional Christian practices such as wearing wedding rings, taking oaths, and participating in civil government. Today there is virtually no dialogue between Anabaptist organizations (Mennonites, Amish) and the Baptist bodies.

The Anabaptists who fled to Holland were organized under the teaching of Menno Simons, a Catholic priest who aligned himself with the Anabaptists in 1539. Today many Mennonites are identifiable by their plain dress and the head coverings that are worn by their women. The Amish trace their history back to a split of the Swiss and Alsatian Anabaptists in 1693, when

Jakob Ammann felt that the Swiss Brethren were veering away from the strict teachings of Menno Simons and needed to enforce a stricter form of church discipline. The distinctiveness of the Amish can be seen in their separation from the society around them. They shun modern technology, keep out of political and secular involvements, and dress plainly, practicing asceticism in various ways.

Here is the main point. It cannot be maintained with any degree of certainty or historical proof and accuracy that the practicing Baptists of today are direct descendents of the Anabaptists; nevertheless, the Baptists and many other groups similar in belief can be considered heirs of the Anabaptist *tradition* of baptizing adult believers in Christ, without being direct descendents of the Anabaptists themselves. *The Baptist line of succession can only be traced to the early 1600's*. Any honest Baptist historian will come to this conclusion. Prior to this time, there is only piecemeal information, and no group can claim with any degree of certainty, or historically accurate evidence, that they are direct descendents of the apostles.

When all the evidence is in there is no “smoking gun” to prove that Baptists are direct descendents of the apostles and that they possess a clear link to the time of Christ, John the Baptist, and the apostles. Of course, Baptist heritage, Brethren heritage, and all other Bible-believing heritages are *spiritually* tied to apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15), but no group has the historical records to prove they are the direct descendants from the apostles.

The truth is this, all the brethren associated with the *independent* churches, which teach the Bible, preserve truth, and stand for Biblical separation, can in a *general* way trace their *spiritual* roots back to the original Christian communities which were founded by the apostles and who taught apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42). This is because they are perpetuating and preserving the apostolic example, teachings, and principles, which have always been practiced throughout the ages of church history (2 Thess. 2:15). No specific group, whether Baptist or Brethren, possess any legitimate historical evidence which proves they have *exclusive* blood ties or physical roots to the apostles.

J. M. Carroll attempted to create the “Trail of Blood” theory which essentially states that the Baptist Church originated with John the Baptist, who was commissioned by Jesus, and the apostles then founded Baptist churches. However, this theory has been weighed and found wanting since the trail cannot be found. There are no accurate or historical records reflecting this as unbiased historians would agree. However, all is not lost! There still is a trail. Independent church communities, who follow the historic Biblical teachings and practices of the apostles, do maintain a general historic EXAMPLE of the original Christian churches, which were founded on the teachings of the apostles (Eph. 2:20).

There is a continuing remnant of the early Christian communities that stood for truth, godliness, and separation. In short, all independent, Bible-believing, and separated church fellowships, which have previously existed, or which come into existence, can in a *general way* (not a literal and physical way) trace their roots and origins back to the days of early Christianity. This is because they are followers and examples of apostolic teaching.

The Remnant on the Trail

Starting around 250 A.D., with the intense persecutions under Emperor Decius, a gradual change began to take place as the bishops (pastors) of certain notable churches assumed a hierarchical authority over the churches in their regions. One primary example would be the Church of Rome. While many churches surrendered themselves to this new structure and authority base, there were many churches that refused to come under the growing authority of the bishops. As the organized Catholic Church gradually adopted new practices and doctrines, the separated churches maintained their historical and biblical positions and did not follow the errors of Romanism. This has been true down through the history of the Church. There have always been groups from the first century to the present day who have not bowed the knee to Roman Catholic teaching and error as it invaded the Church (Acts 20:28-31). These Christians, like their predecessors (Rev. 2:2,6; 3:4), continue to maintain their independence from apostasy, false doctrine, and the worldly excesses being promoted in many churches of today.

