My Reasons

George Landis

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The Reasons For My Resignation as Pastor of the First Baptist Church of New Castle, Pa. and From the Baptist Ministry

(Read Lord's Day morning, July 31, 1932, before the congregation of the First Baptist Church of New Castle, Pa., the last day of the pastorate of George M. Landis, after a service of seven and one-half years.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

In accordance with the promise made when my resignation was read a few weeks ago, it is now my purpose to set forth the reasons which have led me to take this action. Justice to the congregation which has supported us so loyally during the past seven and one-half years demands that I give these reasons. Already rumors are afloat to the effect that I am leaving because the church has not supported me as it should have done; because certain individuals in the church have opposed me; because the congregation found it necessary to reduce my salary. Let me say most emphatically, that none of these are my reasons for resigning.

The congregation has most loyally and graciously supported us. It is not to be expected that in a group of a thousand persons, all should see eye to eye with us. Perhaps they show rare spiritual discernment and good judgment by not agreeing with us in everything. However, we are amazed at the almost unanimous approval of our ministry. As regarding the recent reduction in our salary, it was eminently just and proper. Money did not bring us here, and money is not taking us

away. Therefore we trust that no one will think that we are leaving because of anything which this congregation has done or has failed to do; or because we have the slightest grievance against any person, persons or organization in the church. This church has established an enviable record for being kind to its pastors. This record has been maintained and strengthened during the last seven and one-half years. You have abundantly supplied our needs, you have most graciously sustained us during several illnesses, you have extended to us every Christian courtesy, you have been most indulgent with our many faults, and you have been exceedingly generous with your praise for our few successes. We shall ever cherish the memory of your love expressed in countless ways during the past years.

What We Believe

Before proceeding further, we feel constrained to briefly restate the things which we believe and which we have tried to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. I believe the Holy Scriptures to be the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant and authoritative, and the only all sufficient rule of faith and practice.

2. I believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one in substance, equal in power and glory, and each has a distinctive part in the work of salvation.

3. I believe in the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; that He is the eternal Son of God equal with the Father. I believe that as to His body, He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and was born of the virgin Mary; that

He lived a sinless life; that upon the cross He died for the ungodly; that He was raised from the dead; that He ascended into Heaven where He now intercedes for His own, and from whence He will someday return.

4. I believe that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person and not merely an impersonal influence. He inspired the Scriptures, He is the Agent of conviction and regeneration; He baptizes, seals, indwells, and anoints every believer; and He will fill all believers who yield to His operations.

5. I believe that man was created and not evolved, that he fell through sin, that he is now totally depraved, and that unless he is born again he can neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God.

6. I believe that redemption is wholly by the precious blood of Christ, Who offered Himself without spot to God, Who died upon the cross as a Substitute for all who believe in Him.

7. I believe that salvation is wholly of God's grace, received alone through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that it is entirely apart from human works, but that it produces good works as its fruits. I believe that it is the blessed privilege of every believer to know that he is saved and that he is eternally secure in Christ Jesus.

8. I believe that it is the duty of every Christian to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, such witnessing to be in harmony with New Testament order; that it is the mission of the church to preach the Gospel throughout the whole world.

9. I believe that the hope of the Church is the personal and pre-millennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ; and

that peace and blessing will come to this world only through His reign as earth's righteous King.

10. I believe in the resurrection of the body, in the conscious and eternal bliss of the saved, and in the conscious and eternal punishment of the lost.

11. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ established two ordinances to be observed in His church, baptism and the Lord's supper. I believe that Scriptural baptism is the immersion of the believer's body in water, thereby symbolizing the fact of his identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. I believe that only those who have personally repented of their sins and have put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized.

Beloved, these things we believed when we came here. These things have we endeavored to preach for seven and one-half years and these things we believe more firmly today than ever. Certainly no charge of departure from the faith can be brought against us; and surely these are the things believed among you and which you will insist that your next pastor believe and preach.

Church Order

Perhaps you have noticed that in this declaration of faith, we have made no reference to Church organization, policy, and government. Of this we now desire to speak.

