
Is There Really A Difference In Being A Baptist?

by

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Someone once asked why we do not join together with other faiths in some common cause. There is a good reason. Baptists differ from them in doctrine and practice. This is not to cast doubt upon their sincerity or salvation. Our job is not to inter-mingle with other churches but to maintain the purity and defense of the faith that was once delivered unto the saints. Some find this to be an arrogant position to take. We do not but find it to be a biblically based position. If we did not disagree practically or doctrinally we should and would join with others. Most of the time we find that "common cause" to be a common error and a call to unite on the lowest common denominator among differing brethren. With a call to unite so prevalent among so many today why do Baptists stand opposed to this unity? Why do we feel we have a right, and even a calling, to stand separate from other faiths? I agree with Dr. J. L. McCurry who stated *"No religious denomination has a moral right to a separate existence unless it differs essentially from others. Nothing short of the truth of revelation, the authoritative force of God's word, rising above passion or prejudice can justify a distinct organization."* Baptists do indeed differ in constitution, membership, ordinances, and other doctrines authorized by the word of God and once delivered unto the saints. We cannot join with those who stand in direct opposition to what we understand are the clear teachings of God's word. What makes Baptists different from other denominations? What identifies us as Baptists? The following are but a few of the areas in which we see a primary difference and identifying marks. These points are not intended to be exhaustive dissertations on each subject but points of declaration of our biblical persuasions. They are also not intended to be the only definitive marks of Baptists for they are many in number and nature.

Baptists Believe Baptism is by Immersion only!

The only biblical method of administering the ordinance of baptism is by immersion. The actual Greek word found throughout the New Testament is "baptizo." It literally means to immerse or to dip. This is the only baptism practiced by John and by Christ (yes we know Christ himself did not baptize) and his disciples. They did not immerse their fingers. They did not dip a cup into the water. They immersed or dipped the individual into the water fully. If the meaning the word were to sprinkle we would

find the Greek word "rhantizo" used in its place. If God intended us to pour water he would have used the word "ekcheo." These are not the words God used and it clearly teaches us that to sprinkle an individual, or pour water upon them, and call it baptism is following man's doctrine and not God's. To accept a practice of sprinkling or pouring would be in direct violation of the command of God (Matthew 28:19-20). Anyone who is sprinkled or has water poured upon them is not baptized. Violate the mode of baptism and you have violated the biblical validity of baptism.

Baptists Believe in a Suitable Subject for Baptism!

The only suitable subjects for baptism are those who have truly been born again. Baptism does not save but declares the subject's faith in God's provided salvation. Anyone who has not exercised saving faith in Christ or has not conscientiously exercised faith in Christ is an unsuitable and unbiblical subject for baptism. How many denominations continue to practice the unbiblical method of baptizing infants? There are many and the reason they do this is because they believe in baptismal regeneration. They may call it "washing away of original sin" but it is still heresy. Infants cannot express faith in Christ and you cannot find one infant being baptized in the New Testament. The reformers stopped short in their reformation. They sought freedom from the hierarchy of the Catholic church but not from its unscriptural practices. Baptists still ask the same question we find in Phillip asking in Acts 8:36-37 *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? (37) And Philip said, **If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.** And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* A qualified confession of faith by the subject must precede the act of baptism.

Baptists Believe in a Proper Administrator of Baptism!

While many may agree with us on the previous two points it is here the difference begins to be made clear. The proper administrator of baptism is a scriptural New Testament Baptist church. Elders or pastors are not the administrators of baptism. They are the agents acting in the place of the church by their authority. The authority to baptize was not given to individuals but to the church Christ organized Himself and then left with a commission before his ascent into heaven. The authority does not lie in just any church. The authority was given to one church which then passed it on to another, and then another, until we find it existing today in many qualified churches. While I may know what it takes, and have all the information to make someone a citizen of the United States I am not an authorized agent to act on behalf of the government of the United States of America. No matter how sincere I or the individual desiring to become a citizen may be, whatever we do will not qualify them as a citizen. The reformers again fell short in seeking out a qualified agent with the authority to baptize. There were Baptists to whom they should have gone to submit to scriptural baptism. Instead they chose to retain

the link to Catholicism and persecute our Baptist forefathers because of their stand on the subject of baptism.

