

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

Baptist is it the name of a church? Is it the name of a denomination? Is someone a Baptist because of birth? Where did the Baptists get their name? When did they begin - at creation? from John the Baptist? in the 1600's? Is the label really that important - Episcopalian, Catholic, Protestant, or Baptist?

Joining a church or doing acceptable deeds does not make you a Baptist. A Baptist is simply someone who believes and obeys the Bible. What a person believes affects their living. It is extremely important that we believe right doctrine.

The word "church" is found 77 times in the New Testament and always refers to a local "called out assembly" of saved, baptized believers. Many New Testament books are addressed to local congregations. It is important that a Christian is a member of a church approved by God.

WHEN WAS THE CHURCH ESTABLISHED?

It was established before Pentecost.

1. The apostles were in it before Pentecost. (I Corinthians 12:28)
2. The prophets and teachers were in it before Pentecost. (I Corinthians 12:28)
3. It had an ordained ministry before Pentecost. (Mark 3:14)
4. It had the same gospel before and after Pentecost. (Mark 1:1; Matt. 24:14)
5. It had a commission to preach before Pentecost and it did. (Matt. 10:7)
6. It had authority to baptize before Pentecost. (John 1:2)
7. It had the Lord's Supper before Pentecost. (Heb. 2:12; I Cor. 11:2, 18-20; Matt. 26:30)
8. It had a rule of discipline before Pentecost. (Matt. 18:16-18)
9. It had a church roll before Pentecost with 120 names on it. (Acts 1:15)
10. It had a church treasurer before Pentecost. (John 13:29)
11. It held an election before Pentecost. (Act 1:15-26)

The church was started during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

IT WAS FOUNDED BY JESUS CHRIST

He is the head of the church and is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). He only started one church and called it "my church". The church is called "the body" (I Cor. 12:12-31), "the building" (Eph. 2:21), and "the bride" (Eph. 5:25-27). He will not share the honor of founding the church with any other. No man founded His church. This is not so with other church denominations, who attribute their movement with a man, such as: the Methodists, founded by John Wesley; the Presbyterians, founded by John Calvin; the Mormons, started by John Smith; the Catholics, started by Constantine; and the Christian Science movement, started by Mrs. Eddy. There is only one church Jesus founded, and He is the head of it. Before you finish this lesson, you will know that church's name.

IT BEGAN DURING HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY

After a night of prayer, Jesus chose twelve men, whom He called "apostles" (Luke 6:12-16). They were chosen to be with Him (Mark 3:14). He began the church and they were the first members. The institution of the church was the only institution started during Jesus' ministry (government and the home were already established). Only one church can trace their roots back to the church begun by Jesus.

THE NAME BAPTIST

Jesus did not name His church. His followers were called "disciples". His assembly was called "church". However, God called the preacher who baptized Jesus "The Baptist".

Matthew 3:1 says: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,"

This is not what people called him, but this was the title given him by God. Before John ever preached or baptized, God called him the BAPTIST! Jesus walked sixty miles to be baptized (immersed) by John the Baptist. The twelve apostles were baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus' and John's mission was the same that Baptists have always had - teach, baptize, and teach. The great commission has always been the marching order for Baptist churches. (Matt. 28:19-20 says: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.")

John the Baptist's name indicates two characteristics of Baptists - separation from the world and believer's baptism (immersion) after salvation.

HISTORY

Serious students of Baptist history regret that so few Baptists have studied its roots. One must study and be informed to appreciate his heritage.

The book of Acts gives the account of the first century churches. They were all independent bodies led by a pastor with the sole purpose of preaching the gospel and baptizing converts. Preaching, prayer, fellowship and soulwinning occupied their time.

Since the New Testament had not been finished, compiled, and readily available, the disciples had to follow the commands Jesus told them concerning the organization and goals of the church.

Since the devil hates souls being saved, error was soon introduced to get churches off the track of winning souls and propagating truth.

