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GATE OF HEAVEN.
(GEN 28:17)

Baptist Beliefs & Practices

VBS 2010..

A Biblical Study of Baptist 'Distinctives'

“Dear God, we come together today to learn about another branch of the Christian family tree, Baptist. We ask you to keep us mindful that our aim is not to critique the Baptist faith tradition but to learn from it so that our own faith might be enriched. Help us through our study and discussion to become more authentic and effective disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ. We affirm that all who call upon His name are members of one body, one faith. May we be united in spirit, in love and in service so that your kingdom work may be accomplished in our homes, communities and world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.”

Pastor Charles L. King, Jr.
First Baptist Church West College Hill
July 14, 2010

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WEST COLLEGE HILL

“REACHING THE WORLD, WITHOUT
SACRIFICING THE MESSAGE!”

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THOUGHT:

As Christians we are to... *'be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.'*

1 Peter 3:15-17

INTRODUCTION:

As we begin this study and discussion, please keep in mind that this is only a synopsis as to what Baptists have believed down through the centuries. These 'distinctives' (we'll call them) within the denomination have been practiced by groups of believers which can be traced back to the time of Jesus Christ and His apostles. These groups were not always called "Baptist," nevertheless the practice of these 'distinctives' have never changed. Concerning Bible doctrine, it is imperative that we know our heritage, as it gives a sense of humility and holy boldness to know that present day New Testament Baptist churches come from an unbroken line of believers who have earnestly contended "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3).

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INTRODUCTION ~ CONT:

Baptist distinctives are major fundamental beliefs and principles that have distinguished Baptists apart from any other religious body down through the centuries—hence the term: “Baptist distinctives.” **These distinctives are not a creed or confession of faith.**

Baptists have no set written body of beliefs or principles, per se, that are accepted universally among all Baptists. Studies have shown however that it was never intended for a ‘Baptist’ to think of the name Baptist in any sectarian sense as having some merit in itself but rather equates it with New Testament truth, with a New Testament position.

It should be noted that the name **Baptist** came about in the 14th century with the persecution of the “Anabaptists” or “Re-baptizers.” This was a name given to them by proponents of the Roman Church. Since the Roman Church was predominant throughout Europe, infant Baptism was a common practice. Therefore when these New Testament believers began to immerse only those who had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, the “religious world” protested. The Roman Church could not understand why these people were being baptized again. Therefore they were given the name, “Anabaptists.”

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SUMMARY OF BRIEF HISTORY:

Many Baptists trace their denomination's origins to the early church, a period when the church consisted of committed believers who were baptized upon confession of faith as adults. Baptist beginnings have also been traced to medieval sects who protested against prevailing baptismal theory and practice, and to the Anabaptists of the Continental Reformation, especially in Zurich.

The Anabaptists (spiritual ancestors of the Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites) share emphasized believer's baptism and religious freedom and were probably influential in the development of Baptist characteristics. However, some Anabaptists differed from the Baptists on many other issues such as pacifism and the communal sharing of material goods.

The origins of the Baptists are most commonly traced to John Smyth and the Separatists. In 1609, John Smyth, led a group of separatists to the Netherlands to start the General Baptist Church with an Arminian theology. In 1616, Henry Jacob led a group of Puritans in England with a Calvinist theology to form a congregational church that would eventually become the Particular Baptists in 1638 under John Spilsbury.

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SUMMARY OF BRIEF HISTORY ~

CONT:

Both groups had members who sailed to America as pilgrims to avoid religious persecution in England and Europe and who started Baptist churches in the early colonies. The Particular and General Baptists would disagree over Arminianism and Calvinism until the formation of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in the 1800s under Andrew Fuller and William Carey for the purpose of missions.

Baptist Churches were established in the American colonies from the mid-17th century. In 1639, Roger Williams founded a church on Baptist principles in Providence, Rhode Island, and this is usually regarded as the beginning of American Baptist history. Also established in the 17th century was a small group known as the Seventh Day Baptists, who required rest and worship on Saturday based on the fourth commandment. In the 18th century, many of the General Baptist Churches in England were influenced by the Unitarians and ultimately ceased to insist on believer's baptism. However, Dan Taylor (1738-1816) formed a "New Connection" in 1770 that maintained Baptist principles and later united with the Baptist mainstream.

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SUMMARY OF BRIEF HISTORY ~

CONT:

The Baptist Missionary Society was founded by Particular Baptists in 1792, which would have a profound impact on the future of the Baptists. The Baptist revival in England inspired the Baptist Churches of America, leading to widespread missionary zeal and growth of the movement across America as the frontier extended. The Baptists became the largest religious group in many of the southern states; today, two-thirds of the members of Black Churches of the USA are Baptists.

In the 19th century, Baptist churches continued their rapid growth, and from their ranks came such great preachers as Charles Spurgeon, Robert Hall, Alexander Maclaren and John Clifford. In Britain, the Baptist Union was formed in 1813. Notable in its development was J.H. Shakespeare, who was secretary for over 25 years (1898-1924). The Baptist movement in Scotland was furthered by Archibald McLean (1733-1812), who strongly emphasized emulating the New Testament pattern in doctrine and practice. The "Scotch Baptists" were one of the sources of the Disciples of Christ movement.

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SUMMARY OF BRIEF HISTORY ~

CONT:

Baptists are one of the largest Protestant Free Church denominations. At the turn of the 21st century, there were about 43 million Baptists worldwide with about 33 million of those in the United States and 216,000 in Britain. There are over 850,000 Baptists in South America and 230,000 in Central America and the Caribbean.

As has been indicated by the name, *the primary Baptist distinctive is their practice of believer's baptism and corresponding rejection of infant baptism. Most Baptists are evangelical in doctrine, but Baptist beliefs can vary due to the congregational governance system that gives autonomy to individual local Baptist churches. Historically, Baptists have played a key role in encouraging religious freedom and separation of church and state.*

In the United States, the two largest Baptist organizations are the Southern Baptist Churches (SBC) and American Baptist Churches (ABC), with the former being the more conservative branch. Notable Baptists have included Martin Luther King, Jr., Charles Spurgeon, John Bunyan and Billy Graham.

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If someone were to ask you,
“What are some major fundamental beliefs
and practices within the Baptist faith,”
would you be able to answer them?



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For practical and expedient purposes, we will use the acrostic **BAPTIST**, in order to more readily define and remember each distinctive?

- B** - **Bible** The only rule for faith and practice
- A** - **Autonomy** of each local church
- P** - **Priesthood** of the believer
- T** - **Two Ordinances** for the local church (Believer's Baptism & Communion)
- I** - **Individual** soul liberty and responsibility
- S** - **Seperation** of Church and State
- T** - **Two Offices of the local Church** (Pastor and Deacon)

I. BIBLE – THE ONLY RULE FOR FAITH AND PRACTICE

(2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; Mark 7:7-9; Acts 17:11)

“The Bible is the Divine Revelation given of God to man, and is the complete and infallible guide and standard of authority in all matters of religion and morals; whatever it teaches is to be believed, and what ever it commands is to be obeyed; whatever it commands is to be accepted as both right and useful; whatever it condemns is to be avoided as both wrong and hurtful; but what it neither commands nor teaches is not to be imposed on the conscience as of religious obligation.”

This distinctive is placed first as the foundation because without it all the other distinctives would fall. Baptists do not use any other book, teaching or creed as their authority. We believe that God’s written Word is the only cornerstone by which those that are saved can firmly stand upon. It is a spiritual book that can only be understood by those with spiritual eyes, and the only way to obtain these spiritual eyes is through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptists believe that every area of life needs to be subject to the written Word of God. The Bible is the only source for authority and that which is not authorized in God’s Word is heresy.

“Because the Bible has never been outgrown as the one standard, and cannot be ‘creedified’ in brief; the Baptist holds the substitution of any authoritative creed as the first step in apostasy.

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II. AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

(Acts 13:1-3; Acts 15: 22-28; Matthew 22:17-21)

This distinctive means that every local New Testament church has the privilege to be in total control of itself. In the autonomous form of church government, the system of authority rests in an independent, indigenous, self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing local church. This Baptist distinctive distinguishes itself from two other forms of church government, the Episcopalian, and Presbyterian.

The Episcopalian form of church government places its authority in a system of priests and bishops in an ascending scale. For example, in the Roman Church, the ultimate authority rests in the supreme pontiff, the pope.

The Presbyterian form of church government places its authority in a representative group called preaching and ruling elders.

In this way delegated authority finds its final authority in the highest group. For this process of delegated authority rises in an ascending order from the local church session to the presbytery until it finally rests in the General Assembly which is natural.

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II. AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH ~ CONT.

(Acts 13:1-3; Acts 15: 22-28; Matthew 22:15-21)

The Autonomous form of church government is the only one of the three forms mentioned which is base upon Scriptural principles. The first scriptural principle is: the individual's ability to know the will of God. This will be further explained in the Baptist distinctive, the priesthood of the believer.

The second scriptural principle that local church autonomy is based is the responsibility of each local church, as a whole, to carry out God's will based on the foundation that its members know God's will. In Matthew 18:15-17 we read where instruction is given to the church as a whole.

“15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 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 an heathen man and a publican.”

Just as each New Testament church is not subject to other churches or religious groups, they also are not to be in subject to the state. In other words, the state should not impose any laws upon the church that would cause the church to violate Scriptural principles.

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III. PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

(Eph. 6:9; Col 3:25; I Pet 2:5,9; I John 1:7,9; 2 Cor. 5:10-21; Rom 8:16-17)

This distinctive is founded upon the Scriptural principles that God is no respecter of persons. Romans 2:11 “For there is no respect of persons with God.” Unlike the Old Testament, where priestly functions were restricted to the tribe of Levi, the New Testament teaches that every believer is a priest before God. Therefore, each believer has the blessed privilege of going directly to God at any time, under any circumstance and bring his petition through Jesus Christ to God.

Since the Bible teaches that each believer-priest is equal with one another, there is no need for divisional terms, titles or garb. For example, the Scripture does not give a pastor (or father, to use a catholic term) the authority to forgive sin. Each believer can act upon the promise in I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We make this confession to God. In 1 Pet 2:5,9 the term holy priesthood refers to New Testament believers. We are holy in the sense that our sins have been forgiven, Hebrews 10:1-2 “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.”

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III. PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER ~ CONT.

(Eph. 6:9; Col 3:25; I Pet 2:5,9; I John 1:7,9; 2 Cor. 5:10-21; Rom 8:16-17)

In the Old Testament only the high priest dared to enter the presence of God, and then only once a year! As New Testament believers we have access to God's presence at any time. The term royal priesthood, also refers to New Testament believers. We are royal in the sense that we are called to be personal representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, as a believer-priest, we have a tremendous responsibility placed upon us, and that is; each believer has the privilege to think as he will and that each man is totally responsible to God. The Bible teaches that no person, institution, organization or convention has the authority to tell a person what to believe.

Along with this complete total freedom comes the accountability of such a privilege. Remember, our responsibility is to God alone and no one else! A believer may put himself under the authority of something else (such as a church) but he is still responsible to God for the freedom given him by Christ.

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IV. TWO ORDINANCES: BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

(2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; Mark 7:7-9; Acts 17:11)

The Scriptures teach that the Lord prescribed immersion and the Lord's Supper to be carried on as ordinances by the New Testament church.

As Bible believing Baptists find themselves in disagreement with other churches in relation to the topic of baptism, it would be helpful to summarize the New Testament position with the following four maxims:

1. Only believers are to be baptized. This excludes anyone who is an unbeliever (even babies, who neither believe nor disbelieve). (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-16) 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? 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."

2. Baptism is to be by immersion rather than by pouring or sprinkling. There are two main arguments for immersion. (1) The English word baptize has been transliteration of the Greek word baptizein. In order to render a proper translation we have to use the word immerse. (2) There are many passages that support the immersion translation. Matthew 3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: (Acts 8:37-38)

3. Baptism is not a step to salvation but it is a testimony that one has already received Christ Jesus as Savior. Baptism is a beautiful picture of salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12)

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IV. TWO ORDINANCES: BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER ~ CONT.

4. Believer's baptism by immersion is a requisite to church membership.

Throughout the book of Acts we find the order of salvation, baptism, and church membership. (Acts 2:41; Matt. 16:25-33; Acts 8:37-28)

In practicing these four maxims, Baptists not only preserve purity in their local churches, but they honor the Lord Jesus Christ by respecting completely His Great Commission. Matthew 28:19-20 "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..."

The second ordinance given to the church is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (notice that it's not a breakfast, or lunch). Just as baptism symbolizes spiritual birth in being raised to walk in newness of life, the Lord's Supper symbolizes the nourishment and support of that new life by union with Christ in His death. (1 Corinthians 11:24)

The Lord's Supper is only to be taken by obedient Christians. That means any Christian who has been baptized (immersed), is a member of a New Testament church, and who has searched his own heart to make sure all known sin is confessed. (1 Corinthians 11:28-31) Baptists do not believe in the Roman Catholic view of "transubstantiation" which claims that the Catholic priests "transform" the bread and cup into the literal body and blood of Christ.

Baptists also do not believe in the Lutherans view of "consubstantiation" which claims the "real presence" of the Lord in a "special way."

The Baptist position concerning the Lord's Supper is that it is a memorial table that pictures the body and blood of Jesus and serves only as a reminder of His death, burial, and resurrection for us. (1 Corinthians 11:25-26) These ordinances are not "options" that can be ignored. If we want to be obedient to the Lord then we must be baptized by immersion, members of a New Testament church, and examining ourselves by partaking of the Lord's Supper.