Since the first century and down through the centuries, as Christianity continued to grow and flourish, individual and independent groups have stood against heresy and heretics (Messalians, Euchites, Novotians, Paulicians, Bogomilians, Peterines, Waldenses, Albigenses, Anabaptists, etc.). These groups held some differing views and doctrines, but they also embraced common ground in that the Bible was to be the believer's standard of faith and source of authority, and the Gospel was the way of salvation. They understood that God's people were to live separate from the world and organized religion, the Lord's Supper was a memorial rather than a sacrifice, infant baptism was to be rejected, people were to express faith in Christ alone for salvation, and churches were to be self-governing. Of course, there were many other individual groups and churches whose names have never reached the history books! These brethren will never have their names recorded in the annals of church history, but God will not forget them (Rev. 2:13).

Renald Showers has stated:

"From the time that the organized church began to go apostate to the time of the Reformation, God preserved a small remnant of people who opposed the apostate church."

God has always had a remnant of people who stood against error and abuses in the organized church. For instance, toward the end of the Middle Ages, John Wyclif (1329-1384) stood against the organized Church and embraced the truth of Scripture. He offended the state-run Roman Catholic churches. He attacked the doctrines of the medieval church opposing the doctrine of transubstantiation. He taught that the Church did not need a priest to mediate with God for the people (1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:6). A group of organized followers, who embraced Wycliffe's teachings, became known as "Lollards" (mutterers or mumblers), who spoke against the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

They believed the Bible should be available to everyone in their own language. John Wycliffe has been called the Morningstar of the Reformation. Wycliffe and his followers paved the way for the Reformation in England and Europe. Then too, there was John Huss, who was burned at

the stake for standing against the errors of Romanism. Jerome Savonarola was a fiery preacher of truth that stood against the false teachings of the organized state Church. God always has a remnant of people who want to espouse truth.

During the first part of the 1800's there were Christians who began to feel uncomfortable about denominationalism, a clerical hierarchy, and certain "compromises" creeping into their denominational churches. They resolved to simply read their Bible and try to gather in the same simple manner as Christians did in the New Testament. As some of these Christians began to travel and preach, they found believers in other cities and countries who were doing the same thing. Independent churches were being formed as they separated from the status quo and staleness of Reformed Churches.

For instance, during this time (1827) the Plymouth Brethren became prominent and began to teach a dispensational approach to the Bible and a literal hermeneutic of Scripture. We owe much to this group and John Nelson Darby, who began to revive the prophetic Scriptures, the truth about the Rapture of the Church, the Tribulation Period, premillennial eschatology, and a literal Millennium. Until Darby's time, many Christians believed that the Church was a continuation of Israel, and some others believed that the Church replaced Israel due to the Reformed teaching of Augustine.

God always has a remnant! In one sense, all the brethren associated with independent and separated churches have a rich spiritual heritage which can be traced back to the days of the apostles - not the Reformation. It's important to understand that God's remnant of independent, Bible-believing, separated communities did not begin their existence at the Reformation. Although many independent churches would eventually spawn from the Reformation, Puritanism, and the Pilgrims, and represent the apostolic church tradition, it should be understood that there were pockets and remnants of believers that never became part of the system of Romanism. These brethren were actually reformers *before* Luther and Calvin were born and they did not have to come out of Rome. They continued to represent the independent church example and pattern set by the apostles.

Nevertheless, throughout church history, there were reformers from *without* the organized Church and reformers from *within* the organized Church, who were in some measure seeking to condemn a religious system that was promoting error and apostasy. It's all of these brethren which followed the example of the apostles, even though they were not direct descendants of them.

Without being redundant, let me once again verify that no specific group of people or denomination today can legitimately claim to be *direct* descendents or heirs of the apostles, or of some other Christian group of people, whose roots can be traced back to the days of the apostles (Acts 2:42). This is because no specific church group or denomination has the records or documentation to prove that they (as churches) existed in the days of early apostolic Christianity (Rev. 1:11), and there is no definitive historical evidence that exists, which can link one Christian group of people (the Baptists) to the days of the apostles.

