

“Were The Pilgrims Christians?”

John 3:7

- I. The History of the Pilgrims

- II. The Baptism of the Pilgrims
 - A. “...entry in Judge Sewall’s diary...Always, as the day of delivery drew near, there was a great bustle in the house as relatives and neighbors prepared a plentiful supply of ‘groaning cakes’ and ‘groaning beer.’ And on the infant’s first Sabbath, winter or summer, it was carried without fail to the meeting house to be baptized even if the minister had to break the ice in the font to perform the rite.” (Willison, pg. 385)
 - B. “The Pilgrims believed that if a child were born on a Wednesday, it had been conceived on a Wednesday—which led to great embarrassment at times, for many a child was unhappily born on a Sabbath. Some ministers were disposed to question the propriety of baptizing children born on that day. One pastor loved to thunder on the subject—until his wife presented him with twins one Sabbath, just after the morning service, when it was the pastor’s custom to retire for what the congregation had always presumed was rest and meditation.” (Willison, pgs. 472-473)
 - C. “Smyth offered an elaborate defense and confidently went his way. Sharing the Brownist aversion [strong dislike] to ‘dipping’, he sprinkled his followers...” (Willison, pg. 72)
 - D. “A birth in the family of young William Hilton, of the *Fortune* group, precipitated a crisis. As the Hiltons were Anglicans, their child could not be baptized at Plymouth—at least not until the parents joined the Pilgrim church, which they were not disposed to do.” (Willison, pg. 246)
 - E. “Plymouth remained without a minister for more than three years, to the concern of Saints and Strangers alike. In want of a pastor, the sacraments could not be administered. There could be no baptisms and none could partake of the Lord’s Supper, which gave weight to the Strangers’ complaint that the ‘means of salvation’ were grossly neglected at Plymouth.” (Willison, pg. 345)

- III. The Pilgrims View of the Baptists
 - A. “Baptist views were broached [to introduce as a topic of conversation] at Plymouth. Roger Williams came in 1631. He had attended the preaching of Samuel Howe, the Baptist preacher in London who practiced immersion. Williams himself paid a high tribute to Howe. It is not certain that Williams, at this time, had fully adopted Baptist principles.” (Christian, pg. 360)
 - B. Seen in the Case of John Cooke
 - 1. “The Old Colony expired in its seventy-third year, less than the span of many a life. Two members of the *Mayflower* party survived it—John Cooke, the former deacon, now a Baptist preacher at Dartmouth, and Mary (Allerton) Cushman, widow of Ruling Elder Thomas Cushman...” (Willison, pg. 407)
 - 2. “John Cooke...deprived of office and excommunicated for turning Baptist during religious troubles, 1657; removed to Dartmouth (New Bedford) and became occasional Baptist preacher there.” (Willison, pg. 439)

- C. Seen in the Treatment of the Baptists by the Pilgrims
1. “John Alden...leader in Quaker and Baptist persecutions, 1657...” (Willison, pg. 442)
 2. “Thomas Prence...leader in Quaker and Baptist persecutions, 1657...” (Willison, pg. 445)
 3. “Isaac Robinson...only one of pastor’s family [John Robinson] to come to New World...disenfranchised [took away his citizenship] for opposing Quaker and Baptist persecutions, 1659-72...” (Willison, pg. 452)
 4. “Timothy Hatherly...deprived of office and disenfranchised for opposing Quaker and Baptist persecutions, 1658...” (Willison, pg. 453)
 5. “Thomas Hinckley [Deputy Governor] deprived of office and disenfranchised for opposing quaker and Baptist persecutions, 1657...” (Willison, pg. 455)
 6. “John Norton...succeeded the great John Cotton as pastor of First Church, Boston, 1656; led persecution of Quakers and Baptists, drying for summary execution of all ‘heretics’...” (Willison, pg. 459)

IV. The Persecution of the Pilgrims

A. Seen in the 1657 Act against Dissenters

1. “At Boston the next year, under the presidency of Governor John Endecott, the United Colonies recommended more violent measures. Quakers and all other heretics were to be banished from each of the colonies ‘under pain of death, and it afterwards they presume to come again into that jurisdiction, then to be put to death as presumptuously incorrigible.’ As Cudworth had been dropped as a commissioner because of his opposition to such measures, Plymouth was represented by Prence and Josiah Winslow. Both signed the recommendation, and it was quickly adopted by all of the colonies although Massachusetts alone exacted the extreme penalty of Quakers.” (Willison, pg. 377)
2. “Fearing ‘these wolves in sheep clotheing’ [sic] detesting their ‘horred and damable tenetts’ [sic] the Pilgrims decreed early in 1657 that no one should bring in ‘any quaker, rantor, or other Nororiouse heretiques’ [sic] on pain of a 20s. fine for each week that such ‘strangers’ remained in the colony—a penalty almost immediately increased to a £5 fine or the lash, or both. The workhouse was declared the proper place for Quakers and ‘all such vagrants as wander upp and down without any lawfull calling, and alsoe all Idle persons or rebellious children, or servants that are stubborne.’ [sic] Prisoners received only what they could earn by their own labors in the workhouse, but as there was no House of Correction at the moment, they were punished by ‘stocking or whiping.’ [sic] People were encouraged to seize and hand over to the constables anyone suspected of heresy. Hereafter, those seeking admittance as freemen were to be placed on probation for an extended period, to ‘stand one whole yeare propounded to the Court,’ [sic] to make sure that no ‘corrupt’ persons crept in. These laws were aimed at Baptists as well as Quakers, for the former had been making converts. And to keep Anglicans in their place, it was now a crime—previously it had been only a social error though serious enough—to celebrate Christmas by ‘forbearing of labour, feasting, or in any other way’.” (Willison, pg. 377)

B. Seen in the Case of Charles Chauncy

1. "There was an Anabaptist taint [or generally, to impregnate with something odious, noxious or poisonous] about Plymouth. There is therefore this singular circumstance that the Rev. Charles Chauncy, who was an Episcopal clergyman and brought with him the doctrine of immersion, made for Plymouth. Felt says he arrived 'a few days before the great earthquake on the 1st of June,' 1638." (Christian, pg. 361)
2. "I had forgotten to insert in its place how ye church here had Invited and sent for Mr. Charles Chauncey, a reverend, godly and very learned man, intending upon trial to chose him pastor of ye church hear, for ye more comfortable performance of ye ministry with Mr. John Rayner, the teacher of ye same." (Bradford, pgs. 309-310)
3. "But there fell out some difference about baptising, he holding that it ought only to be by dipping, and putting ye whole body under water, and that sprinkling was unlawful. The church yeelded that immersion, or dipping, was lawful, but in this could countrie not so conveniente. But they could not nor durst not yeeld to him in this, that sprinkling (which all ye churches of Christ doe for ye most parte at this day) was unlawfull & humane invention, as ye same was prest; but they were willing to yeel to him as far as they could, & to the utmost; and were contented to suffer him to practise as he was perswaded; and when he came to minister that ordinance he might so doe it to any yt did desire it in yt way, provided he could peacably suffer Mr. Reinor, and such as desired to have theirs otherwise baptized by him, by sprinkling or powering on of water upon them; so ther might be no disturbance in ye church hereabout. But he said he could not yeeld hereunto. Upon which the church procured some other ministers to dispute ye pointe with him publickly; as Mr. Ralfe Patrick, of Duxberie, allso some other ministers within this governmente. But he was not satisfied; so ye church sent to many other churches to crave their help and advise in this matter, and with his will & consente, sent them his arguments written under his owne hand. They sente them to ye church at Boston in ye Bay of Massachusetts, to be communicated with other churches ther. Also they sent the same to ye churches of Conightecutt and New-Haven, with sundrie others; and received very able & sufficient answers, as they conceived, from them and their larned ministers, who all concluded against him. But himself was not satisfied therwth. Their answers are too large hear to relate. They conceived ye church had done what was meete in ye things, so Mr. Chansey having been ye most parte 3 years here, removed himself to Sityate, wher he now remains a minister to ye church ther" [sic] (Bradford, pg. 310)
4. "This was the first debate on the American continent on the subject of immersion. The whole of New England was agitated on the subject of immersion." (Christian, pg. 362)
5. "Meantime, at Boston, Richard Mather and John Norton, acting for the Harvard Overseers, had come to terms with Chauncy, demanding of him a promise that he would 'forbear to disseminate or publish any tenets concerning the necessity of immersion in baptism and celebration of the Lord's Supper at evening.' On this occasion Chauncy's conscience did not trouble him, and he yielded 'without reluctance.' Becoming the second president of Harvard, at a salary of £100 a year..." (Willison, pg. 364)

