

Here is a report from a Primitive Baptist Church, taken from the Shreveport Journal in 1939, as reprinted in The Baptist Witness in 1972; to wit:

“Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”

(1 Cor. 14:12.)

"Just beyond the outskirts of Shreveport in a spot from which, but for the terrain and trees, the spires of the city could be seen, is a little community where tradition and custom more quaint than the antebellum period, still prevail. Here one may witness religious rites that have been unchanged in centuries and unaffected by the modern world growing about. Here is Bethel Primitive Baptist Church, a little shrine nestled in a grove of oak and pine which, to the faithful flock who worship there, is one of the loveliest spots. Here is a church that exists without a collection plate, a Sunday school, a salaried pastor, an organ or a new song book. It has no missionary program, no drives, no revival meetings, no ladies society, nor a custom that was not initiated centuries ago. The members say their rites have not changed, except in language, since the days of Jesus — they claim apostolic origin. Here is real wine served from a common cup. The bread is unleavened. Real wine is served, says the good pastor, because it is more symbolic of the blood of Christ — it doesn't spoil. I went to Bethel recently and spent several hours, and it was with some reluctance that I departed from the scene of religious fraternity. Hospitality is a trait of those good people. Bethel is but a few miles north of Shreveport. One goes up the Blanchard road, past the second K.C.S. underpass, then follows a gravel road to the right. A sign at the end of a sandy lane that intersects the road informs the traveler that Bethel is a quarter of a mile to the right. I found the service underway with the congregation singing an old hymn. No new-fangled tunes for these Primitive Baptists. They still sing the songs their grandparents sang and their parents before them. 'Amazing Grace' and 'How Firm A Foundation' are among their favorites. Officially they are known as Primitive Baptists, but adherents usually refer to themselves as 'Old Baptists.' However, they are known to the uninitiated as 'Hardshells.' This derisive appellation has been applied so long that 'Old Baptists' have gracefully bowed to it without offense. Old Baptists present a unique and incongruous picture in the modern ecclesiastical realm. Their quaintness, their adherence to the old customs, their staunch belief in the ancient doctrine of predestination, long since relegated to oblivion or never adopted by other creeds — set them apart (wrong, wrong, wrong; they only believe in a small part of absolute predestination, which, of course, means that they do not believe in predestination at all). This is the very essence of their faith, and accounts, principally, for their unchanging customs and mode of worship. It accounts, too, for their old songs; for most of the modern hymns contain words out of harmony with the tenets of fore-ordination. Though there is no article of faith against instrumental music in church, Old Baptists do not believe an organ necessary to worship, so there is none. I took my seat near the rear and listened to the old hymns that sounded like the chant of bygone years. Then the pastor, Elder Garner, read some passages of Scripture from which he later took his text. I refer to him as 'Elder' because there are no 'Reverends' among Old Baptists. They think the term is too exalted to apply even to a minister. Humility is one of their strongest traits. A restless child in a seat near me gave its mother some trouble and slightly disturbed proceedings. A young mother with a cute baby sat in front of me. The baby was but a few months old, but was in a good humor and smiled at me. I liked it. But soon the baby began to cry, and the mother stepped outside. She returned a few moments later with a nursing bottle. The baby was satisfied and fell asleep. There is no such thing as a nursery in a Primitive Baptist Church, and rural folk can't leave babies at home unattended. Some people,

