

# BAPTIST'S BELIEFS

-- Prepared by Dr. Edward Watke Jr.

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DEFINITION

When someone says, "*I am a member of a Baptist church,*" they are saying more than that they belong to some local church. It ought to mean that they have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, that their sins have been forgiven, and they have peace in their soul. It also means they have been obedient to the commands of Christ in following Him in scriptural baptism and uniting with His church. It also means they have found a new relationship and fellowship with other believers. Church membership should be taken very seriously and looked upon as sacred.

This organization is a local, organized body of baptized believers, equal in rank and privileges, administering affairs under the headship of Christ, united in the belief of what He taught, and covenanting together to do what He has commanded. A local church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest institution that the world has ever known. Christ established the church during His personal ministry and is its head. He promised that He would be with it through all the ages and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. We have the great privilege of being members of Baptist churches. They are churches with a glorious beginning, a blood written history, an illustrious present, and a future as bright as the promises of God. They are churches that have held true to God's word through persecution and tribulation and whose members have been numbered among the faithful. Truly, it is a privilege to be a member of a Baptist church.

Membership brings great opportunities: an opportunity for the best fellowship that can be obtained; an opportunity for Christian growth, development, and training through the various departments of the church organization; and an opportunity for Christian service through the programs of the church to the glory of and in the name of Christ.

Membership also conveys an inescapable obligation: an obligation to make the church and its work first in our lives; an obligation to use our time and talents for the glory of God; and an obligation to support the work with our presence, talents, influence and resources. Our church will never be any stronger than its membership. A membership of worldly, careless, negligent, stunted Christians will prevent a church from accomplishing much for the Lord. The need is for every member to be consecrated, trained, and enlisted in active service. Every member is under obligation to be the best member possible under the leading of the Lord.

We see then that membership is not only a high privilege but also an opportunity which demands great obligation. Too many members have not learned these things; their church means little to them, and they mean little to their church. This condition must be changed. Won't you help change it by making your membership count for Christ?

## BAPTIST HISTORY

By J. T. Odle

Baptist history begins with Christ and the apostles. Before you let that statement turn you off, please read on and see what we are truly saying. Other churches must date their origin with men in recent centuries, but the Baptist churches had their beginning during the ministry of Jesus when He formed His church out of the material prepared by John the Baptist. In this sketch we can only give a brief outline of Baptist beginning and history through the centuries. If you desire to make further study of this subject, there are many splendid volumes available. Ask your pastor about them.

## BAPTIST BEGINNING

1. Christ set up His church during His personal ministry here on earth. This was one of the things He came to do (Matthew 16:18). Before He left the earth, He said that the work He had come to do was finished (John 17:4, 19:30). Establishing His church was part of the work He had come to do; therefore, it was established. The first members of the church were the apostles (I Corinthians 12:28). This organization had the essentials of a church. It had the Gospel, an organization, a church roll, the ordinances, a commission, a treasurer, etc.

2. This church was a Baptist church, for Baptist churches today are like it in organization, doctrine, and practice. It was also organized out of material prepared by the first missionary Baptist preacher, John the Baptist (John 1:6, Matthew 3:13-17, Acts 1:22). A church organized out of people baptized by a Baptist preacher must be a Baptist church (I Corinthians 12:28). Furthermore, Baptists alone can trace their teachings and principles back through the ages to Christ.

3. Churches like this first church have continued to exist from that day to the present time. Christ promised that they would not cease to exist (Matthew 16:18). Those today who claim that they have restored primitive Christianity forget that the church that Jesus built would not have to be restored, for it would not cease to exist. If it did cease to exist for a time, then Christ's promise failed, and we know that is not true. Churches like the one Jesus built have existed in every age to the present hour.

Historians, of various denominations, admit that Baptists have existed through the ages since Christ. Let us notice the statements of just a few of them.

**Dr. John T. Christian (Baptist):** "I have no question in my own mind that there has been an historical succession of the Baptists from the days of Christ to the present time" (History of Baptists, p.5).