From the early years of our Christian experience we recognized that there were many things in modern church life which were not found in the New Testament. For a time this gave us but little concern. We regretted the departure from New Testament principles, but

supposed that good men throughout the ages had altered certain practices as they believed the circumstances demanded. We felt that it was for us to accept the "status quo" and make the best of the situation.

However, about fourteen years ago as we studied the Word and sought to conform our faith and practice to its precepts and precedents; we discovered that there were a number of doctrines and practices authorized by the communion of which we were then a member and in which we were then ministering, which we could no longer defend much less declare to others. Consequently, we withdrew from that denomination, and looked around to see if there was a body of Christians with whom we could agree, and who seemed to be the most nearly in accord with the Holy Scriptures.

At that time we felt definitely led to the Baptist Church with whose doctrines and practices we were in substantial agreement. We were impressed with the fact that the Bible was declared to be "the only rule of faith and practice." We reveled in the doctrines of grace which were held by the congregations which we thereafter served. We enjoyed the Christian liberty which the Baptist church afforded us. In its fold we have spent thirteen happy years of service. Therein we have a host of devoted friends whose love we shall ever cherish. It has been our privilege to enjoy the fellowship of a number of consecrated ministers of the Word, men full of faith and of Holy Ghost; men who would die for the "faith once for all delivered unto the saints."

During the subsequent years, as we have ministered in three Baptist Churches, and as we have continued to

study the Scriptures; we have been impressed with the wide difference between the church of today and that of the New Testament. With vastly superior equipment, with superb organization calculated to produce the maximum of efficiency; with the esteem of the non-church members; the church of today is not to be compared in spiritual power, and in personal piety with the church of the New Testament; which was without the supposed advantages of wealth, equipment, efficient organization, and worldly favor. After all had the church gained by its departure from New Testament simplicity and in its adoption of many devices dictated by human wisdom?

About the time these questions were perplexing us, we discovered that there were a number of companies of devout Christians who were meeting along New Testament lines and were endeavoring to maintain the "simplicity which is in Christ." We were impressed with the evangelistic zeal, the missionary fervor, the almost unbelievable knowledge of the Scriptures possessed by the rank and file of these believers. While we would not be so bold as to affirm that they approached the high standards of spiritual power and effectiveness manifested by the New Testament Church we had to concede that they were far in advance of the standards of the various Denominational churches.

So, being a good Baptist, we went to our "only rule of faith and practice," the Holy Scriptures. Previous experience had demonstrated the wisdom of such a course. Surely we could not be blamed for going to the fountain head of all authority for the church on earth. Can we be blamed for examining every phase of church life and policy in the light of the New Testament, and for

weighing all of our ecclesiastical doings in the balances of the sanctuary?

One other principle of interpretation guided us in our investigations. We had long since learned the truth of God's statement: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9). I had found that in respect to salvation, spiritual development, and God's prophetic program; God's thoughts and ways were much higher than man's thoughts and ways, that were it not for the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit, none of us could understand them. God's thoughts do not contradict human reason, they transcend it. We have discovered that when the statements of Holy Writ are accepted on their face value, all is perfectly reasonable. Postulate a personal, all-wise, all-powerful, omnipresent Being; a living and loving God; and everything in the Scriptures become as logical as a syllogism, and as clear as the sunlight at noonday.

Therefore, as we carefully and prayerfully pursued our search of the New Testament, we were not surprised or shocked to find many facts concerning church truth which were absolutely contrary to the views and practices generally held throughout Christendom, and even in the Baptist denomination. We found that human tradition and human expediency had in many points supplanted, amended, or altered the simple teaching of the New Testament relative to the Church. What path should the child of God take in the light of these facts? Should we acquiesce to the practices of man, even of good and devoted men; and make the best of the

situation as we found it? Having been instructed in and having instructed others in the Baptist principle of making the New Testament the sole rule of faith and practice, there was but one thing we could do, whatever the personal cost might be, and that one thing was to obey the Word of God. And certainly we have Scripture for so doing. We read "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment that as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it" (II John 6). To everything should we put the question of our Lord Himself, "Is it of heaven or of men" (Luke 20:4)? We read again, "Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104).

We have been further convinced of the fact that the Church is not only responsible to do God's work, but that it is responsible to do it in God's way and only in the Scriptures do we have His way made plain.

