

# *The Gospel Herald*

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“As the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21)

For The LORD’S PILGRIMS, STRANGERS & SOJOURNERS

by

Donald E. Martin, Sr.

## *The Personal Experience of Donald E. Martin, Sr.*

### *Part II: From Divine Calling Grace to Absolute Predestination*

*From my initial writing about my journey, I now want to pick up, if God permit. After my experience of conversion/new birth, old things passed away and, behold, ALL things became NEW in the realm of the Spirit world, about which I was previously totally blind.*

*It was soon after my conversion experience (coming to a blessed hope and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ) that I was strongly desirous to follow the Lord in obedience, especially in water baptism. It was explained to me as the identification with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection; as a poor and needy sinner dying to sinful self in the waters of immersion, being raised likened unto the newness of Christ, coming up out of those baptismal waters as a symbol of a liquid grave. Following baptism, I was “resurrected” in Spirit in this new life. I have experienced by the same power that brought our beloved Saviour from the tomb on that third day.*

*I was also, after that experience of baptism, an “official” member of Clearview Baptist Church (Southern Baptist church) as well as a baptized believer in Jesus Christ, in obedience to his scriptural command. **I did not submit to water baptism to join a church**, nor follow a denomination’s order and decorum: I did so in obedience to He who by His loving kindness sought me as a sinner and granted me faith to believe that He had redeemed me and brought about this marvelous new birth.*

*After being exposed to about three years of “Southern Baptist” means and methods of “bring them in from the fields of sin” tactics, gimmicks, programs, and entertainment, I saw enough of what I could not support scripturally and began looking around. I*

tired of the “Lottie Moon” Missionary program and my money being pooled into the Southern Baptist Convention general fund. I was just beginning to exercise a little in that SB Assembly, at a Gospel Rescue Mission in downtown St. Petersburg, Florida. The Church was represented by the pastor and I as we held monthly chapel meetings in the evening on the first Tuesday of the month. I began to share the testimony of my past sinful walk and the new life I now experienced in Christ. I was a trembling nervous wreck/wretch of a man trying to persuade men (as many as 60 would gather in the winter meetings) to seek Christ and be saved. Oh, yes, I was a rank “free-willer” to the core; all I knew to tell others was what happened to me and invite them to Christ. The old second floor Chapel Mission facility was rooms filled with bunk beds, a soup kitchen, a chapel room full of chairs and a pulpit. The men who gathered had to be in the Mission by 6:45 p.m. to receive soup and sandwich after the chapel service, and to have overnight accommodations.

I recall the dear elderly chaplain of the Mission, Isaac Martin (now deceased) would always close the mission meeting with these comments, “Now men, we know God is dealing with each one of you here tonight as the Holy Spirit is present, and all you have to do is confess your sins and accept what God has provided for you and be saved, just trust Christ and believe in Him, and you shall be saved tonight.”

I was soon brought to question whether God was dealing with every man in that mission Chapel. I continued studying the scriptures day by day and then attending an Independent Baptist Church. A dear brother asked me one particular day, “What do you think about “election?” I said, well, “as far as I know God has elected those whom he foreknew would accept him, being an omniscient God.” The dear brother said, “what about God electing people unconditionally, choosing them before the foundation of the earth to be his people and believe on Christ?” I said, “Man, why even preach the gospel if that be the case? Isn’t that why we try to win others and preach the gospel?” I was getting angry in the debate.

(There is an old saying about when one comes to gospel truth, “one becomes **MAD** when questioned about electing grace. A close examination will make one **SAD** as seeing oneself unable to accept or receive Christ’s so great salvation. Finally, one becomes **GLAD** when revealed by divine love that sovereign, free grace was the **ONLY** means a sinner can believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ).