ERROR IN THE CHURCHES

"By the beginning of the year A.D. 313, Christianity has won a mighty victory over paganism. A new emperor has come to the throne of the Roman Empire. He evidently recognized something of the mysterious power of this religion that continued to grow in spite of persecution. History says that this new emperor who was none other than Constantine, had a wonderful realistic vision. He saw in the skies a fiery red cross and on that cross written in fiery letters these words: By this thou shalt conquer. He interpreted it to mean that he should become a Christian. And that by giving up paganism, and that by attaching the spiritual power of the Christian religion onto the temporal power of the Roman Empire a whole world could easily be conquered. Thus the Christian religion would in fact become a whole world religion, and the Roman Empire a whole world empire.

"A Hierarchy was formed. In the organization of the Hierarchy, Christ was dethroned as head of the churches and Emperor Constantine enthroned (only temporarily, however) as head of the church.

"The Hierarchy was the definite beginning of a development which finally resulted into what is now known as the Catholic, or "universal" church. It might be said that its indefinite beginnings were near the close of the second and beginning of the third century, when the new ideas concerning bishops and preacher-church government began to take shape. Let it be definitely remembered that when Constantine made his call for the council, there were very many of the Christians (Baptists) and of the churches, which declined to respond. They wanted no marriage with the state, and no centralized religious government, and no higher ecclesiastical government of any kind, than the individual church. These Christians (Baptists) nor the churches ever at that time or later, entered the hierarchy of the Catholic denomination.

“Sir Isaac Newton: ‘The Baptists are the only body of known Christians that have never symbolized with Rome.’

“When this hierarchy was created, Constantine, who was made its head, was not himself at the time a Christian. He had agreed to become one. But as the erring or irregular churches which had gone with him into this organization had come to adopt the error of Baptismal regeneration, a serious question arose in the mind of Constantine. “If I am saved from my sins by baptism, what is to become of my sins which I may commit after I am baptized?” He raised a question that has puzzled the world in all succeeding generations. Can baptism wash away yet uncommitted sins? Or, are the sins committed prior to baptism washed away by one method (that is, baptism), and the sins committed subsequent to baptism washed away by another method?

“Not being able to settle satisfactorily the main questions thus arising, Constantine finally decided to unite with the Christians, but to postpone his baptism until just preceding his death, so that all his sins might thus be washed away at one time. This course he followed, and hence was not baptized until just preceding his death.

“Constantine’s action in repudiating for the whole Roman Empire, the pagan religion, and accepting Christianity incurred the hot displeasures of the Roman Senate. They repudiated, or at least opposed his course. And their opposition finally resulted in the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Byzantium, an old city rebuilt and then renamed Constantinople for Constantine. As a result there came to be two capital cities of the Roman Empire—Rome and Constantinople. The two rival cities several centuries later became the ruling centers of the divided Catholic church - Roman and Greek.

“Up to the organization of the Hierarchy and the uniting of church and state, all the persecution of Christianity has been done either by Judaism or Paganism. Now comes a serious change. Christians (in name) begin to persecute Christians. Constantine, desiring to have all Christians join with him in his new idea of a state religion, and many conscientiously opposing this serious departure from New Testament teachings, he begins using the power of government to compel. Thus begin the days and years and even centuries of a hard and bitter persecution against all those Christians who were loyal to the original Christ and Apostolic teachings.” (p. 15-17 Trail of Blood)

“There is one new doctrine to which we have failed to call attention. There are doubtless others but one especially - and that ‘Infant Communion.’ Infants were not only baptized, but received into the church, and being church members, they were supposed to be entitled to the Lord’s Supper. How to administer to them was a problem, but it was solved by soaking the bread in the wine. Thus it was practiced for years. And after awhile another new doctrine was added to this—it was taught that this was another means of Salvation. As still another new doctrine was later added to these, we will again refer to this a little later in the lectures.” (p. 22 - Trail of Blood)

“One of their new doctrines or declarations about this time was ‘There is no salvation outside of the Church—the Catholic Church, of course, as they declared there was no other—be a Catholic or be lost. There was no other alternative.

“The doctrine of Indulgences and the Sale of Indulgences was another absolutely new and serious departure from New Testament teachings. But in order to make that new teaching really effective, still another new teaching was imperatively necessary: A very large Credit Account must somehow be established—a credit account in heaven, but accessible to earth. So the merit of ‘good works’ as a means of Salvation must be taught, and as a means of filling up, putting something in the credit account, from which something could be drawn. The first large sum to go into the account in heaven was of course the work of the Lord Jesus.