No major historian today holds to the organic succession of Baptist churches. This view was based on inadequate sources, and some authors, to prove their point, who have made large assumptions where evidence was lacking. All of these facts refute the Baptist claim to antiquity. And facts are stubborn things!

Beware of "Baptist tunnel vision." It seems that some of the brethren cannot envision another church embracing historic Fundamentalism that is not a Baptist Church. Some of my Baptist brothers have asked why I don't use the word "Baptist" in my church name. I often reply, why don't you have the word "Bible" in your name? What is wrong with the Bible? Does the word "Baptist" override the Bible? Let's stop kidding ourselves. None of us have exclusive, historical, and physical roots to the days of the apostles.

Every independent church that embraces Biblical Fundamentalism is the hallmark of New Testament Christianity and is a SPIRITUAL heir of the teachings of the apostles. To raise our eyebrows at one another and judge one another over a name is to possess the same spirit and mindset of the Corinthians, who said, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). We can apply this principle to those who say: "I am

a Baptist, I am an independent Baptist, I'm a Landmark Baptist, I'm proud to be a Baptist," and who question the Fundamentalism of those who are not Baptist in name.

One does not read in the Bible about the "First Baptist Church of Antioch" nor do we read of the "Baptist Church of Ephesus." Those who claim to have a *direct* line of succession to the apostles, or to one group that stems from the apostles, are making unwarranted and spurious statements from both an historical and Biblical standpoint. They have invented a trail that simply does not exist. We don't possess all the links in the chain that leads back to the days of the apostles. Like the bones of Moses (Jude 1:9), God has chosen to not reveal these records, knowing the prejudice and pride that would result from these findings. We do not have a spiritual edge on each other, and we are never told to compare ourselves with one another.

2 Corinthians 10:12 gives us this stern warning:

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

The Spiritual Trail

The point of all this is that all of the independent and fundamental groups, since the days of the original early churches, did remain on the same trail that the apostles and original churches walked, which was a *spiritual* trail. It's a trail or spiritual heritage that all Christians follow who stick to the unadulterated teachings of Christ and His Word (Acts 2:42). It's NOT a trail of blood but a trail of faithfulness (Rev. 3:3; 3:11) to apostolic teaching that is the mark of the independent and fundamental church movement of today. All separatist groups that hold to the fundamentals of the faith and Bible separation do follow, maintain, and defend the same principles as the apostles and faithful Christians did from the inception of the Church. There is a definite *spiritual* trail and heritage that runs back to apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15) but there is no *physical* trail that links any group to the days of the apostles. The physical link is broken but the apostolic traditions remain to this day in the fundamental groups that embrace sound doctrine and separated living that honors God.

I would like to remind my Baptist friends that the name “Baptist” is shared with many New Evangelical Churches of today within compromised Christianity, who are not moving in the same direction as historic Fundamentalism. So, wearing a “Baptist” title is not the greatest thing that has ever happened to the Church. Then too, the name Baptist was also associated with the denominational apostasy that occurred at the turn of the 20th century. I thank God for those Baptists who separated from the Baptist apostasy and remained pure. I thank God that they eventually formed new independent Baptist churches that would stand for truth and not compromise.

But let us remember that the independent “Bible Church” movement also resulted from the original separation from apostasy that was occurring in the denominations. The Bible Church movement formed many churches and organizations that stood for the truth of separation and holiness in the midst of a dark hour and there are Bible churches today, like fellow-Baptist churches, which are still holding the line doctrinally (Rev. 2:25).

On many occasions, I have had independent, Baptist brethren who came to speak in my independent Bible Church, but these brethren do not buy into the successionist theory, as some of the extreme Baptist groups teach. These Baptist ministers are independent, fundamental, and holding the line in the area of doctrinal integrity and Bible separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17) and are very comfortable fellowshiping with a ministry of like-precious faith.