Well, I went home that evening in about 1974 (some three years after my conversion experience) and opened the scriptures and a Strong’s Concordance and started with words “**elect, election, called, chosen, ordained, appointed, predestinated.**” and proceeded to examine every verse where these words were used throughout the scriptures. I was bent on proving that we must preach and witness to try to win souls for Christ’s sake. I spent two nights in my study room examining these words. After the second night, God revealed to me that Christ **NEVER** merely invited any man to decide to follow Him. I was overwhelmed with this so great revelation. I began to see the **BIG** picture begin to unfold in front of my spiritual eyes. Man, was I hungry to

know more of what I felt was a divine revelation of truth. This same dear brother shared with me the book, "The Sovereignty of God" by Arthur Pink within a few days of my discovery. Well, reading that book, comparing scripture with scripture further convinced me that I was not the only one who had been revealed these truths, but many brethren over time of the REFORMED and SOVEREIGN GRACE BAPTISTS held those positions.

The next great issue came about when I confronted the Independent Baptist pastor about these truths of God's sovereignty. He said, "I believe God is sovereign as Charles Spurgeon wrote and preached about." I said, "Then why don't you preach about a sovereign God who alone seeks and saves sinners?" He said, "I believe that God has called us to evangelize and win the lost and that's our mission." I said, "I see a different aspect of Christ's Church and its mission, and that's to feed sheep not MAKE sheep." He said, "Well, maybe you ought to look around for a church that believes that way: The Old Primitives believe that way." That was the first time I had heard of the Primitive Baptists, by this Independent Baptist pastor from North Carolina; it was in about 1976, I was licensed by this particular Independent Baptist church to preach the gospel; continuing to minister at the Mission and at a nursing home on Sunday afternoon. But, **my message was changing**. I started preaching Christ without the invitation, free offer, open opportunity message. I started preaching what Christ has promised those blessed to believe, and the sovereign, free grace that alone seeks out sinners and causes them to follow Him.

I want to inject at this point that I met Bro. Michael McInnis around this time. He was pastoring a small assembly in O'Brien, Florida (Suwannee County), named Sovereign Grace Baptist Church. Bro. James Bowman and I visited Bro. Michael on one occasion and he said there was a Primitive Baptist church (Crawford Lake Primitive Baptist Church) having their annual meeting starting on the same Saturday we were visiting.

This was my FIRST Primitive Baptist church visit. As we drove into the grassy parking area and exited the car, we could hear the singing coming from within the meeting house; sound like I had never heard.

We entered in the meeting house about full except for a few seats, and we began to join in the harmonious singing. It was as if I had been translated into heaven itself! Beautiful songs from the old Lloyd's Hymn Book were called one after another. I recall the singing was brought to an end and prayer was offered by an elderly brother who beckoned God in humility. I recall an old elder, in his 80s I would think, was helped into the stand, stood a moment and then began to express some spiritual thoughts. As God began to give the dear brother liberty to preach, he proceeded to exalt Christ and the glories of salvation by grace alone. It was a SWEET SOUND to this believer's ears ("blessed are they who know the joyful sound"). The folks were hospitable and loving in their greeting. I shall never forget that first meeting among the Primitive folks.

*At this time, I began to seek out those folks called **Primitive Baptists**; I had a fellow send me a copy of The Old Faith Contender. When I received it was like a child receiving his first ROY ROGERS badge and compass that was bought with 25 cents and a Wheaties box top. Wow, what a wealth of sovereign grace reading; and a periodical at that! I soon called Elder W. J. Berry and introduced myself and we conversed about the gospel and God's sovereign grace. And asked if he knew of any Primitive Baptists in central Florida. He did say that there were some of the Mt. Enon Churches continuing sound in the faith, to the best of his knowledge.*

*I began to inquire around about for Primitive Baptist folks. I called Elder Robert Miles in Plant City, Florida and spoke to him about what I was seeking. He informed me that there was an annual meeting coming up the next weekend at Hopewell Church in Sarasota, Florida and he planned on attending.*