“Yet another new doctrine was necessary, yea imperative, to make thoroughly effective the last two. That new doctrine is called Purgatory, a place of intermediate state between heaven and hell, at which all must stop to be cleansed from all less than damning sins. Even the ‘Saints’ must go through purgatory and must remain there until cleansed by fire-unless they can get help through that credit account, and that they can get only through the prayers or the paying for Indulgences, by those living. Hence the Sale of Indulgences. One departure from New Testament teaching lead inevitably to others.” (p. 24 - 25 Trail of Blood)

“Remember that we are now noting the events occurring between the years A.D. 300 and 500. The Hierarchy organized under the leadership of Constantine, rapidly developed into what is now known as the Catholic church. This newly developing church joined to a temporal government, no longer simply an executive to carry out the completed laws or enacting new ones utterly unknown to the New Testament.” (p. 18 - Trail of Blood)

“At that time was promulgated the new doctrine of ‘Transubstantiation,’ the intended turning of the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper into the actual and real body and blood of Christ, after a prayer by the priest. This doctrine among others, had much to do with stirring up the leaders of the Reformation a few centuries later. This doctrine, of course, taught that all those who participated in the supper actually ate of the body and drank of the blood of Christ. Auricular confession-confessing one’s sins into the ear of a priest-was another new doctrine seemingly having its beginning at this meeting. But probably the most cruel and bloody thing ever brought upon any people in all the world’s history was what is known as the ‘Inquisition’ and other similar courts, designed for trying what was called ‘heresy.’ The whole world is seemingly filled with books written in condemnation of that extreme cruelty, and yet was originated and perpetuated by a people claiming to be led and directed by the Lord. For real barbarity there seems to be nothing, absolutely nothing in all history that will surpass it. I would not even attempt to describe it. I will simply refer my readers to some of the many books written on the ‘Inquisition’ and let them read and study for themselves. And yet another thing was done at this same meeting, as if enough had not been done. It was expressly decreed to Extirpate all ‘heresy.’ What a black page-yea-many black pages were written into the world’s history by these terrible decrees.” (p. 28 - Trail of Blood)

BAPTISM

Since Constantine believed baptism saved, it was assumed, the sooner baptized the better! Hence came another false teaching - infant baptism.

“One of the first of its legislative enactments, and one of the most subversive in its results, was the establishing by law of ‘infant baptism.’ By this new law, ‘Infant Baptism’ becomes compulsory. This was done in A.D. 416. Infants had been infrequently baptized for probably a century preceding this. Insofar as this newly enacted law became effective, two vital New Testament laws were abrogated-‘Believer’s Baptism’ and ‘Voluntary personal obedience in Baptism.’ As an inevitable consequence of this new doctrine and law, these erring churches were soon filled with unconverted members. In fact, it was not very many years until probably a majority of the membership was composed of unconverted material. So the great spiritual affairs of God’s great spiritual kingdom were in the hands of an unregenerate temporal power. What may now be expected?

“Loyal Christians and churches, of course, rejected this new law. ‘Believers baptism,’ of course, ‘New Testament baptism,’ was the only law for them. They not only refused to baptize their own children, but believing in the baptism of believers only, they refused to accept the baptizing done by and within the churches of this unscriptural organization. If any of the members from the churches of this new organization attempted to join any of the churches which had refused to join in with the new organization, a Christian experience and a rebaptism was demanded.” (p. 18 - Trail of Blood)

“In A.D. 754 Pope Stephen II declared that if an infant was baptized in wine, there being no water to be had, the baptism was valid. And if, the infant being very sick, the baptism was performed with water, not in it, the water being poured from a shelf, or by the hand, and the proper words used, that baptism was valid. The Pope might have spared himself the trouble of giving these decisions. There was no validity in either case. (p. 68 - Baptist History)

“In A.D. 692 Ina, King of the West Saxons, enacted a law by which it was enjoined that all infants should be baptized within thirty days after birth, under a penalty of thirty shillings. If the child died without baptism, the father’s entire estate was to be confiscated.”
(p. 67 - Baptist History)

Let it be remembered that these errors did not occur all at once. They crept in slowly. Some churches opposed the errors so much that in A.D. 251 some churches declared non-fellowship with churches practicing error.