**Alexander Campbell (Founder of the Disciple, or Christian/ Church of Christ):** "The Baptists can trace their origin to Apostolic times and can produce unequivocal testimony of their existence in every century down to the present time" (Debate with walker).

"Hence it is, that the Baptist denomination in all ages and in all centuries has been as a body the constant asserters of the rights of man and liberty of conscience" (Baptism, p. 409).

**John C. Ripath (Methodist):** "I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 A.D.; though without a doubt, there were Baptists as all Christians were then Baptists." (Clarrel's Church Perpetuity, p. 59) *COMMENT: If all Christians were then Baptists, what kind of churches did they form? Baptist churches, of course.*

**Ypeig and Dermout (Dutch Reformed Church):** In 1819, the king of the Netherlands appointed these men to write a history of the Dutch Reformed church and to investigate the claims of the Dutch Baptists that they could trace their history back to Christ. These men wrote in their books, "We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists and in later times called Mennonites, were the original Waldenses who historically received the honor of that origin. On this account, the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community that has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all ages." (History of the Dutch Reformed Church, Vol. I, p. 148)

**Moshem (Lutheran):** "The first century was a history of the Baptist."

**Cardinal Hosius (Catholic - Spoken at Council of Trent in the year 1554):** "If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and cheerfulness which a man of any sect shows in suffering, then the opinions and persuasions of no sect can be truer or surer than those of the Anabaptist; since there have been none for these twelve hundred years past that have been more grievously punished." (Orchard's History of Baptists, p. 364)

Many more similar quotations could be given but these are enough to prove that historians, even of other denominations, admit that Baptists have existed since the apostolic days.

4. Baptist churches alone find their beginning with Christ. To be the Lord's Church, a church must have three things true concerning its beginning. It must have the right founder -- Christ (Matthew 16:18), the right place -- Palestine (where Christ lived), and the right time -- during Christ's ministry. Any church that cannot meet these three conditions cannot be the church that the Lord organized. Can any church meet them?

This period lasted until the Reformation and the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people, when the invention of printing and the revolt of many religious leaders against the Roman hierarchy brought a new day in world history.

During all this time of the rise and development of false doctrine and practices in the churches, there were scattered all over Europe, Asia, and Africa groups of dissenting churches which were not led astray by the heretics but remained true to the essential doctrines and truths of the New Testament. They were called Paulicians, Montanists, Novatians, Albigenses, Waldenses, and many other names. They were later called Catabaptists and finally Anabaptists. Later, the prefix "ana" was dropped, and they were just called Baptists. All catholic historians call the named sects Anabaptists. They were mercilessly persecuted through the centuries until after the Reformation, and some persecution against them continued almost to modern times. In some sections of the world, the persecution of Baptists continues to this hour. Though these groups did not carry the name Baptist, they did hold to certain Baptist tenets-- Separation of church and state, spiritual democracy, salvation by grace apart from sacraments, believer's baptism, and immersion as the mode of baptism. Churches holding these truths must be classed with New Testament churches and with Baptists.

When the Reformation came, these groups emerged in every land and began a growth that was rapid and continuous in spite of continued persecution by even the

Reformers. They were among the first comers to America and had a great part in the settlement of this new world. Even here, they were persecuted for many years but finally prevailed in their stand for religious freedom. Today, the Baptists constitute the largest evangelical group in the world with churches in almost every nation around the world.

Baptists have contributed many things to the world's progress. Perhaps their greatest contribution is religious freedom for which they fought through the centuries and which was established in America through their influence and effort. They were also the beginners of the modern mission movement with William Carey as the first missionary of modern times. The first Sunday School for Bible teaching was started in a Baptist church in London, and the first of the great Bible societies was started through the influence of English Baptists. These and many other things have been contributed by Baptist Churches.

The Baptist past is glorious. The Baptist future is assured, for the Lord has promised that His church will be here until the "end of the world." Inspired by the unflinching devotion of our forbearers and assured of victory by the promises of God, let us as Baptists, in this day of religious compromise and retreat, hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints and with renewed fervor lift up the banner of Him who said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).