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unacquainted with the situation, don't understand this. An old man, apparently 80, pronounced the invocation in a voice that was feeble but fervent, then took his seat directly in front of the pulpit a few feet from the minister, and cupped his ear with his hand. His hearing was impaired, but he appeared very happy. The pastor started his sermon in typical Old Baptist fashion — a humble apology for his human frailties and expression of his profound love for the brethren, and his great responsibility of the duty of trying to say something of comfort to God's people. The wine and unleavened bread were on a table in front of the pulpit covered with a cloth. There was a prayer, and the pastor read the account of the last supper, emphasizing that Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples and had enjoined them and all God's children to wash each other's feet. Nearly all wept silently. Most Primitive Baptists do not shout, but they weep silently at intervals in their service. They say these are tears of joy. Realizing that their customs are unique and strange to the moderns, Old Baptists accept their position with kindly stoicism. Laugh at them and they will pity you. You do not understand their ways or know their joys. Only those with faith and will to humble themselves can enjoy the pleasure of obeying His commandments, say this band of faithful adherents. 'Secret Societies,' said the pastor, 'have a secret they could tell but won't. We have a secret that we would tell but can't. This is the secret of our joy in serving the commandments of our Lord.' Old Baptists do not approve of divorce except for 'Bible Grounds,' which is infidelity on the part of either party contracting for the marriage. There is also a church rule which forbids any member to defraud any person, or to evade the payment of any just debt when the debtor is able to pay it. These rules are applied only occasionally. Old Baptist pastors are paid no salary. However, they usually receive free-will offerings after each service. The clerk or a deacon notifies the congregation that donations will be received after the service. Those wishing to contribute do so by going to the clerk after the benediction. No plates are passed during the service. No sermon in an Old Baptist church is complete unless it touches on the cornerstone of the Old Baptist faith — predestination. (Theirs is a dangerous heresy only masquerading as predestination, but saturated with Arminian lies, carefully avoiding the adjective 'absolute'. Unless they believe and BOLDLY PROCLAIM ABSOLUTE PREDESTINATION, they are false prophets soon to join Balaam and the Rich Man in Hell. And this goes double for so-called 'Elder' Garner, et al., of Mississippi Old Baptist fame.) This, with a wordy picture of the joys to come, is the spiritual meat and drink of the followers of the faith. The communion ritual over, the members of the flock closed their service with a procedure unique to the faith — 'The Parting Hand.' There is a special song for this occasion. It is The Parting Hand. There are many stanzas, and the tempo is slow, and the air is doleful. As they sing this song the members walk about and shake hands, singing as they go. This is a part of their rites in which non-members may participate. The communion is only for members. Following the parting hand the crowd assembled under a big oak on the churchyard where a wooden table about 50 feet long, stood. Then from near-by automobiles men and women drew forth boxes and baskets filled with treasures of culinary art of the countryside. Soon the table groaned under the weight of a feast fit for the gods. Certainly these people who know the economy of doing without do not practice it in their dining rooms, for they know nothing of the shortage of food. Here before us lay a feast — meats of every description, fried chicken, roast chicken, chicken pot pie, fruit pies, custard, salads of various assortments, cakes, cakes, and cakes, all prepared according to those delicate recipes that seem to be a secret of the rural South. On my plate I had a piece of roast beef, a la rural, a helping of chicken pie, two kinds of salad, a slice of roast chicken, a slice of fried country ham, a slice of custard, a slice of delectable apple pie, plus a few pickles. I managed to do justice to this generous plate and was offered more, but had to forego the pleasure of sampling other tempting morsels. Space would not permit. After the (gluttonous) meal — sinfully so? — there was

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no hurry. Women cleared away the tables. Men pulled out their pipes. Children began to play about the church-yard. Some boys tossed a baseball. Men and women huddled in little groups under the trees, or sat on benches and talked. No European crisis bothered these people — not even the latest sins of the government. They were but slightly interested in politics. A group of farmers looked at the clouds in the west and wondered if it would rain. Crops were suffering, they said, from both drought and cold. Women talked about the neighborhood matters. They were worried about ‘Sister’ Jones, who was too ill to be present. She had been specially mentioned in a prayer.”

Here, beloved, is the story of Bethel Primitive Baptist Church, of Shreveport, Louisiana, still holding services after more than 200 years, and **“*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers;*”** (only as regarding the foreign missionary controversy, wherein the Southern Baptists are wrong, and must yield the field to the Primitive Baptists.) (**Titus 1:9.**) Comes now the little church in East Texas which was and is miles closer to the truth than Bethel Primitive Baptist, beginning with the righteous name: "Pilgrim Predestinarian Regular Baptist Church." — near Palestine, Texas — organized by Pastor Daniel Parker. Here is the amazing story, taken from the Vicksburg Sunday Post, Vicksburg, Mississippi, July 29, 1973; to wit:

"The Illinois minister and the Mexican governor sat talking in the governor's office in the Province of Texas. It had been a long, dangerous trip by horseback for Elder Daniel Parker, but he felt that God wanted him to preach the Gospel in Texas; so without financial backing, or fanfare, he headed south to the Mexican territory where so many other Americans had already settled. Now it seemed that his trip had been in vain: non-Catholic religions could not be organized in Texas, he was told. But just as Elder Parker's faith was not bound by Old Testament law, neither were his actions thwarted by Mexican law. The governor, who found Parker's straight-forward approach and his devotion to his religion refreshing in that land of intrigue, suggested to Parker that though he could not ESTABLISH a religion in Texas, he could go back to Illinois, organize his congregation, and move them to Texas as a church. Elder Parker immediately went to see Stephen F. Austin, founder of the American colony, and secured his approval of a plan to move a congregation of Primitive Baptists into Texas. Back in Illinois, Daniel Parker and a small group of followers organized themselves into a church on July 26, 1833, in Crawford County. There were only six charter members, but a few weeks later when the wagons were ready to roll, the Texas-bound caravan had grown to 25 families who allied themselves with Elder Parker. It was a long pilgrimage, and appropriately the group named their congregation the 'Pilgrim Predestinarian Regular Baptist Church.' Elder Parker and his followers didn't all live in the same area; he, along with his 5 sons and others settled in the present county of Anderson; his brother John Parker and his sons went on to the Navasota River, some 75 miles away, where he established Fort Parker and also began an arm of the Church. Pilgrim Church had a precarious existence for a number of years. Indians constantly terrorized the settlers, and the Revolution called many from their farms. It was not until 1838 that Pilgrim Church erected its first building amid some dogwood trees near Elder Parker's home (about three miles from the present town of Elkhart near Palestine, Texas). It was a crude log structure, about 20 feet square, with a clay floor. Heavy shutters with holes for rifles were placed on the windows, and tradition says that the men took turns during the services standing guard against raids by Indians. After several years, the members erected a frame building, which was replaced in the 1890s by another, which burned in 1929. Today a tidy brick edifice serves the congregation, but near it is a replica of the original structure. Elder Parker not only played an important role in religious circles — he was also well-known in Texas politics. In 1835 he was elected as a member of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Texas, and he opened the