Baptismal regeneration and infant baptism. “These two errors have, according to the testimony of well-established history, caused the shedding of more Christian blood as the centuries have gone by than all other errors combined, or than possibly have all wars not connected with persecution, if you will leave out the recent ‘World War’. Over 50,000,000 Christians died martyr deaths, mainly because of their rejection of these two errors during the period of the Dark Ages alone - about twelve or thirteen centuries.” (p. 14 - Trail of Blood)

THE BIBLE

The Catholic Church did not regard the Bible as the sole source of authority. They claim it was unerring, but the “writings of the fathers”, the decrees of the church, and declarations of the Pope are just as infallible. If the Bible is not the foundation of the church, much error will creep in. In 1229 at the Council of Toulouse, the Catholic Church decided to hold the Bible away from its people. They were afraid they might misinterpret it. Is it not strange for God to write this book for man and a church to withhold it from its people? Truth reveals error. The devil likes to keep people ignorant of God’s Word.

THE REFORMERS

These were people who wanted to change or reform things in the erring churches. Though they had differences in some doctrines, they did agree on the sole authority of the scripture, opposition of tradition, and the necessity of personal faith in Christ for Salvation. Many great men led the way, such as Calvin, Luther, Savonarola, and Huss. Many of these men were martyred for their stand.

PROTESTANTS

This group protested the error in the Catholic Church and pulled out. Baptists are not Protestants. Many Protestant churches later persecuted the Baptists.

Notice the following timeline:

AD 30 100 200 300 BAPTIST BY BELIEF (not always by name) 1900

325 AD CATHOLIC church is formed

1300 - 1500 PROTESTANTS (those who protested)

“Let it not be thought that all these persecuted ones were always loyal in all respects to New Testament

teachings. In the main they were. And some of these, considering their surroundings, were marvelously so. Remember that many of them at that far away time had only parts of the New Testament or the Old Testament as to that. The book was not printed. It was written in manuscript on parchment or skins or something of that kind, and was necessarily large and bulky. Few, if any, families or even simple churches had complete copies of the whole Bible. Before the formal close of the Canon (end of the fourth century) there were probably very few simple manuscripts of the entire New Testament. Of the one thousand known manuscripts only about 30 copies included all the books.” Basics 18 6 Baptist Distinctives (p. 23 - Trail of Blood)

PERSECUTION

Evil has always persecuted good. Wrong always criticizes right. Error always persecutes truth. Following the crucifixion of Christ, many New Testament Christians were persecuted and killed. Stephen was stoned. James was killed by the sword. Eleven of the disciples were martyred. Since then, the devil has had only one true church of Bible believing Christians in his site for destruction. Do you know which group he has been persecuting more than any other in history? BAPTISTS! They have not always had that name. They began with Jesus and were called Christians. They wore many names during the following centuries, such as: Montanists, Novatians, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigenses, Waldenses, Anabaptists, and Baptists. There was always a group who held to the historical distinctives that Baptists hold today. That is the church that was persecuted for over 1200 years!

“These purer churches multiplied and continued in existence for more than three centuries, the members being everywhere looked upon as Puritans and Dissenters. They were Anabaptists, baptizing again all who had been immersed by the orthodox and corrupt church.

“Baptists were always equally prepared for conflict and for persecution. At the rise of the Reformation they openly declared themselves, coming out of their obscure positions, where they had long worshipped their Master in quiet seclusion.” (A History of the Baptists)

The history of Baptists is written in the blood of its martyrs. Fifty million died in the 1200 years called the “Dark Ages”. During this time, strenuous efforts were made to destroy all scriptures.

WHAT WAS THE PERSECUTION OVER?

Bible believers were labeled heretics by the Catholic church. Baptism of infants and baptism for salvation were the big issues. Both of these are false doctrines. They are not found in scripture! The Catholic Church had married the state, and had power to persecute and destroy all Bible believers who did not bow to her authority.

_ “Peter of Bruys was martyred in 1124 because he believed the church is to be composed of believers alone and that baptism was not a part of salvation. He was historically a Baptist preacher.”

_ “Pope Innocent III was frustrated with Baptists not being completely destroyed, so he proclaimed a crusade. He promised full pardon of sins to all those who would fight in his “holy war”. This large army was gathered. Inhabitants in town were butchered. In one, 50 were hanged and 400 burnt. In Lavaur “the numberless heretics that were in the fortress were burnt alive with great joy.””

_ Cardinal Hosius (Catholic, 1524), President of the Council of Trent: “Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past twelve hundred years, they would swarm in greater number than all the Reformers.” (Hosius Letters, Apud Opera, pages 112, 113)

_ The following edict was put forth by the Council of St. Fall, March 26, 1530: “All who adhere to or favor the false sect of the Baptists, and attend hedge meetings, shall suffer the most severe punishments. Baptist leaders, their followers and protectors, shall be drowned without mercy.”

(History of the Baptists, by J. T. Christian)

Entire books are written describing the brutal punishment given to Baptists.

“On the 10th of June, 1535, a furious edict was published at Brussels. Death by fire was the punishment of all Baptists who should be detected and should refuse to abjure. If they recanted they were still to die, but not by fire; the men were to be put to death by the sword, ‘the women in a sunken pit.’ Those who resisted the operation of the edict by failing to deliver up Baptist to the authorities were to suffer the same punishment as accomplices. Informers were promised one-third of the confiscated estates and all persons were forbidden to claim or seek any forgiveness, or reconciliation for the said Anabaptists, or re-baptizers, or to present, on their behalf, any petitions or bequests; - it being understood,” says the Emperor, “that it is not our will, nor will we permit, that any Anabaptists, or re-baptizers (because of their wicked opinions), shall be received into favour, but be punished as a warning to others, without any dissimulation, favour, or delay.” (p. 168 - 169 Baptist History)

“When Philip II succeeded his father, Charles V, upon the abdication of the latter, in the year 1556, he renewed the edict of 1550 with additional articles. The publication of Baptist books was prohibited, and the right of disposing of their property, by sale or will, was taken away. Nor were magistrates or judges to moderate or lessen the penalties in the slightest degree.

“Every settler was required to furnish proof that his children had been baptized according to the rites of Rome.” (p. 170 Baptist History)

As the reformation began, Baptists came out of hiding. They were soon disappointed. The Baptists went too far and too fast for the reformers. Soon the reformers strove to suppress the Baptist sentiment. Now Catholics, Protestants, Episcopalian, and Presbyterians treated them the same way. Emperor Charles V ordered the Baptist women to be drowned, buried alive, or burned at the stake.

“I quote a very significant statement from the Herzogg Encyclopedia, under ‘History of Baptists in Europe,’ about 1523, where they were persecuted by Zwingle and the Romanists. They are found in the following years, 1525 - 1530, with large churches fully organized in Southern Germany, Tyrol and in Middle Germany. In all these places persecutions made their lives bitter.”

Note that all this is prior to the founding of the Protestant churches: Lutheran, Episcopal, or Presbyterian. We continue the quote: “Moravia promised a home of greater freedom, and thither many Baptist migrated, only to find their hopes deceived. After 1534 they were numerous in Northern Germany, Holland Belgium, and the Walloon provinces. They increased even during Alva’s rule, in the low countries, and developed a wonderful missionary zeal. (Note – ‘Missionary Zeal.’ And yet some folks say that the ‘Hardshells’ are primitive Baptists.)

“Where did these Baptists come from? They did not come out of the Catholics during the Reformation. They had large churches prior to the Reformation.” (p. 40 Trail of Blood)

These religious persecutions in England were a prime cause for settlements in the colonies. But before the Massachusetts Bay Colony was 20 years old, it passed laws against the Baptists:

“It is ordered and agreed, that if any person or persons, within this jurisdiction, shall either openly condemn or oppose the baptizing of infants, or go about secretly to seduce others from the approbation or use thereof, or shall purposely depart the congregation at the ministration of the ordinances after due time and means of conviction - every such person or persons shall be sentenced to banishment. This law was enacted especially against the Baptists.”

Much oppression was directed against Baptists. Preachers were whipped, buildings seized, property auctioned off, taxes raised.