Baptists Believe in a Proper Design in Baptism!

Baptism that has a design of washing away sin is unscriptural and nothing short of heresy. Baptism that has a design of bringing the Holy Spirit into one's life is unscriptural and a complete heresy. Baptism that has any other design than the one designated in the New Testament is extra-scriptural and unbiblical. The Bible clearly states that baptism is a declaration of one's personal faith that has already been exercised in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It declares to all that we have (past tense) been united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. It also qualifies us to be scriptural candidates for membership in a local New Testament church. It is sad to see how many so-called "churches" seem to despise the ordinance of baptism.

Baptists Believe in Proper Candidates for Church Membership!

The only biblical candidates for church membership are those who have been regenerated and scripturally baptized. To receive an unregenerate individual into the fellowship of a local church would destroy the distinction between the world and the church. To receive an unbaptized individual into the fellowship of a local church violates the order we find throughout the New Testament. Look at Acts 2:41, *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* They believed then they were baptized and then they were added unto the church that was at Jerusalem. While some churches may look at your ability to tithe, your personal talents, or your personal background, these are not the qualifications God intended us to abide by. The churches of the New Testament were filled with individuals whose former lives were vile and surely objectionable. The difference is that this was their former life. They were no longer children of disobedience. They no longer walked according to the lust of the flesh. Those added to local churches were born again, baptized believers. Nothing less or more should be accepted as a biblical standard.

Baptists Believe in Closed Communion!

The Lord's Supper was instituted during the Lord's personal ministry with the church he had organized. It is a perpetual church ordinance to be observed by a local New Testament church until Christ comes again. Baptists believe it to be a church ordinance. Baptists believe a church to be a local and visible body of baptized believers who have covenanted together to obey the great commission. They do not believe the church is some universal and invisible body made up of all the regenerate. We do not confuse the family of God with the church of God. Since the church is a local visible body it is they who are to observe and keep the ordinance of

the Lord's supper. Some people find it offensive that we do not include visitors to observe the Lord's Supper with us. We find it much more offensive to be called upon to violate such a serious command. It is odd how these same folks do not find it offensive when we do not invite them to vote in our business meetings.

Baptists Believe in a Local Church Government!

Each church is a separate, autonomous or self-governing body. We are not part of some larger denomination. Each church is entirely independent of all other churches, persons, and bodies of men. It is to be governed by its members alone guided by its one and only head, Jesus Christ. Churches governed by popes, synods, presbyteries, conferences, associations, fellowships, and even boards are not constituted after the model we have been given in the Bible. Our only rule of faith and practice is the Bible. The church is to be free from all civil government. Baptists have always protested against the union of church and state but have equally protested against the state's invasion into our affairs. We do not and will not seek governmental approval to exist since that right has been clearly granted by Almighty God.

Baptists Believe in only Two Church Officers!

The only officers given to a New Testament church is that of deacon and pastor. The office of pastor is also called elder and/or bishop. The deacon is a servant of the church and not a ruling or guiding body within a church. They were set aside to free the apostles for study and prayer not for the purpose of conducting the business of the church. The elder, bishop, pastor, or overseer is not to be a dictator but a spiritual caretaker under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to feed the flock over which he has been made an overseer.

Baptists Believe in the Sovereign Rule of God's Word!

We hold that the Bible is supreme, sufficient, exclusive, and absolute in all matters of faith and practice. This appears to be a clear doctrine that distinguishes us from most all other faiths. Man has no authority to add to, or subtract from, divine revelation. This means we look to the Bible to be our guide in all matters of conscience and religion. The soul of a Baptist church is its submission and conformity to the New Testament. The church is not a legislative body but is ordained to carry out the laws set in order that are within the divine revelation of God's word.

Baptists Believe in Soul Liberty!

Baptists have long held to the fact that each man and woman has the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of his or her heart. If each human soul is alone responsible to God for the discharge of

it's biblical duties then no human authority has a right to come between that soul and its God. Any interference with the faith and practice designated by God is a direct violation of the sacred and biblical right and is not to be tolerated. One American historian wrote, "freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of Baptists." Read back through history and you will find all other denominations often sought to destroy this principle while Baptists alone have held it in high esteem. What does your church believe? Does it make a difference what we believe? We believe it does and therefore we are Baptist by conviction. What are your convictions?