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meeting at Washington-on-the-Brazos with prayer when Texans gathered to declare their independence from Mexico. When the laws of the new Republic were written, Elder Parker had a hand in authoring them, and he was elected to the first Texas Congress in 1839, a position which he declined because he preferred 'allegiance to my religious vows to a seat in Congress.' He returned home, cultivated his farm, preached to his congregation, and he died in 1844 and was buried in the cemetery at Pilgrim Church. According to J. M. Carroll, historian of Texas Baptists, Elder Parker 'left a deeper or more nearly ineradicable impression on the theology of East Texas than any other preacher in its history.' Born in Virginia, Elder Parker had grown up in the Old Baptist Church, and when some congregations advocated changes, he had fought against them. He felt that any centralized authority, man-made religious organizations, or a paid ministry were unscriptural. He was widely-known for his opposition to missions and the free will doctrine, and he preached successfully against these movements in Tennessee, Indiana, and Illinois before moving to Texas. Elder Parker published a pamphlet in 1826 explaining his reasoning concerning predestination; he called it 'Two-Seeds-In-the-Spirit' doctrine. It simply stated that man was born either of the seed of God or of the seed of the devil. He said that it was folly to preach the Gospel or give Bibles to the non-elect who were spiritually dead. The name of Daniel Parker is associated with Texas politics and religion and also with one who is almost legendary in Texas history – Cynthia Ann Parker. Cynthia Ann Parker was the granddaughter of Elder Parker's brother, John, of Fort Parker. On a May morning in 1836, while the young men of Fort Parker were in the fields, a group of Comanche Indians attacked the settlement and killed many of the pioneers, including John Parker. They took several prisoners, among them Parker's nine-year-old grand-daughter Cynthia and her six-year-old brother, John. The two children were taken to different Indian villages where both grew up as Comanches. In his teens, young John Parker was returned to his people, but he refused to stay with them, going back to the Indians. As a young man, on a raiding party into Mexico, he fell in love with a Mexican girl who had been captured by the Comanches. On the way back to Texas, he contracted smallpox, and the Indians left him to die on the vast Staked Plains of Texas. They persuaded them to let her remain with John, and with her loving care he recovered. The two were married, she persuaded him to relinquish his Indian life, and he spent the rest of his days in Mexico as a rancher and farmer. Cynthia Ann lived with the Comanches for 24 years, and the only word of her for a long time was an occasional tale told by a trader of a white girl held captive by the Indians. One trader tried to ransom her, but the Indians refused. Several expeditions were undertaken by the Parkers to find her, but all to no avail. When Cynthia Ann was grown she became the wife of Chief Peta Nocona and bore him three children, two sons and a daughter. Her son Quannah, known as 'Quannah Parker' when he was grown, became one of the most famous Indian Chiefs. In 1860 Chief Nocona was killed in a raid by the Texas Rangers, and Cynthia Ann and her two-year-old daughter, Prairie Flower, were captured. She had practically forgotten her native tongue and when questioned could only point to herself and say, 'Me Cynthia Ann.' She never became reconciled to the death of her husband, and she lived only a few years after she was returned to her people. Today the cemetery at old Pilgrim Church tells much of the history of Texas, for many of the pioneers who came with Daniel Parker from Illinois helped to shape the destiny of the frontier. The state has placed numerous markers at the site, telling the tales of the brave band who established the first non-Catholic Church in Texas. For some 175 (140 + 35) years services have been held at Pilgrim Church which Elder Parker and his little band of Primitive Baptists established despite Mexican law. Pilgrim, the Mother Church of Texas Baptists, remains unchanged as to doctrine and practice, just as Daniel Parker left it."

I love you. Amen.