“Evidently, one of the greatest obstructions to religious liberty in America, and probably all over the world as to that, was the conviction which had grown into the people throughout the preceding centuries that religion could not possibly live without governmental support. That no denomination could prosper solely on voluntary offerings by its adherents. And this was the hard argument to meet when the battle was raging for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Virginia, and also later in Congress when the question of religious liberty was being discussed there. For a long time the Baptists fought the battle almost alone.” (p. 51 - Trail of Blood)

The Baptists did not want state support or the sanctuary of law for everyone to be a Baptist. Baptists fought being the states’ established religion in America, as well as in the Netherlands.

“It is stated the King of Holland appointed a committee to examine into the claims of all existing churches or denominations to see which had the best claim to be the New Testament Church. The committee reported back that the Baptists were the best representatives of New Testament teachings. Then the King offered to make Baptist ‘the established’ church or denomination of his kingdom. The Baptists kindly thanked him but declined, stating that it was contrary to their fundamental convictions and principles.” (p. 53 - Trail of Blood)

Notice this account of worship of the persecuted Baptists:

January 21, 1683:

“We met at eight in the morning, and though there were seven on horseback and twenty on foot to seek after us, we escaped, having broken up at ten.”

March:

“This week about 150 dissenters were convicted by our recorder, on the statute of Eliz., for 20 a month for not coming to church.”

March 25:

“Mr. Fowler, though very ill, went to the meetings in the wood; but after three quarters of an hour we were surrounded by horse and foot, the former in ambush. Mr. Fownes was arrested, and sent to Gloucester jail for six months.”

April 22:

“We went out at four in the morning, and were in peace.”

November 14:

“A day of prayer, having some hours together in the wood, between London and Sodbury Road: the enemy came upon us unawares, and seized about eight persons; but the brethren escaped to admiration. The bushes were of great service to us.” A number of the sisters were taken: they got Justice Fitz-Herbert to come and upon examination he could get little out of them, and could not learn who was the preacher; so they were let go.”

December 20:

“Watkins, the marshal, and others, went with warrants from Justice Herbert to brother John Morgan, in

Temple Street, and took his yarn and what goods they could find, for seven pounds ten shillings. And the day before took away Margaret Seymour's trunk and clothes, with about thirty pounds, for seven pounds odd money, for being at our meeting in the fields."

December 30:

"Being a hard frost, and snow on the ground, we met in the woods, and though we stood in the snow the sun shone upon us, and we were in peace. The years 1682 and 1683 were the darkest times to our brethren.

They held their meetings in private houses, in the fields, or in the woods, wherever they could best escape the vigilance of the authorities. Mayor, Aldermen, and Constables could hardly have gone to Church at all in those years, for all their time was spent in hunting after dissenters' meetings. A few brief extracts from the records will show how our ancestors fared."

January 29, 1682:

"The Church met at four different places. Many of them went in the afternoon on Durdham Down, and got into a cave of a rock towards Clifton, where Brother Thomas Whinnell preached to them."

March 12:

"Met in the fields by Barton Hundred, and Mr. Samuel Buttall of Plymouth preached in the fore-part of the day and Brother Whinnell in the evening. It was thought there were near a thousand persons in the morning."

March 19:

"Met in the lanes beyond Baptist Mills."

April 13:

"Met in the rain in a lane."

April 20:

"A day of prayer, from nine till five in the evening, at Mr. Jackson's, over the Down, in peace."

May 4:

"Information was brought to a petty session for Gloucestershire, against Brother Jennings, for preaching in the lanes, and a warrant granted for levying five pounds or else goods, or person."

June 11:

"Brother Fownes being come from London, but not daring to come into the city because of the Corporation Act, met with us, and preached in Kingswood, near Scruze Hole, under a tree, and endured the rain."