*He began to inform me that there were different factions of the Primitives and the Mt. Enon Association has a mixture. Some would profess to be "absoluters" while the majority are of the "conditional" faction. But, he goes along, as he fellowships closely with the "absoluter" brethren. (Elder Miles was among the "conditional faction" for a few years as they took him in when he and wife returned from Louisiana and Mississippi in about 1982. He could not go on with the "new style conditionalists" after a couple years and moved among the Original Mt. Enon "Absolute" association made up of about four churches).*

***In the mean time**, there were about four families blessed to believe the truths of sovereign grace from various Baptist assemblies (and even a free Methodist church) who heard about us and we began meeting together on Sundays for worship and fellowship in a Women's Club building (this was 1980).*

*Soon, Bro. John Bogan and I were ordained by the small assembly as the Elders, to minister by preaching and teaching. In time, we took the title LEALMAN CHURCH, Old Order of Baptists. Our service order was very similar to the Primitives. We sang from the Gadsby Hymnal acapella (the Gadsby had been exposed to us by another sovereign grace group) and the meeting was simple and humbly Christ-honoring. We were soon persuaded that our doctrine was of "absolute predestinarian," as historically recorded in the early Baptist writings, supported by the scriptures.*

*I met Elder Miles at that Sarasota meeting; I think it was at Hopewell Primitive Baptist Church house. He introduced me to Elders Johnny Townsen (an absoluter - now deceased), Elder Leon Blanton and a couple others. As we were gathered out under an old oak tree, Bro. Miles said, "Bro. Martin, these brethren believe like we do" (absoluters). Well, the meeting began - singing was a starting, so we entered the old meeting house. This is where I met Elder Cromer Crawford (of the Conditional Mt. Enon hierarchy), Elder Mayhorn of Kentucky (Hopewell's pastor), Elder David Crawford, Elder Hollis Albritton, and others I can't recall. It was certainly a mixed group. Yet, the meeting was joyous and worshipful. This was the second PB meeting I*

*attended. At lunch break, Bro. Cromer Crawford came over and sat by me to chat, seeking out where I was from and where I was at doctrinally. He said, "Bro. Martin, I want you to come over to the Plant City area and visit with us. I pastor three churches and I'd like to hear what you may be blessed to speak to us."*

*I asked, "Well, Bro. Crawford, when is your next meeting time? He told me, and I began to meander about the Mt. Enon Churches at Bro. Crawford's invitation. As I have expressed in previous articles, there was a mix of conditionalism and absolutism being preached from the conditional faction of the Mt. Enon association churches. But, absolutism was (and still is) SOFT-PEDDLED in their pulpits. It was soon that I was labeled as a rebel preaching absolutism and not being an "official" Primitive Baptist, so I slowly was not used much among the conditional faction, which suited me fine; if they could not hear my message, then I had nothing else to preach.*

*This is about the time I first met with Fellowship Primitive Baptist Church in South Hillsborough County, Florida, which was established in 1875. I had followed Elder Miles and his wife, Copal, in their car to the Saturday meeting. This was one of four absolute churches in the original Mt. Enon Association. Pastors J.Y. McCormick, Pastor Fred Neikirk, and Elder Robert Miles (after he left the conditional faction) were ministering among the absolute churches. This date was about 1985-6.*

*Upon my second visit to Fellowship on the following monthly meeting, Elder McCormick invited me - after the lunch break - to share anything with the church that God may have on my mind. Well, we re-assembled in the house from the old outdoor eating tables and began with a song or two. Elder McCormick was gracious to introduce me as Brother Martin from St. Petersburg and invited me into the stand. I stood a short season, sharing some of my journey coming to the revelation of God's free and sovereign grace, and how the God of the scriptures is an unlimited and Almighty God who does as He pleases. I visited upon numerous occasions with Fellowship Church in those days of the late 1980s and early 1990s.*