I would like to share with my fellow Baptist friends that I find it somewhat troubling when a Baptist missionary brother fears attending a fellow-fundamentalist Bible church. To present his missionary ministry, just because it does not wear the name or title Baptist. I know of several missionaries who wanted to attend the independent Bible Church where I pastor, so they could present their ministry. However, out fear of not being invited back and supported by other fundamental Baptist Churches, they had to decline. This seems like a worthless division among fellow fundamentalists, who possess a similar *spiritual* heritage, who are opposing the same things, and who are moving in the same direction in ministry.

The evangelist, Oliver Green, once said:

“Some of you people are so independent that the termites in your independent churches won’t fellowship with the termites in other independent churches.”

I find this “better than thou” attitude of some Baptist groups to be unwarranted in light of the unity that we have in Fundamentalism and how all fundamental Christians are the historic *spiritual* heirs of New Testament Christianity, which has traditionally and biblically embraced the doctrine of separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17). We are all walking the same *spiritual* trail that leads back to the days of the apostles and the original churches founded by the apostles, who were called upon to stand for truth, separation, and holiness (1 Pet. 1:15). As fundamentalists, we all embrace the spirit of independence, unadulterated doctrine, and undying commitment to the fundamentalist cause. Whenever and wherever a church stands committed to apostolic doctrine, which includes separation from apostasy (Rom. 16:17), it is then we can enjoy walking on the same *spiritual* trail and find great blessing in serving together, as a united front for the cause of Fundamentalism and the salvation of souls.

Philippians 1:27

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

Reexamining the Trail

Let’s reexamine what we have studied and come to some Biblical conclusion on this matter. It is the claim of some Baptist groups that their church (the Baptist Church) was intended to be the true or original Church that was founded by Jesus Christ through the leadership of the first Baptist – John the Baptist. They attempt to trace their heritage and origins all the way back to John the Baptist who is believed to be the source of the original true Church – the Baptist Church. Their primary proof is a 56-page booklet titled, "The Trail of Blood," written by J.M. Carroll in 1931.

The conclusions of this booklet by J.M. Carrol can be easily refuted in sixteen arguments.

First, most Baptist groups do not embrace this teaching since there is no true historical evidence to support it. There is no revealed and reliable Baptist linkage which can be accurately traced back to the blood of John the Baptist. No specific group, whether Baptist or Brethren possess any legitimate historical evidence which proves they have *exclusive* blood ties or physical roots to the apostles. Although some (J. M. Carroll) have tried to create the “Trail of Blood” theory, there are no accurate historical records reflecting this, as unbiased historians would agree. Even Baptist historians deny this theory.

Second, John the Baptist could NOT be a denominational Baptist since the Church was not yet formed.

Jesus taught in Matthew 16:18:

“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.”

The Church was still in the future when Jesus spoke about it and John the Baptist came before Jesus. This means there is no correlation whatsoever between John the Baptist and the New Testament Church.

Third, Jesus could have said, “I will build my Baptist Church” but He refused to make any such distinction (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, we should not promote one denomination as the primary dispenser of truth down through the ages of time.

Fourth, neither Paul nor any other writer of Scripture spoke of the Baptist Church (1 Cor. 10:32; James 5:14; 3 John 1:9). This is a significant omission and observation if the Baptist Church were to take precedence over the Church and be the true mother Church of history. The silence of such a teaching by the New Testament writers is an important argument that shoots “The Trail of Blood” theory in the foot.

Fifth, churches formed in New Testament times were identified and named in relationship to their localities (Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:13; Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14). There was no such thing as the First Baptist Church of Corinth, the Second Baptist Church of Jerusalem, or the Independent Baptist Church of Thessalonica. Why? This is because no such distinctions were made during early apostolic Christianity, nor were they ever intended to be made in the local churches of New Testament times. If the Church were to copy John the Baptist's name, this would have surely occurred during the infant days of the Church. The absence of the Baptist name and all other names is significant. It demonstrates that the Baptists are not the only historical successors of the apostles.

