



Preston City
Bible Church
On Mission Since 1815

Serving for Over 200 Years!

Our Origins

Two hundred years ago, this church officially launched as an independent congregation of believers. The Preston City Baptist Church was truly a work of God's grace, where He brought people together in the community who has become convinced that Christians should be baptized.

Our continuing presence here today represents a testimony to the same conviction of those early Baptists in Preston. Where did they come from? Why start a new church when there was already one in Preston? The answer actually goes back to the Reformation in Europe, begun with Martin Luther's objections to Roman Catholic indulgences in 1517. The outcome of the efforts of those like Luther and Calvin in Germany and Switzerland was the insistence that Christians should base their spiritual lives on the Bible and not the religious traditions of men.

Englishmen fleeing the Roman Catholic persecution of "Bloody" Mary Tudor in 1553-58 found their way to Geneva and heard the preaching of John Calvin. They returned with this instruction and the Geneva Bible, and under Elizabeth's reign decided the English Church was not really Reformed. The "Middle Way" of Anglicanism was not like Geneva, so they wanted to push the Reformation to its conclusion in their homeland. This goal of the purification of the English Church gave these Christians their name: Puritans.

The quest for purity and Biblical fidelity continued in the hearts of some of these Puritans who eventually separated from the Anglican Church outright. They are remembered today as the Separatists, with Robert Browne (1550–1633) as the first Separatist pastor in England. Browne's goal was to worship God as the Bible described, apart from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer or any other direction from English

Episcopal governance. This meant having autonomous congregations with no superior ecclesiastical organization over them. They were the early Congregationalists who advocated the separation of Church and State. Today that idea has been reinterpreted to mean government prohibition of free Christian expression in public and government places. However, what our forefathers meant by the "separation of Church and state" was the freedom of religious practice with not government infringement or regulation. In rejection of tyranny, the forefathers' view on separation meant no established state churches and no restriction of religious practices according to an individual's conscience before God. So great was the oppression of these Separatists by the administrations of Elizabeth I and King James that they departed for Holland in 1607-8 and eventually the New World on the Mayflower in 1620.

Some of those in Holland returned to England in 1609 and started the first Baptist church in England in Spitalfields, north of London. The separatist group is the origin of today's Baptist movement. Two hundred years later, and across the Atlantic, a revival in Groton's Second Baptist Church caught the attention of several of the people of Preston, and meetings began in the home of James Treat. Elder Roswell Burrows of Groton and John Sperry of Norwich divided the work of weekly meetings for a time, and a small revival began in Preston in March of 1811.

In the colonial era Connecticut was founded as a Congregationalist institution, with the views of the Separatist Puritans established as the state religion. It was the Baptists in Rhode Island who held so firmly to Browne's conviction of the separation of Church and State, and their influence radiated into the surrounding colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Thus, the Baptists were often a despised minority whom the Congregationalists would persecute, but



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they continued to grow slowly as their roots sank deeply into the Scriptures.

The Issue in Question: Baptism

What was the difference between Congregationalist and Baptists? Mainly, beside the establishment of Congregationalism as the state religion, the theological argument was about infant baptism versus believers' baptism. Holding to the teaching of the Reformers that infant baptism was a replacement of Jewish circumcision for entrance into "the covenant," the Congregationalists and other who advocated "pedobaptism" grounded their views in tradition and theological reasoning.

The Baptists, on the other hand, were a new movement, and they rejected tradition as the primary basis for the faith and practice of the Christian life. The Baptist movement advanced on the basis of the single, powerful observation that there is no reference to infant baptism in the New Testament. The Baptists held that their tradition was the Scriptures, and so they were in agreement with the thrust and spirit of the Reformation's "Sola Scriptura," "only Scripture." Ironically as heirs to the Reformation, the Congregationalists held to a practice that derived from human tradition and theologizing, while they rejected as heterodox those who held to a more biblical model of ritual baptism. The irony continues in that the first Separatist Congregationalist, Robert Browne, held as a main principle that there should be no state involvement in the affairs of the Church, yet Congregationalism was the state religion of the Puritan colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and others were persecuted for rejecting state-supported tenants about baptism.

The Baptists believed that Matthew 28:19-20 made water baptism an ordinance from the Lord Jesus. Obeying Him by baptizing believers defined them as different from the

otherwise similarly-minded Congregationalists. Baptism, for Baptists, then and now is the believer's testimony to his own faith alone in Christ for salvation. It is a public way to mark the reception of eternal life and to show the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not a saving work or a sacrament which through by which a church organization transmits grace to the communicant; it is a public act of obedience by one who already has eternal life by grace through faith in Christ.

A very small stirring of Baptist worship in Preston in 1811 began on March 3 with the baptism of Polly Tyler and Lucy Rockwell in Amos Lake. Polly had been convinced for some time that as a believer she should proclaim her faith through ritual immersion. Church leaders cut through 18 inches of ice in order to baptize Polly and Lucy, and that dramatic event became the first of many baptisms in Preston in the coming weeks and months. In May, two prominent men were baptized: James Treat and Mundator T. Richards. This event caught the attention of the town because these were the first men of note to join in with the Baptists. More than twenty people remembered that their conversion dated back to Polly Tyler's baptism in ice water.

Staying the Course

Through the many upheavals and struggles that have marked American religion's history since 1815, we members of Preston City Bible Church have maintained a steady attendance and a rock-solid conviction that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We have held to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, and we have seen our adherence to what it teaches to be the foundation for a sanctified and satisfying life in the communion with our Creator.

When revivalism grew and mysticism carried people beyond the bounds of Christian dignity Preston City Baptist Church kept its focus on the Lord and the Bible. When Continental



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liberalism of the late 19th Century crept in among the churches of the United States and carried away many with its rejection of the Scriptures, Preston City Baptist Church stayed the course. In the early 20th Century, when liberals made their play for the souls of America and the fundamentalists articulated their Fundamentals, Preston City Baptist Church stood resolute with our eyes on the Lord, our bible in the pulpit, and God's Word in the mouths of our pastors. Our love for one another persevered because our love of the Lord grew as we learned of Him.

As a close reading of the Bible concerning prophecy and the future of Israel grew to prominence in the Bible conference movement of the early 20th Century, dispensational teaching gained a strong following among the Bible-believing evangelicals. Preston City Baptist Church kept reading the Bible and was thankful to participate in this systematic presentation of Bible prophecy, as it firmly biblical.

Today, as Preston City Bible Church we stand with our forefathers committed to these beliefs:

- Separation of state tyranny and influence from the business of the church
- Sovereign autonomy of a local church under the Lord Jesus Christ with no higher system of authority over it
- The obedience to Jesus Christ in the performance of His ordinances
- The power of the Gospel message in saving men who are fallen in the sin of Adam and who need only to believe in the saving work of Christ at Calvary
- The sanctifying work of God the Spirit in bringing a believer to maturity in Christ and making him useful for God's holy purpose

- The sufficiency of the Scriptures as the foundation of life in this age

Our Enduring Message

It is our prayer that as you consider our national history within the greater story of world events and the history of the Lord's Church, you will hear the offer of Christ in His own words:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 3:16-18

One reason we exist as a church in our community is for the purpose of this testimony: We offer to you that Christ died on the Cross in your place for all of your sins, that He rose from the dead, and so He offers eternal life to all who believe in Him.

The other reason that we continue with the Lord in Preston is the spiritual growth of believers through the intake and application of God's Word, which is "a lamp unto [our] feet and a light unto [our] path." Psalm 119:105, 2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 3:18, Eph 4:7-16.

Matthew 28:19-20 "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen