

OUR DISTINCTIVE BAPTIST HERITAGE

"The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage."
Psalm 16:6.

A heritage is that which passes from one to another. We must not be indifferent to the heritage of vital principles that have come down to us. As we think of the goodness of God in guiding and blessing Baptists through the years, we can say with David, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage."

It is needful for us to look back to the rock from whence we were hewn, and to learn more about our origin, history and doctrines. 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.

Among the distinctive characteristics of real Baptists are the following:

I. Their Unflinching Loyalty And Unswerving Devotion To The Scriptures.

Great things have been done by Baptists because they have believed something. The world has respect for those who believe something and stand for their convictions. It is exceedingly important that we believe right because our beliefs determine what we are and what we do.

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 religious beliefs of people: human reason, a church and the Bible. Baptists accept the Bible instead of any other authority. Real Baptists have always believed and still believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only authoritative rule of faith and practice, is used as a means to the salvation of men, is an open book to be read, interpreted, believed and obeyed by all alike, should have the widest possible circulation in the native language of all people, should be preached in all the world, and that any departure from its teachings is fraught with untold evil.

II. Their Belief In The Competence Of The Individual Soul To Deal With God By And For Itself.

By the competency of the soul we mean the ability of the individual to deal directly with God. This ability, or competency, grows out of the fact that man was created in the image of God. Made in the likeness of God, man possesses intelligence, emotion and will. Baptists differ from all other groups in their doctrine of the competency of the individual soul. Dr. E. Y. Mullins said, "All men have an equal right to direct access to God." Dr. W. R. White said, "The individual not only must act for himself; he is the only one who can. God has made him competent." Dr. J. B. Lawrence said, "The Baptist distinctive is the belief that every person who ever lived or ever would live has as much inherent right to deal personally with God as any other person who ever did or ever would live."

We cannot overemphasize this doctrine of the competency of the soul. However, we must always keep in mind that it is competency under God and not apart from Him or apart from the means which He has provided. It is not competency apart from the Bible, which is the revelation of God to men, but under the guidance of it. It is not competency apart from Christ, Who is the God-given and blessed Redeemer, but in Him. It is not competency apart from the Holy Spirit, Who is the divine Guide and Teacher, but in partnership with Him. Each person is competent to approach God personally through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, and to have dealings with Him. This excludes sacerdotalism and sacramentalism.

What does this doctrine include? It includes the right to approach God directly through Christ for salvation. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." It includes the right to approach God through Christ in prayer. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." It also includes the right to read and to interpret the Word of God. It emphasizes the fact of a personal accountability to God. "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." Each will have to render an account for what he thinks, says and does.

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

Salvation is a comprehensive term. It implies that man was lost and totally unable to save himself. He did not deserve salvation. Neither did he solicit it. It was entirely the result of divine grace. The grace of God made all the arrangements necessary for salvation, devised the astounding plan, determined the means, provided the author, brought the message and presented the application of it to the soul.

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 God's Word, 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 salvation 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.

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.

This divine institution has two ordinances — baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon a 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. The Lord's Supper is a practice — "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup;" a proclamation — "Ye do shew forth the Lord's death;" and a prophecy — "Till he come." Both of these ordinances are symbolic. There is no saving efficacy whatever in them.

V. Their Belief In Absolute Religious Liberty For All Men.

Baptists have always been the champions of religious liberty. In the early history of our nation Baptists were the pioneers in the struggle for the separation of church and state. Religious liberty means that so far as human authority is concerned every man has the inalienable right to choose for himself in religion.

Baptists believe that every man should have the right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, or not to worship Him; that he should have the right to propagate his religious beliefs; and that he should have the right to change his religious convictions and affiliation without fear of reprisal.

In the light of our wonderful heritage which our forefathers gained by sacrifice and passed on to us, there is a three-fold obligation resting upon us as Baptists.

1. We must properly appraise it.
2. We must earnestly guard it.
3. We must share it with the world.

Let us be faithful in proclaiming this heritage wherever we go until our Master's voice shall call us from our fields of labor to everlasting repose in our heavenly home.