Sixth, the Church is not just a local body of Landmark Baptist Churches, but a worldwide entity comprised of all believers, with Christ as their Head (Ephesians 1:21-22). The true Church (the Bride of Christ) is not composed of just Baptists (Baptist Briders) but all born again, blood washed saints (Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:13). The original blueprints for the Church (Bride of Christ) were not designed to include only organizational Baptists but all Christians who come to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2 – “with all that in every place call upon the name of the Jesus Christ”). Furthermore, if God would have wanted the Church to exclusively reflect John the Baptist's name, He would have said so in Scripture. To assume that it should always be “Baptist” is erroneous.

Seventh, those in the Church today have a position and standing which far exceeds that of John the Baptist (Eph. 1:3, 19-23; 2:5). Christians today that belong to the Church Age have a high, heavenly, and holy position in God's exalted Son which John the Baptist never knew or experienced (Col. 3:1). This means John the Baptist would not be in the position to be head of the Church, since he has never experienced the same position and calling that the Church has been given during the Church age.

Eighth, John the Baptist was a forerunner of Christ – not the forerunner of the Baptist Church. In Matthew 3:2 John the baptizer said: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” – not prepare the way for the Baptist Church! This is a significant omission in John's statement. John never mentions about the Church since he and his ministry predated the Church.

Ninth, the doctrinal foundation and original expansion of the Church came about by the teaching of the New Testament “apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20) and not the teaching of John the Baptist. It would be strange that the Church would be named after a man who prepared NO foundational teaching and guidance for its future. This passage (Eph. 2:20) makes it abundantly clear that John the Baptist belonged to the former Law Dispensation that revolved around kingdom truth for Israel. He was actually the last Old Testament prophet attempting to prepare Israel for her Messiah and kingdom (Matt. 3:1-2). This excludes him from being a New Testament prophet. John the Baptist was not qualified to be a leader of the Church for the simple reason that he was not a New Testament prophet declaring truth about the Church.

Only the New Testament “apostles and prophets” were said to have a foundational ministry in connection with the Church. As the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist did not have the *message* nor the *credentials* to become a founder of the Church. Instead, the New Testament apostles and prophets are the founders (source and originators) of the Church in the sense that they supplied the Church with its doctrine, practice, and original expansion (Acts 2:42).

Tenth, the Church did not begin with John the Baptist but with the Spirit’s baptism on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-16). John the Baptist was already dead when this occurred!

Eleventh, the Scripture lists only three categories of people: unsaved Jews, unsaved Gentiles, and the Church (1 Corinthians 10:32). Therefore, the members within the “family of God” are not separate from the rest of the Church as Landmark Baptists teach.

Twelfth, the “Baptist Bride” churches with the emphasis on their special and unique baptism into landmark churches are surely missing the point of 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Here, Paul rebukes the church for the schisms arising over who had baptized whom. Paul goes so far as to say, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17). Strange words, indeed, if water baptism is what makes one part of the Bride of Christ. 1) Furthermore, the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 is not the water baptism

of Landmark Baptists which brings them into the Baptist Church but is actually a spiritual baptism shared by all believers which places them in the Body of Christ (the Church).

Thirteenth, no specific person is ever termed as being the actual founder or underlying basis for the origin, existence, and survival of the Church, except Jesus Christ, who is called the “chief cornerstone” of the Church (Eph. 2:20b). Only Jesus is the originator, life-giver, and sustainer of the Church. To claim that John the Baptist was the original founder and starting point of the true Church that God intended to bless goes against the clear teaching of Scripture. The Bible clarifies that the Church was founded upon Jesus Christ – not John the Baptist (Matt. 16:18). Jesus Christ is the originator of the one true Church which is termed as His body (Col. 1:18).

No historical roots were ever provided, nor can they be found, which trace the origins of the true Church to one particular man. Why? It’s because Jesus Christ started the Church. Our roots are in Him! He is the commencement of the Church. The Church is Christ’s sovereign plan and His select people (Eph. 3:10) which He brought into existence on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; 11:15-16), after the days of John the Baptist. There are some things in the Bible extremely hard to misunderstand!