*Elder Miles and I were in close correspondence for a number of years as he would share his heart with me and his spiritual insights from time to time. He wrote numerous articles that Elder James Poole, Editor/Publisher of The Remnant would publish from time to time. Elder W. J. Berry also published some of Elder Miles' writings in The Old Faith Contender in the early 80s (Bro. Miles was called away in 1996; asleep in Jesus).*

*I pastored Lealman Old Order of Baptists from 1980 until 1999, as I was visiting and ministering among the Primitive churches that would "put me up." In 2001 I relocated to Lake Panasoffkee, Florida (80 miles North of Tampa) as I was working over a ten-year period on the largest federal prison project/facility in the United States, as Architectural/Engineering Project Representative in the vicinity of Lake Panasoffkee.*

*Elder James Bowman, who was ordained by Lealman Church in 1981 co-pastored with me for nearly 19 years, sharing the pulpit. Elder Bowman continues the work even this day, proclaiming to predestinarian principles of the scriptures.*

*It was about 2005 when Bro. Michael McInnis and I began visiting Empire Primitive Baptist Church of Lanier County, Georgia, at the invitation of Bro. John Crowley, who is currently a member of Empire Church.*

*After meeting with Empire Church for nearly a year, I felt the need to identify with, and have a home among, those in Empire Primitive Baptist Church of Lanier County, Georgia. In March 2006 I asked for Empire Church to accept this sojourning pilgrim as a member into their fellowship. I was received with loving kindness and Christian fellowship among the members.*

*In July 23, 2006, Empire Church was moved to license me as a gospel minister under their authority to preach, pray, teach and instruct where ever God, by divine providence, may open unto me the door of utterance.*

*I was blessed to travel monthly and meet with those of Empire, as Bro. McInnis would accompany me to the Saturday meetings. God, in his divine purpose, called away Elder J. Y. McCormick, who was residing in Blackshear, Georgia and still pastoring at Fellowship Church in Florida, until his passing (about 2007).*

*Fellowship Church called me and asked if I would consider coming down to minister to them. I agreed, with a thankful heart, that they would consider me worthy to minister among them. After about a year and a half, I felt the need to move my church membership to Fellowship Church where I was pastoring, as my home church. This I did in late 2008, with the approval of Empire Church, and acceptance of Fellowship Church, as a member in good standing.*

*This is a brief and certainly not an all-inclusive writing of my walk among Zion's host and the experiences encountered along the way. I am thankful to our Almighty God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for every step ordered along the way and for directing this poor sinner's path from the beginning to this very day. I know that NOTHING has been brought about in this pilgrim's walk that was not ordained and predestined of the God of all grace and sovereign mercy.*

*By Christ's divine call I rest, and by His promises I have sweet assurance of hope, for He who has promised will also DO IT! To Christ be the honor and glory even when the earth is on fire as the elements thereof burn with a fervent heat, destroying all that men have designed, invented and constructed.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*On this 31st day of August in the year 2009 of our Lord; revised September 9, 2015.*

*(NOTE: Sadly, many of the Primitive Baptist brethren whom I was blessed to meet and minister among, have been called away from this temporal realm here below - in this mortal world of sin and sorrow. By God's sovereign mercy, they have entered into that state of immortal glory in heaven's realm, per the hope that God alone instills within the heart, mind, and soul of his elect heirs and beloved children.)*

*The following are just a few God enabled me to meet along the journey among the Old School Primitive Baptists who are now departed:*

*Elder Robert Miles*

*Elder Cromer Crawford*

*Elder Fred Neikirk*

*Elder George Hazen*

*Elder Floyd Cox*

*Elder Percy Ming*

*Elder Teddy Ball*

*Deacon Ben Stanaland*

*Elder Roy Harrison*

*Brother Tom Jackson*

*Elder Johnny Townsen*

*Elder Johnny Bowen*

*Elder J. Y. McCormick*

*Elder Charles Mount*

*Elder Winfred J. Berry*

*Elder Bryant Couey*

*Deacon Ben Cowan*

*Elder J. L. Rowan*

*Elder Stanley C. Phillips*