

THE PEOPLE CALLED BAPTISTS

As we think of the goodness of God in guiding and blessing us through the years, we as Baptists can say with David, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage." Psalms 16:6. Without pride or boasting, but with joy and certainty Baptists trace their lineage back to an ancient and honorable beginning—during the personal ministry of Jesus Christ on this earth. Through the centuries they have professed love for and loyalty to the principles and teachings which Christ gave to the apostolic group and are recorded in the New Testament. They have sought to track Christ's model of life, teaching, doctrine, method, and spirit as found in the New Testament. For more than nineteen hundred years they have readily accepted and faithfully proclaimed Christ's supernatural birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, personal intercession, and visible return.

We must not be indifferent to the glorious heritage of the vital principles and the mighty names that have come down to us. It is needful for us to look back to the rock from whence we are hewn, and to learn more about our origin, our history, and our doctrine. This exercise will help us to appreciate more fully our heritage and give us the courage to stand more firmly in these days of doctrinal uncertainty.

Through these more than nineteen centuries Baptists have been characterized by:

I. Their Unflinching Loyalty and Unwavering Devotion to the Scriptures.

Great things have always been done by those who have believed something. We cannot have respect for or sympathy with those who say, "It makes no difference what you believe, just so you are sincere." Our beliefs determine what we are and what we do.

Those who believe something must have a reason for their beliefs. There must be some standard of authority in religion, even though the tendency of many in this age is to disregard all authority. There are three sources of authority for the beliefs of people:

- (1) A church.
- (2) Human reason.
- (3) The Bible.

Baptists accept the Bible instead of any other authority. It is the best standard. It is a sufficient standard. It is an authoritative standard. As the final authority on all questions of faith and conduct, it is not subject to addition or modification of any kind. It is an inspired standard. By inspiration we mean the conscious in-breathing of God which qualified the men to utter the truths which God wanted all men to receive. Truly the Bible is wonderful in the truth it proclaims, in the treasures it contains, in the triumphs it reveals, and in the trust it invites.

Real Baptists have always believed and still believe:

1. That the Bible is the inspired Word of God.
2. That the Bible is the only authoritative rule of faith and practice. God's Word is our guide in all religious matters.
3. That the Bible is used as a means to the salvation of men.
"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The preached Word used of the Holy Spirit brings conviction which results in repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, or salvation.

4. That the Bible should be an open book to be read, interpreted, believed, and obeyed by all alike.
5. That the Bible should have the widest possible circulation in the native language of all the people.
6. That the Bible should be preached in all the world.
7. That any departure from the teachings of the Bible is fraught with untold evil. Nobody has any right to add to or to take from the teachings of God's Word.

II. Their Belief in the Competence of the Individual Soul to Deal With God By and For Itself.

God's Word emphasizes the worth of the individual and the dignity of human personality. God deals with men as individuals. This doctrine of the individual relationship of the soul to God has always and everywhere been insisted upon by Baptists. It is something for which to thank profoundly our Baptist progenitors, and something to cherish tenaciously for those who are to come after us.

1. The individual soul is competent to deal with God for itself.
2. The individual soul is under an imperative duty to deal with God for itself.
3. The individual soul has the inalienable right to deal with God for itself. No one has any right to rob another of this gracious privilege.
4. Any infringement upon this privilege, or any violation of this principle of the competency of the soul is wrong in the sight of God and of correctly informed men. This principle eliminates all proxies in religion, and everything that would come between the soul and God. Individualism must prevail if man is to be what God wants him to be. The soul of each individual is competent under God and not apart from Him or the means which He has provided.
 - (1) Every one must repent for himself.
 - (2) Every one must exercise faith for himself.
 - (3) Every one must be baptized for himself.
 - (4) Every one must worship for himself.
 - (5) Every one must work for himself.
 - (6) Every one must die for himself.
 - (7) Every one must give an account for himself.

III. Their Conviction That Salvation is By Grace Through Faith Plus Nothing.

Salvation is a comprehensive term. There is salvation from the past, in the present, and for the future. There is salvation from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the presence of sin. It is the greatest blessing that is offered to man.

God's Word deals with man as a sinner and reminds him that he needs salvation. It plainly teaches the absolute impossibility of any man saving himself. Man's only hope of salvation is in Jesus Christ Who was "manifested to take away sin."

Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. In the experience of salvation, God's part is "by grace," and man's part is "through faith." Some think that salvation is by grace through faith plus baptism, or plus joining the church, or plus something else. But, according to the Bible, it is by grace through faith plus nothing. Salvation is entirely God's gift to us. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Man must accept it as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it.

"Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

IV. Their Contention That The Church is a Divine Institution.

1. The origin of it.

- (1) Founded at the right time--during the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (2) Founded in the right place--Palestine.
- (3) Founded by the right Person--Christ.
- (4) Founded out of the right material--saved people, who had been baptized in obedience to the command of Christ, and who were willing to proclaim His gospel and to carry on His work in the world.

A New Testament church is a congregation of regenerated, scripturally baptized believers, associated together for fellowship, the ministry of the Word, worship, and the carrying of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

2. The ordinances of it.

(1) Baptism.

Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon his profession of faith in Him as Saviour and Lord, upon the authority of a New Testament church, and in obedience to the command of our Lord. Baptism was submitted to by Christ, commanded by Christ, practiced by the Apostles, and intended for all believers. Christ's baptism was intended to be the example for all who might come into the membership of one of His churches. His baptism had four characteristics:

- a. He was baptized as God's child.
"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
- b. He was baptized by God's man.
"There was a man sent from God."
- c. He was baptized in God's way.
"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water."
- d. He was baptized for God's purpose.
"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Thus" means in this manner. If we love Christ we will want to obey Him.

Certain things are necessary to scriptural baptism:

- a. A proper subject--a believer in Christ.
- b. A proper authority--a New Testament Church.
Baptism is not worth any more than the authority behind it.
- c. A proper administrator--one authorized by a New Testament Church.
Baptism is not scriptural unless it is administered by one who is properly authorized to baptize.

- d. A proper motive—obedience to Christ and never with any idea that it has any saving efficacy.
- e. A proper form—burial in water and rising from the watery grave.
- f. A proper formula—"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

When so-called Baptists receive alien immersion, what do they do?

- a. They do that for which there is no scriptural example..
- b. They throw aside the time-honored stand of Baptists down through the centuries.
- c. They place themselves in the position of being just another sect, thus denying their divine origin.
- d. They disregard the real meaning of baptism, for they accepted the immersion of those who baptize to help save.

(2) The Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance which is to be observed by and in His churches at stated intervals as determined by each individual church, inasmuch as the scriptures do not specify how often it is to be observed. It is a memorial of the death of Christ for our sins. The pre-requisites to the proper observance of the Lord's Supper are: regeneration, scriptural baptism, church membership, and an orderly walk. It is designed to show forth the Lord's death until He comes again. It is never a means of showing our fellowship with other Christians. Since Jesus did not invite His mother to partake of the Lord's Supper on the occasion of its institution, what right does anyone have to complain if some of their loved ones cannot be invited to the Supper when they observe it?

3. The officers of it.

(1) Bishops, Elders or Pastors.

The Greek word which is translated "bishop," "elder," or "pastor," means an overseer. To the extent that a pastor is charged with the supervision of a church, he is a bishop. He is just a ministering leader, without control in the sense of commanding and enforcing obedience.

(2) Deacons.

Deacons are simply ministering servants in the church. They are not to rule the policies or regulate the affairs of the church.

4. The objectives of it.

(1) Evangelism.

"Make disciples of all the nations."

(2) Education.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

(3) Enlistment.

Church members need to be enlisted in real loyalty to Christ and to His church. It is the duty of every member to support His church with his presence, his prayers, and his purse. One proves his attitude toward Christ by the way in which he supports the church of which he is a member.

V. Their Belief in Absolute Religious Liberty for All Men.

There is a vast difference between toleration and liberty. Toleration means allowing a man to do what he will in the matter of religion with the understanding that you have the power to stop him when you will. Liberty means that in the matter of religion a man may do as he will, regardless of the desires or power of others to say when he shall or shall not, and what he shall or shall not do. The supreme contribution of America to the rest of the world is that of religious liberty. And historic justice compells me to say that it was pre-eminently a Baptist contribution. The great historian, Mr. Bancroft, said, "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of Baptists." John Locke said, "The Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty." Baptists have ever been unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil.

Let us, who bear the name of Baptists, properly appreciate our heritage, earnestly guard it, enlarge it, and share it with the world. The needs of the world, the command of Christ, and our own spiritual welfare impel us to share our heritage with the world.