Fourteenth, Jesus is called the “head” (leader and authority) over the Church – not John the Baptist (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18). John the Baptist was never chosen by God to be the original leader or head of the Church. No man, such as a Peter, pope, or John the Baptist, was chosen to be the original leader and authority figure over the entire Church, except Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). To assume that John the Baptist was the original leader and starting point of the Church plays into Roman Catholicism, which believes that Peter was the originator of the Roman Catholic Church. God never intended to establish one man to become the founder and leader of the true Church. Beware of glorifying men (1 Cor. 3:4).

Fifteenth, John was simply a baptizer – not a denominational Baptist. The term “Baptist” means baptizer (Matt. 3:1; 11:11). The term was never meant to imply that John or any other person would be associated with the Baptist Church movement. To come to this conclusion is pure conjecture.

Sixteenth, John baptized Jews in view of their preparation and entrance into the earthly kingdom (Matt. 3:2, 8). His baptism had nothing to do with New Testament water baptism and the Baptist Church (Matt. 28:19-20). This is a dispensational significance missed by most Baptists who espouse the “trail of blood” theory. There is not a shred of evidence which relates John’s water baptism with the water baptism related to the Church age.

There is a distinct difference between *Christian* baptism for this age and *John’s* baptism. John’s baptism was for the Jews who were anticipating entrance into the earthly messianic kingdom. Christian baptism is for New Testament believers who want to identify with Christ and the Church. John's baptism has no place in the present dispensation. To equate John the Baptist with modern-day Baptists, and the same water baptism that is related to the Church and Great Commission, results in total dispensational confusion.

It’s interesting that Apollos wanted to trace his roots and following back to John the Baptist (“knowing only the baptism of John” – Acts 18:25). However, this man was quickly corrected by Aquila and Priscilla and taught the true doctrine of New Testament truth and Christian baptism for this present Church age (Acts 18:24-28). This is because John’s baptism had nothing to do with the Church and Christian baptism.

All of this informs us that John the Baptist had no connection with the Church nor understanding of Church truth. The fact of the matter is this, John the Baptist was totally ignorant of Church truth as set forth by the apostles in the epistles. This being the case, how could the origin and roots of the New Testament Church be linked in succession to a man who was so ignorant of Church truth and who knew nothing about the Church?

In Acts 19:1-7, there was a group of men, who, like Apollos, knew only of John's baptism, but who had never been baptized by the Holy Spirit and placed into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It is interesting that these men were re-baptized. Why? It’s because John's baptism was not sufficient for the new Church Dispensation. They had to be baptized in the name of Christ and identify with the Church which is His Body (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).

Therefore, instead of a SUCCESSION from John the Baptist, there needs to be a distinct BREAK from John the Baptist!

Jesus taught in Matthew 11:11:

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Let's set the record straight. The underlying founder of God's true Church was Jesus Christ - not John the Baptist. Christ is the foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:11), the Chief Cornerstone of the Church (Eph. 2:20), the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23), the Builder of the Church (Matthew 16:18), and the Rock of the Church (Matthew 16:18). John the Baptist is none of these things! John wanted to *decrease* (John 3:30) but certain Baptists groups want him to *increase*. What we should really desire is that Christ might have first place and preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18).

In closing, my purpose for this study is not to demean the rich heritage of Baptists. My Baptist friends know this is not my intent. My purpose is to keep a Biblical perspective on the foundation of the Church, represent Church history truthfully and accurately, and unite all the fundamentalists who are following the same spiritual trail and heritage of their ancestors (the apostles). As fellow fundamentalists who adhere to the historic doctrines of Scripture, including the doctrine of Bible separation, we should band together in these last days as we "see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25) when Christ will return for His Church.

Instead of trying to prove a theory that is shot full of holes, we should be united in our shared fundamentalist, spiritual, and apostolic heritage. Instead of walking down a rabbit trail that will lead to a make-believe place and position on Baptist succession, which is not historically or biblically supported, we should be standing together in the truth of Bible doctrine, which includes separation and our commitment to God's holiness ("to the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). Instead of contending for a Baptist trail which cannot be found, we should in the spirit of togetherness and cooperation "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).