

Lesson 3 – Our Heritage

I. The Spiritual Lineage of Bible Way Baptist Church

Hebrews 12:1 (NET)

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us,

A. Our Church is Independent and Autonomous, Yet Part of a Historic Faith Tradition

- **Bible Way Baptist Church does not belong to any denomination**, but we are part of a long history of biblical, New Testament churches.
- Though we **do not trace our authority through a human lineage** (like Catholicism or some Protestant denominations), we trace our beliefs through **faithfulness to the teachings of Christ and the apostles**.
- The **New Testament church has always existed**, even though it has gone by different names throughout history.

B. The Faithfulness of Early Christians and Their Sacrifices

- Many early Christians refused to compromise biblical truth and paid with their lives.
- **The earliest churches were often persecuted** by the Roman Empire because they rejected emperor worship and refused to conform to state religion (*Acts 4:18-20, Acts 5:29*).
- True believers remained **separate from state-controlled churches**, even after Christianity became legalized under Emperor Constantine.
- These believers were often hunted, exiled, imprisoned, or killed because they rejected false teachings such as:
 - Infant baptism.
 - Salvation by sacraments or works.
 - State-controlled religion.
 - Unbiblical church hierarchy.

II. Historical Baptist Persecution & Faithfulness

A. Early Christian Groups That Held Baptist Beliefs

Many believers throughout history held to **Baptist principles** even though they were not always called "Baptists." These groups rejected false teachings and remained faithful to the **New Testament model of the church**.

1. Early Names and Movements That Shared Baptist Beliefs

- **Montanists (2nd Century)** – Believed in the priesthood of all believers and rejected church hierarchy.
- **Novatians (3rd Century)** – Insisted on a pure church, separate from the state and false converts.
- **Donatists (4th Century)** – Rejected corrupt leaders and upheld believer's baptism.
- **Paulicians (7th Century)** – Opposed state-church systems and practiced simple New Testament Christianity.

- **Waldensians (12th Century)** – Preached the gospel, rejected Catholic traditions, and promoted believer's baptism.
- **Anabaptists (16th Century Reformation)** – Rejected infant baptism, promoted believer's immersion, and insisted on church purity.

2. The Meaning of "Anabaptist"

- "Anabaptist" means "**re-baptizer**" because these believers rejected infant baptism and **insisted on baptism by immersion after personal salvation**.
- They were persecuted by **both Catholics and Protestants** for their biblical stance.

B. Examples of Men Who Stood Firm in the Faith

Throughout history, many men and women died rather than compromise their faith.

1. Michael Sattler (1490-1527)

- A leader among the **Swiss Anabaptists**, Sattler was condemned for rejecting infant baptism and promoting believers' baptism.

The torture, a prelude to the execution, began at the marketplace, where a piece was cut from Sattler's tongue. Pieces of flesh were torn from his body twice with red-hot tongs. He was then forged to a cart. On the way to the scene of the execution the tongs were applied five times again. In the marketplace and at the site of the execution, still able to speak, the unshakable Sattler prayed for his persecutors. After being bound to a ladder with ropes and pushed into the fire, he admonished the people, the judges, and the mayor to repent and be converted. Then he prayed, "Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the way and the truth: because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with thy help to this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood."

As soon as the ropes on his wrists were burned, Sattler raised the two forefingers of his hands, giving the promised signal to the brethren that a martyr's death was bearable. Then the assembled crowd heard coming from his seared lips, "Father, I commend my spirit into Thy hands."

Three others were then executed. After every attempt to secure a recantation from Sattler's faithful wife had failed, she was drowned eight days later in the Neckar.

William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*

2. Balthasar Hubmaier (~1480-1528)

- One of the most prolific anabaptist writers, he was an Austrian priest turned pastor that was the foremost of his day in his defense of religious liberty.
- He wrote the famous *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*
- After an escape from the Austrian Catholics to Zurich in 1525, home to the Protestant Zwingli, he was arrested for fear of starting an anabaptist uprising. Sick and depressed, he was pressured by a panel of men (including Zwingli as well as some whom he had thought were his friends) on the matter of infant baptism. After surrendering to recant the doctrine of believer's baptism publicly before the Fraumunster congregation he had a change of heart right before the delivery.

Once Hubmaier was in the pulpit of the Fraumunster, instead of recanting, he began, "Oh what anguish and travail I have suffered this night over the statements which I myself have made. So I say here and now, I can and I will not

recant." He then proceeded to defend believers' baptism. Zwingli entered the other pulpit and silenced the people. Hubmaier was reminded of his previous recantation and accused of being devil-possessed, which was obviously the reason for his conduct at the moment. Refusing to back down, he was seized and placed in the Wellenberg prison...