We submit the following four propositions which summarize the results of our investigation of what the New Testament has to say on the subject of ecclesiology or the doctrines relating to the church.

I. The Truth of the Unity of the Church Is Practically Denied by the Present Denominational System

Our blessed Lord prayed for a practical unity among His followers, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:20, 21).

How much unbelief has been caused by the multitude of divisions in the Church, God alone knows.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, but one body was formed on the Day of Pentecost. That one body existed in the days of the Apostle Paul, for by the Spirit he writes: "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:12, 13). And again, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:3, 4).

But what do we see today? Approximately 1500 different sects and denominations, meeting under different names, governed by different rules, and each professing to be the true Church or the truest expression of the Church on earth. Some rally to the name of a reverend founder, some to a doctrine, some a practice, and some to a Divinely appointed ordinance.

The influence which such a condition has upon a new convert is hard to estimate. What body or group shall he join? He is bewildered by the confusion of voices around him. Not being established in the Bible, he often is hindered in his Christian life through inability to decide and loses the benefits of Christian fellowship.

We quote the experience of another. "A few years ago, two Christians, hitherto strangers to each other, were traveling together in a railway carriage, when, after some conversation about the Lord and His interests, one of them leaned forward and said, 'May I ask what

denomination you belong to?' 'Well, that is a common enough question,' replied the other, 'but will you first say what you think is to guide me in my paths as a Christian?'

"He agreed at once that it was the Word of God alone that could with certainty direct him. 'Then, if you will allow me,' said his fellow-traveler, 'I will answer your question by proposing another, viz., What denomination does the Word of God put me into?' After some deliberation, he said, 'Why none at all.' 'Then I can't belong to one at all,' replied the other; 'for if I did (upon your own showing) I would clearly be in a position where the Word of God had not placed me.'

"'But,' replied the first speaker, 'does not the Word of God exhort us "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together and so much the more as we see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25)?'

"'Yes, it does. But a Christian need not belong to a denomination to obey that word; for the Lord Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in (or lit. unto) My Name there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).'" (Are You A "Member"? And of What? by G. C.)

Instead of endorsing the sectarian denominational system the New Testament strongly condemns it, and declares it to be a mark of carnality. Hear the words of the Spirit through Paul: "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul" (I Cor. 1:11-13)? "And I,

brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. For ye are carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal" (3:1, 3, 4)? Among the works of the flesh is listed in Gal. 5:19-21 "strife, seditions, heresies" (literally, "sects") all of which the child of God is exhorted to avoid.

Again we read, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to all that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. . . God is faithful, by Whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:2, 9, 10). This is the fellowship into which the child of God is called. The worthy Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient as a center around which to gather. To choose another name is to tacitly admit the insufficiency of the Name of Him Who is the center of heaven's worship. Let us as individuals be content with the names which God's Word gives us: "saints," "believers," "disciples," "children of God," "Christians," and "brethren."

I believe that the Church is composed of all those who have been born again and have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of which Christ in the glory is the Head. I believe it should receive all whom Christ has received, and who are sound in belief and practice.

Having seen that the truth of the unity of the Church is practically denied by the present denominational system, which genders the sectarianism so justly condemned in the New Testament; we come to the second proposition, viz.,

II. The Divine Order for the Worship of the Church Is Not Being Observed in the Present Denominational System

The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Lord Himself on the same night in which He was betrayed. The disciples were commanded, "this do in remembrance of Me." The Holy Spirit tells us in the eleventh chapter of I Corinthians, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." As to how the early Christians understood these statements we read, "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in Breaking of Bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:43); and again, "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, ready to depart on the morrow" (Acts 20:7, R. V.). Evidently it was the practice of the early church to gather each Lord's Day to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread, thereby proclaiming His death till He come.

We quote from another: "That which occupied the most conspicuous place in the Assemblies of God's people then, was neither a 'preacher' nor a 'pulpit' but a 'table' on which rested the symbols, 'bread and wine.' Those early believers were gathered unto Him (Matt. 18:20). He was the magnet to which their hearts were drawn, and by which they were charmed and satisfied. The beauty of that method of gathering was its very

simplicity. No arrangements nor adornments of men! no 'altar service,' no 'priestly vestments,' no specially 'robed choirs' . . They had no one to lead their Assembly worship, but the Holy Spirit; He was sufficient; He directed their hearts to Christ. In 'the beauty of holiness' they worshipped Him, their Lord. This was worship 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). It was beautiful and God-honoring, because it was His own arrangement. The vainglory of the flesh found no place there. No one was seen but 'Jesus only' (Matt. 17:8)" (Hugh Kane.)