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V. INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

This distinctive is based upon the belief that every man is accountable to the teachings of God's Word in all religious matter; both in judgment and decision. Baptists believe that each man has the privilege to think as he will and that he is totally responsible to God.

This distinctive teaches that no person, institution, organization or convention has the authority to tell a person what to believe. But keep in mind that along with complete and total freedom comes the responsibility of such a privilege. That responsibility is to God and God alone. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29.

Someday as believers, we will answer to God for our actions, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10.

God has also commanded that we not be a stumbling block to others. Our lifestyle does affect others. (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:29-33; Gal. 5:1,13; 1 Pet 2:16)

Yes, the believer has freedom in Christ, but what an awesome responsibility he has knowing that someday he will give an account to God as to how he used his soul liberty in regards to salvation, to the scriptures, to his daily life and in every area of life.

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VI. SEPARATION (Church and State)

As Baptists we believe in a separation of church and state.

Baptists believe that Christ taught in Mark 12:17 that there should be separation between the church and the state. “And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him.”

Baptists believe that the state ought to stay out of the affairs of the church and vice versa, they not believe in a state church, state baptist, or state ordinances, when it comes to spiritual or religious matters. Even though we believe in the separation of the church and state, this should not construed as the elimination of God from the state as the A.C.L.U. is proposing. In order to avert the ruination of our nation, God must never leave the minds of the government.

As New Testament believers, we are to stay as far away from the world and its standards as possible. Likewise we to stay as close to Christ and His Word as possible. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5.

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VII. TWO OFFICES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

This Baptist distinctive can be scripturally supported after careful reading of the New Testament. Philippians 1:1 says, Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. In order to properly understand these two offices, let's go to the Scripture.

1. THE PASTOR

The pastor's qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Also in Titus 1:5-13 Throughout the New Testament there are various titles for the pastor. They are:

1. Pastor or shepherd of the Flock; And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; Ephesians 4:11 (**Greek word = poimein**).

2. Bishop or overseer of the working force; Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Philippians 1:1 (**Greek word = episcopus**).

3. Elder or leader in a business session; And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. Acts 20:17 (**Greek word = presbuteros**).

4. Preacher – a self explanatory term; (**Greek word = kerrusso**; to be a herald, always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed). Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity. 1 Timothy 2:7

Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.

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5. Teacher – an instructor of the Word of God; And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; Ephesians 4:11

6. Angel and Star – a messenger of the Lord; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Revelation 1:20

These various New Testament titles reflect the diverse responsibilities of the “Pastor.” The pastor is to LEAD, FEED, GUARD AND GUIDE the local church for one day he will give and account God for his ministry, Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17

2. DEACON

The qualifications for deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 And also in Act 6:1-4

The function of a deacon is that of a servant or one who ministers. Deacons should not run the church nor should they dictate over the pastor. The Bible nowhere suggests that the deacon is to be a “watch-dog” over the Pastor to keep him in line. Therefore they are to serve the congregation under the leadership of the pastor.

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CONCLUSION:

Is Jesus Christ a member of the Baptist Church, the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopal, the Adventists, the Mormons Methodists, and all of the different churches?

Is He a member of all of them?

When God gave His law by Moses to Israel, He made no provision for the division of His people into sects and parties. But by the time Jesus came into the world, division was well entrenched. There were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and doubtless others. It was assumed that all who were serious about religion would be associated with one of these, but to which of these parties did Jesus belong? Of course, He belonged to none of them. He maintained His independent, non-sectarian relationship with God to the very end. For this reason, they all opposed Him.

Jesus did not provide for His followers to be divided into sects and parties. Rather He desired that they might be united. After praying for His apostles, He then prayed that all His disciples may be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:20-21).

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CONCLUSION ~ CONT:

Through the years, however, divisions have developed and has been perpetuated by the writing of creeds and the formation of denominational organizations. The result is that now among professed followers of Jesus there are many bodies (denominations), many faiths (creeds), and many baptisms.

How different the present situation from the unity described in the New Testament. The apostle declared, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Jesus did not undertake to convene a worldwide conference or start a universal movement designed to effect a merger of Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. into one super sect. Neither did He pray that His disciples might be united into one super denomination. He prayed rather that individual believers might be united in Himself and in the Father. His teaching was designed to turn individuals from the doctrines and traditions of men to the simple word of God.

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WHEW ~ ANY QUESTIONS?



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CHRIST
CENTERED

WORD
FOCUSED

MINISTRY
MINDED



THIS IS NONE
OTHER THAN
THE
HOUSE OF GOD,
THIS IS
THE
GATE OF HEAVEN.
(GEN 28:17)