July 2:

"Our pastor preached in another place in the wood. Our friends took much pains in the rain, because many informers were ordered out to search; and we were in peace, though there were near twenty men and boys in search." (p. 308 - 310 Baptist History)

"Even the Puritans, who fled from persecution in England, had no idea of religious liberty. They came here to establish their won faith, and to exclude all others; hence they were more rigidly intolerant than the countries whence they had fled from persecution. Intolerance was a necessary condition of their enterprise. They feared and hated religious liberty." (Baptists Through Reformers)

“Hence, in 1644, a law was passed in Massachusetts against the Baptists, by which it was “ordered and agreed, that if any person or persons within this jurisdiction shall either openly condemn or oppose the baptism of infants, or seduce others to do so, or leave the congregation during the administration of the rite, he shall be sentenced to banishment. The same year we accordingly find that a poor man was tied up and whipped for refusing to have his child sprinkled.” (Baptist Through Reformers)

“In Virginia, where the first permanent colony in America was established, the charter bearing date 1606, fourteen years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Baptist were bitterly persecuted. By law, a fine of two thousand pounds of tobacco was imposed on ‘those who neglected to have their infants baptized’. Baptist ministers were arrested and imprisoned as vagrants; some were pulled down from the stand as they were preaching, insulted and whipped, and many were imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. Elders John Waller, Lewis Craig, and James Childs were seized at a meeting, June 4, 1768, dragged before the magistrate, and imprisoned for forty-three days in Fredericksburg. Mr. Wofford was severely scourged, and carried the scars to his grave.

Dr. Hawks, historian of the Episcopal Church of Virginia, says: ‘No dissenters in Virginia experienced harsher treatment than did the Baptist. They were beaten and imprisoned, and cruelty taxed its ingenuity to devise new modes of punishment and annoyance.’” (Baptist Through Reformers)

Finally, in 1639, Roger Williams had permission to establish the first Baptist Church in America in Rhode Island.

“From what I have submitted, it will be seen that the Baptists stood alone, as the defenders of religious liberty, during the progress of the Reformation, and for many years after. It will also be seen, that their idea of the church, composed of none but believers, immersed on the profession of their faith, was the grand cause of the separation of the Baptists, as individuals and communities, from all the ecclesiastical organizations supported by the Reformers and their successors.”

“The Baptists occupied an independent and original position; they were neither Romanists nor Protestants, but thorough religious reformers, elevating their standard of religious liberty far above the most exalted ideas of Protestant toleration.” (p. 97 - Why Be A Baptist?)

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

What are Baptist distinctives? They are teachings that distinguish Baptists from all other church groups. It is important for us to study these to assure ourselves that we are in the right church. We need to know why we are a Baptist by belief.

1. BIBLE AUTHORITY

The word author is part of authority. We believe the Bible because of its author, God. It is the only book for faith and practice in the church. II Pet. 1:21 says: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Baptists believe everything the Bible says as the final authority. Some churches acknowledge a man, a council or some other writings as the final authority. Some follow tradition more than the Bible. If you cannot find it in the Bible it is not Baptist doctrine! If it is Baptist doctrine, you can find it in the Bible. Matt. 15:6 says: “And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” (See Jer. 1:1-4; I Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:11-12; I Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 3:16; Col. 2:8-9) Baptists do not base doctrine on tradition.

2. AUTONOMY OF LOCAL CHURCH

Autonomy means “independent”. Baptists (Bible) teach that the local church is independently

governed. Matt. 18:17 says: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

The church is not controlled by a denomination, headquarters, convention, synod, or man! Each church is self-governed and only answerable to the Lord. Churches are to call their own pastors, support their choice of missionaries, collect and disburse funds, and give each member an equal vote on any matter.

3. PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

I Peter 2:9 says: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (See Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-23; I Pet. 2:5,9)

TWO ORDINANCES

BAPTISM

Acts 2:41 says: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

All New Testament believers were immersed (baptizo) or buried in water baptism the day or shortly after they got saved. Jesus was baptized by this same method. No place in scripture does it speak of a "sprinkling" or "pouring" method. Babies were never baptized in scripture - only believers. Baptism has no saving power. It is not a part of salvation. Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

I Corinthians 11:23 - 25 says: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

The Bible (and Baptists) teach that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus to commemorate His death on the cross. It was to be observed as often as the church desired ("till I come"). It was to be a time of examining one's life and confession of sin. It was to also remember Christ's agony on the cross and Second Coming. It has no saving power as the Roman Catholic church teaches. It does not turn into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). The grape juice and wafers (bread) we use symbolize Jesus' blood and body. It was only instituted for saved, baptized believers who are right with God. Christians with known sin in their lives often got sick or even died after taking the Lord's Supper. (Fermented juice is always a symbol of corruption and sin. Scripture says, Jesus took the "cup" or "fruit of the vine".)

5. INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY

Rom. 14:5, 12 says: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Baptists believe each person must choose Christ himself. We cannot force anyone to get saved. God gave each of us a will.

6. SAVED, BAPTIZED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Acts 2:47 says: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

The only members in a church should be people who have been saved and baptized. Church membership is a necessary ingredient, if someone is to become the Christian they ought to be. Hopping from church to church is not conducive to Christian growth. Every Christian needs a pastor, a people, and a purpose. Baptist churches only let saved, baptized Christians join. The only other way someone can join the church is to be saved and then baptized into that local congregation. By the way, Baptists believe once someone is saved, it is forever. (See John 10:28, 3:16)

7. TWO OFFICES

PASTOR

Acts 20:28 says: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (See Acts 20:17, 28; Tit. 1:5-7; I Pet. 5:1-4)

DEACON

II Tim. 3:13 says: "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Deacons are Holy Spirit filled, faithful, godly servants, who assist the pastor in church errands and service to widows and the poor. (See Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 16:1; Eph. 6:21)

8. SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Matt. 22:21 says: "They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

The Bible clearly teaches that the state should not control the church nor the church control the state. That is why the Baptists fought so hard not to be a state religion in America and in the Netherlands. (See John 18:36; Acts 5:29; Matt. 17:24-27; Rom. 13) This is what Roman Catholicism has done in so many other nations.

Saul violated the separation of church and state when he, as king, offered the sacrifice only the high priest was to offer. The church and state were not meant to conflict. The state is to produce justice. The church is to evangelize the world.

QUESTIONS

Do you have to be labeled? Why not just be called a Christian? Christ does not want us to be ashamed of what we believe and with what we are identified (Matt. 10:32). If we are Baptist by belief, let us say so. It is only honest to admit what you are. Even a supermarket labels what is inside the cans. Baptist is a name the world gave us. We did not label ourselves.

What about non-denominational churches?

They are non-offenders. They try to attract people by having a broad base of beliefs. If the church believes the Bible, and truly wants to practice it, put Baptist on the sign.

What if a Christian never joins a church?

They will still go to heaven, but cannot be as effective on earth as they should be. It is hard to get people enthusiastic about attending a church, if you are not even a member. Every Christian needs to get in a Bible believing, missionary minded, soulwinning, separated Baptist church.

OPEN BIBLE POLICY

Every Baptist church should be able to site scriptures to back up any teaching proclaimed. Try to find another church that can do that.

DIFFERENCES IN BAPTIST CHURCHES

Historically all Baptist churches believe the same but not all are the same in practice. Therefore, it has been necessary for Baptists today to redefine what “brand” Baptist they are. The aggressive Baptist churches are now called Fundamental Independent Separated Soulwinning Non-charismatic Baptist Churches. A person ought to be able to look in the phone book under churches and just about know what he will get if he visits that church.

CONCLUSION

The name Baptist was given to Bible believers in the 1600’s. Before that, they were called Anabaptists because they re-baptized those who had been “baptized” as infants.

C. H. Spurgeon has said that given a new heart and an open Bible, people will become Baptists.

John Oncken became a Baptist by reading the New Testament.
Basics 18 13 Baptist Distinctives

I. N. Yohannon, a Persian, got saved under a Presbyterian missionary. He read the New Testament and came to New York to be baptized by a Baptist preacher.

Adoniram Judson became a Baptist after carefully studying the New Testament and was soon baptized by immersion.

Charles Spurgeon said he was reading the Bible one day and “found out” he was a Baptist.

A lady walked out of church when the service was over and commented, “I never wanted to be labeled, but tonight I found out I am a Baptist.”

DECISION

Do you appreciate your Baptist heritage and those who paid a price for their Christianity before you?

Are you currently attending a Baptist church? If not, why not?

Does the church you currently attend hold true to all of the Baptist Distinctives?

Are you presently a member of a Baptist Church that holds true to all the teachings of the Bible in belief and practice?