This simple feast of love which was the worship meeting of the apostolic church, has in too many cases become an adjunct rather than the main feature of our worship. It is placed at infrequent intervals, instead of being observed each Lord's Day. The presidency of the Holy Spirit has been practically set aside for the direction of "an officiating clergyman"—a personage unknown to the New Testament. We inquire, where in the New Testament is a certain person, official or otherwise, designated to "administer the Lord's Supper"? We firmly believe that the introduction of human devices and traditions has taken much from the beautiful simplicity and spiritual fruitfulness of this sacred service. Much that now passes as worship is a misnomer.

We next discovered that:

III. The Divine Order for the Ministry and Government of the Church Is Not Observed in the Denominational Systems of Today

We can speak but very briefly on this point, as our allotted time is well nigh spent.

The popular idea of Church organization is a group of members known as the "laity," presided over by one man, known as a "clergyman," who serves as the "pastor" of that particular congregation. Practically all ministry and much of the administration and government is vested in this one man—and in some cases in one woman. The pastor in this denomination, as in many others, is selected by the congregation, usually after he has "candidated for the office." He is paid a fixed salary. He is supposed to preach the Gospel and teach the Word of God in the regular services of the Church. He is moderator of its business meetings, and a general superintendent of its various operations. He is usually ordained by a council of churches, whereby he becomes an accredited "minister" or "clergyman." The title of "Reverend" is usually given to him, and he moves in a select circle, known as "the clergy," as distinct from the "laity."

That God in His grace has used this system and has wrought many spiritual victories through it need not be argued. That there are many consecrated and zealous men of God thus investing their lives in sacrificial and unselfish service, we freely admit. But we raise this one question: "Is it Scriptural?" We make bold to declare that we are unable to find anything in the New Testament which even approximates such a system. One-man ministry in the church is unknown in the Book which as Baptists we profess to recognize as "our only rule of faith and practice."

We never read in the New Testament of "the pastor of a church," but frequently of "the pastors" in a given church. These were matured brethren who exercised a shepherding care over the flock of God. Nothing is said

of their performing any public ministry such as preaching or teaching.

When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended up on high He gave gifts unto men. "And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:8, 11). The first of these two, apostles and prophets, were temporary offices and belonged to the foundation of the temple (Eph. 2:20). The other three, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, were given to the Church for its edification. But in no respect did they comprise a distinct group known as "the clergy," as distinct from "the laity." Every believer is a priest unto God, and has equal access with every other believer, unto the Father. Clerisy is foreign to the New Testament, save to be condemned under the term of "Nicolaitanism" (Rev. 2:6, 15), "which thing," says the glorified Christ, "I hate."

For any believer to receive the title of "Reverend," we regard as being a serious assumption of an exclusively Divine title. But once in the Scriptures is the word found, and then it is ascribed to Jehovah, "Holy and Reverend is His Name" (Psa. 111:9). The title which once thrilled us and in which we took no little pride, now causes us to shrink as it is applied to us by well-meaning people. We remember the words in Job 32:21, 22, "Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away."

We challenge any person to find either precept or precedent in the New Testament "our rule of faith and practice" for the following ideas or expressions: "A church calling a pastor," "a pastor candidating for a

church," "a candidate accepting a call from a congregation," "the fixing of a salary for a pastor," "a public service for the recognition or installation of a pastor," "the declaring of a pulpit vacant," "a pastor and his parish," "a clergyman and his church," "a council for ordination," "denominational headquarters," "the granting of a license to preach," etc.

We believe that a one-man ministry is contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost and retards the development of the body of Christ by preventing the exercise of many God-given gifts. It tends to the setting up of a hierarchy within the church, and virtually leads to a priesthood, whether recognized by that name or not. It makes the servant of God too often a servant of man and amenable to the will of man rather than God. It does an injustice to small churches which cannot afford to pay large salaries, by practically confining the outstanding gifts to the larger churches.