6. "...the first great president of Harvard was Charles Chauncy..." (Gibbs, pg. 151)
 7. Question: What about the first president at Harvard, Henry Dunster?
 8. "While awaiting passage in Boston, he was approached by a committee appointed by the Harvard Overseers to find a president for the college to succeed the cultivated and conscientious Henry Dunster, forced out for holding 'antipaedobaptistical principles'—meaning, in simple English, that he had followed John Smyth, Roger Williams, and others in rejecting infant baptism." (Willison, pg. 363)
- C. Seen in the General Court Writing to Plymouth—October 18, 1649
1. "Note has already been taken of the activity of the Massachusetts colony against the Baptists, and the persecuting laws that they passed and executed." (Christian, pg. 378)
 2. "On October 18, 1649, this Colony urged drastic measures against the Baptists of Plymouth." (Christian, pg. 378)
 3. You can see the letter concerning divers of Anabaptists that has risen up in the jurisdiction of Plymouth [referring to Sea Cunke; now Swansea and Rehoboth—under the pastoral care of John Myles] and their intended restrictions on them in Christian, pg. 379.
- D. Seen in the General Court's Passed Order on Taxes—1654
1. One of the chief grievances of the Baptists, and other dissenters, was that the people were taxed to support the ministry of the standing order. (Christian, pg. 60)
 2. The passed order stated: That the civil court in every shire, shall, upon information given them of any defect or any congregation or township within the shire, order and appoint what maintenance shall be allowed to the ministers of that place, and shall issue out warrants to the selectmen to assess, and the constable of the said town to collect the same, and to distraine the said assessment upon such as shall refuse to pay. (Christian, pg. 61)
 3. The first law bearing on ministerial support in the Plymouth colony was passed the same year, and the same reason for it is given in its preamble, namely, "railing and renting." The law was not seriously enforced until 1657. Thus was added an additional grievance against the Baptists. (Christian, pg. 61)
 4. Between the years, 1727 and 1733 there were 28 Baptists, 2 Quakers and two Episcopalians imprisoned in Bristol, Massachusetts (now Rhode Island) for the ministerial tax. (Christian, pg. 84)
- E. Seen in the Case of the First Baptist Church in Massachusetts
1. First Baptist Church in Swansea—1663 (Not counting the Providence Church, Swansea was the Third Baptist Church in America)
 2. For more than forty years after the landing of the Pilgrims there was no Baptist church in Massachusetts. The first Baptist church constituted in that State was at Swansea, on the south side, near the Rhode Island line. (Christian, pg. 63)
 3. The beginning of this movement, and of many other Baptist churches in this country was in Wales, where a Baptist church was organized, October 1, 1649. (Christian, pgs. 63-64) Most of the Baptists in America came from England or Wales. (Christian, pg. 375)
 4. The pastor of this church was John Myles. He was born at Newton, in Herefordshire, about 1621, and was a student in Oxford in 1636. The next spring

John Myles and Thomas Proud visited the Baptist church at the Glasshouse, Broad street, under the care of William Cossett and Edward Draper. They were joyously received by the brethren in London, and probably received material assistance. By the year 1660 the church in Wales had prospered greatly and had two hundred and sixtythree members. (Christian, pg. 64)

5. Myles became one of the testers under Cromwell, but upon the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II, Myles was ejected along with two thousand ministers (Calamy, *Abridgment*, I., II.). Upon which he and some of his friends came to this country, and brought their church records with them. At Rehoboth, in 1663, John Myles, elder, James Brown, Nicholas Tanner, Joseph Carpenter, John Butterworth, Eldad Kingsley and Benjamin Allby, joined in a solemn covenant together. (Christian, pg. 65)
6. The church was then located in Plymouth colony. Newman, the minister who persecuted Holmes, died that year and for four years the church had peace. (Christian, pg. 65)
7. They faced opposition at Plymouth. Notice the record of the court: At the Court holden at Plymouth the 2d of July, 1667, before Thomas Prince, Governor, John Alden, Josiah Winslow, Thomas Southworth, William Bradford, Thomas Hinckley, Nathaniel Bacon, and John Freeman, assistants. (Christian, pg. 65)
8. Mr. Miles, and Mr. Brown, for their breach in order, in setting up a public meeting without the knowledge and approbation of the Court to the disturbance of the peace of the place, are fined each of them five pounds, and Mr: Tanner the sum of one pound, and we judge that their continuance at Rehoboth, being very prejudicial to the peace of that church and that town, may not be allowed; and do therefore order all persons concerned therein, wholly to desist from the said meeting in that place or township, within this month. (Christian, pg. 65)
9. Yet in case they shall remove their meeting unto some other place, where they may not prejudice any other church, and shall give us any reasonable satisfaction respecting their principles, we know not but they may be permitted by this government to do so. (Christian, pg. 65)
10. Accordingly on October 30 following, a grant of land was given them at Swansea where they made their settlement. (Christian, pg. 65)
11. Often in the days of persecution he preached to the church in Boston. At length he grew "very aged and feeble" but he continued the pastoral oversight of the Swansea church till his death, which occurred February 3, 1683. (Christian, pg. 66)
12. "...for over a half a century they stood alone, and bore the responsibilities and the whole weight of theological odium which rested upon the Baptist name and cause in the Colony of Massachusetts. They must have had, and did have, during the first seventy years of their experience, a painful sense of isolation. They were separated from their brethren in England. No sister churches were in the neighborhood. No Baptist associations, as now, with letters and delegates, pleasant countenances, and kindly words to cheer and sustain them. Rev. John Myles, who had recently emigrated with a remnant of his flock, from Wales, was at Swansea, and occasionally made a visit to Boston; and sometimes a good brother or two would come up from Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations;

but in general, our brethren were shut out from public sympathy, and lived in constant dread of the emissaries of the government. They met in houses of the different members of the church at Charleston, Noodle's Island, and Back street, now Salem street, until the erection of their first sanctuary in 1679." (Christian, pg. 76)