- With this new imprisonment he was put on the torture rack and forced to produce a written recantation. A mistake that, by his own admission, deeply humbled and shamed him. He traveled to Moravia where he saw many converts to the faith and began to write down in detail his doctrine and a defense of the anabaptist position from Scripture. His refrain became, and demonstrably so, "I may err - I am a man - but a heretic I cannot be, because I ask constantly for instruction of the Word of God."
- He was arrested again, this time by the Roman Catholic Austrians, in 1527. In Vienna he was "once again tortured on the rack; but this time no recantation was forthcoming."

Seven days after returning to Vienna and tribulations known only to God, Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier was led forth to his death on March 10, 1528.

An eyewitness account of Hubmaier's execution was given by Stephen Spriigel, dean of the philosophical faculty at the University of Vienna. Hubmaier, he said, was "fixed like an immovable rock in his heresy." With his wife exhorting him to fortitude, he was taken to the place of execution. When the company reached the pile of fagots, he cried in the Swiss dialect:

"O gracious God, forgive my sins in my great torment...."

To the people he said, "O dear brothers, if I have injured any, in word or deed, may he forgive me for the sake of my merciful God. I forgive all those that have done me harm."

While his clothes were being removed: "From thee also, O Lord, were the clothes stripped. My clothes will I gladly leave here, only preserve my spirit and my soul, I beseech thee!" Then he added in Latin: "O Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit," and spoke no more in Latin.

As they rubbed sulphur and gunpowder into his beard, which he wore rather long, he said, "Oh salt me well, salt me well." And raising his head, he called out: "O dear brothers, pray God that he will give me patience in this my suffering."

As his beard and hair caught fire, he cried out, "O Jesus, Jesus." Suffocating from the smoke, he died. Three days later the execution of his wife by drowning in the Danube followed.

William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*

3. John Bunyan (1628-1688)

- A Baptist preacher in England who was **imprisoned for 12 years** for preaching the gospel without government approval.
- He wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison—a book that has influenced countless Christians.

4. Obadiah Holmes (1606-1682)

- A Baptist in colonial America who was **whipped publicly** in Massachusetts for refusing to submit to Puritan state-church baptism laws.
- He endured 30 lashes, yet **thanked God for the privilege of suffering for Christ**.

Application:

- These believers **paid the price for the biblical faith we practice today**. How firm are you willing to stand on truth?
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III. Kinship vs. Succession

Acts 24:14 (NET)

¹⁴But I confess this to you, that I worship the God of our ancestors according to **the Way** (which they call a sect), believing everything that is according to the law and that is written in the prophets.

James 2:2 (NET)

²For if someone comes into your **assembly** (synagogue)...

A. The Church is Not Validated by Human Succession, But by Biblical Teaching

- Some groups (such as the **Roman Catholic Church**) claim that **authority is passed down through an unbroken line of leaders (apostolic succession)**.
- **Baptists do not believe in church succession** but in **faithfulness to the Bible** as the true mark of an authentic church.

B. Every Assembly is a "Brand-New Assembly of Living Stones"

- **Each local church is independent** and does not need to be connected to an official denominational lineage.
- The church is made up of **born-again believers**, not an institutional structure

1 Peter 2:5 (NET)

⁵you yourselves, as **living stones**, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- **Application:** A church is not true because of its age or historical ties—it is true **when it follows Scripture**.
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IV. Application: Learning from Our Heritage

A. Discussion: How Does Understanding Church History Strengthen Your Faith?

- Why is it important to know about those who suffered for their faith?
- How can historical examples inspire us to **stand firm in our own faith** today?

B. Personal Reflection: How Can I Honor This Heritage?

1. **Faithfulness to Sound Doctrine** – Am I standing firm on biblical truth, or am I compromising with the world?
2. **Commitment to Evangelism** – These early believers preached the gospel even when it was illegal. Am I actively sharing Christ with others?

3. **Willingness to Suffer for Christ** – If persecution came to us today, would I remain faithful?
 4. **Dedication to the Local Church** – Do I take my role in Bible Way Baptist Church seriously, knowing that **God has placed me in this assembly for a purpose?**
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V. Conclusion & Challenge

- The **faith we hold today** has been passed down **not by tradition, but by faithfulness to God's Word**.
- Many believers **gave their lives** rather than compromise biblical truth.
- The question remains: **Will we be as faithful in our generation?**