We turn from the thought of ministry to one other issue in closing.

IV. Modernism Is Making Rapid Inroads In Our Own Denomination and Is Fast Gaining the Reins of Power

For thirteen years we have seen the advances of this thinly veiled agnosticism and infidelity. Men who deny and belittle many of the great fundamental doctrines of the Baptist Church, have in a large measure captured the denominational machinery. State and national secretaries, college presidents and teachers, theological professors, leading pastors, and denominational workers, are too frequently either avowed Modernists or are unsympathetic to Fundamentalism. Our publication

society sells without warning, books which would make Tom Paine look like an amateur. Our Foreign Missionary Society insists on retaining the so-called "inclusive policy," which means that both conservative and liberal wings of the denomination shall be represented on the mission fields. With few exceptions our theological seminaries cannot be trusted, except to send out enthusiastic Modernists or ill-equipped Conservatives.

For years we felt that our duty was to protest and fight from within with the hope of eventually purging the denomination of all modernistic influences. We no longer entertain such hopes. We believe that God is calling to His people to separate themselves from all iniquity and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. It is still true that two cannot walk together unless they be agreed.

Conclusion

And so to summarize the result of this investigation of our church position in the light of the New Testament, we have found that:

The truth of the unity of the Church is practically denied by the present denominational system;

The Divine order for the worship of the Church is not being observed in the present denominational system;

The Divine order for the ministry and government of the Church is not observed in the denominational systems of today, and that:

Modernism is making rapid inroads in our own denomination and is fast gaining the reins of power.

To hold the views which we have above set forth renders our present position impossible to continue, for the following reasons:

We must be loyal to the Word of God as we see it. We must be true to our own conscience. And we must be loyal to the Church whose salary we receive, and the acceptance of whose pastorate involved the furtherance of its doctrines and welfare. To remain as your pastor we would have had to be disloyal either to you or to our own conscience enlightened by the Word of God. To teach the views which we have herein set forth would certainly be detrimental to the present organization and policy of this Church. Whatever sins may be laid to our charge, we have never stabbed the hand that fed us or betrayed the trust reposed in us. But, my beloved friends, I must at all costs be loyal to the blessed One Who redeemed me by His precious blood; I must be loyal to the Word of God; I must be loyal to my own conscience.

Therefore, after much prayer for guidance, I feel that but one course is open to me. To take this course is the most difficult thing I have ever been called upon to do. That course is to resign from the pastorate of this church and from the Baptist ministry.

I have not sought to lead others with me, much as I would like to see every Christian walking according to the simple truth of God's Word; hence I have reserved this declaration until my last day with you. As long as I have been in this pulpit I have been loyal to it. However, I must witness to the fact that the announcement of my resignation has brought great peace of heart and conscience. I may have made a terrible mistake. But to my own Master must I stand or fall. Someday I must

stand before His judgment seat, where the motives of my heart will be revealed. In the light of that day, I can take no other course than to renounce all denominational alignments in favor of a simple fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and with those who gather to His Name alone, in the simplicity of New Testament worship.

If asked, "to what do you now belong?" my answer is, "I belong to Christ." "But," someone may add, "under what name do you now gather?" "I gather unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and surely no greater privilege can be mine." "Where will you worship?" another may inquire. "I will worship with fellow believers in Christ who meet only in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in accordance with New Testament simplicity, and who are sound in life and doctrine."

I leave with a heart filled to overflowing with Christian love for each one of you. I covet for you God's choicest blessings. I deeply appreciate the countless things which you have done for me and my family. Never will I cease to thank God for every remembrance of you.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Make it in fact as well as in theory "the only rule of your faith and practice;" for "heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away."

—George M. Landis

Low at Thy feet, Lord Jesus,
This is the place for me;
Here I have learned deep lessons,

Truth that has set me free.
Free from myself, Lord Jesus;
Free from the ways of men;
Chains of thought that have bound me,
Never can bind again.
Only Thyself, Lord Jesus,
Conquered my wayward will;
But for Thy love constraining,
I had been wayward still.
(J. N. Darby)