

OUR DISTINCTIVE BAPTIST HERITAGE

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 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." Psalm 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 these 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 centuries they have readily accepted and faithfully proclaimed Christ's supernatural birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, personal intercession and visible return.

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.

Through the centuries Baptists have been characterized by certain distinctive beliefs. I am a Baptist because I am in harmony with these beliefs. 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. World has respect for those who believe something and stand up 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 beliefs of people: a church, human reason, 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 widest possible circulation in the native language of all the 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. E. Y. Mullins said, "All men have an equal right to direct access to God." W. R. White has said, "The individual not only must act for himself; he is the only one who can. God has made him competent." J. B. Lawrence declares, "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 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? The right to approach God directly through Christ for salvation. Jesus 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 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.

1. The origin of it.

- (1) Founded at the right time—during 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 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. Baptism was submitted

to by the Lord Jesus Christ, commanded by Him, practiced by the Apostles, and intended for all believers. Christ's baptism was intended to be for all time the example and pattern of those who should become members 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." If a child of God loves his Saviour as he should, he will not hesitate or refuse to obey Him.

When Jesus Christ was baptized, it was God's child being baptized, God's man doing the baptizing, God's method by which it was done, and God's purpose for which it was done.

Certain things are necessary to scriptural baptism:

- a. A proper subject—a believer in Christ or a child of God.
- 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 thereby accept the immersion of those who baptize to help save.

(2) The Lord's Supper.

This ordinance is to be observed by and in New Testament churches at stated intervals as determined by each church, inasmuch as the Scriptures do not specify how often it is to be observed. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. He also commanded its observance. He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Concerning the Lord's Supper three things should be said:

- a. It is a practice.
"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup." The regular practice of observing the ordinance will enrich the life of believers, cause them to love their Lord more, and bring them to a more loyal and faithful devotion to Christ and His church.

- b. It is a proclamation.
"Ye do shew forth the Lord's death." His death is what is held up to view in this Supper. The bread speaks of His broken body and the cup speaks of His shed blood. The Lord's Supper portrays two things:
 - (a) The dreadfulness of sin.
Man's sin nailed the Son of God to Calvary's cross.
 - (b) The sufficiency of Christ's blood to put away sin.
Nothing else can release anybody from the penalty, the power or the presence of sin.

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation to us and by us.

- c. It is a prophecy.
"Till He come." This ordinance predicts that Christ will return.

Our Lord certainly expects us to observe this ordinance in the spirit of deep humility, grateful love, faithful obedience and joyous hope.

Among the prerequisites to the proper observance of the Lord's Supper are regeneration, scriptural baptism, church membership, doctrinal correctness and an orderly walk.

Both of these ordinances are symbolic. There is no saving efficacy whatever in either or both of them. Each of them points in three directions.

- a. To a past transaction.
 - (a) Baptism points back to the burial and resurrection of Christ.
 - (b) The Lord's Supper points back to the death of Christ.
- b. To a present experience.
 - (a) Baptism proclaims that the believer, who is being baptized, has died to sin and is being raised to a new life in Christ.
 - (b) The Lord's Supper declares that the believer is depending on the atoning death of Christ for His salvation.
- c. To a future event.
 - (a) Baptism points forward to the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns.
 - (b) The Lord's Supper points to the return of Christ.

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 great nation, Baptists were pioneers in the struggle for 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.

Religious liberty is the greatest contribution that America has made to civilization. And historic justice compels me to say that it was pre-eminently a Baptist contribution. The impartial historian, whether in the past, present or future, will ever agree with our American historian, Mr. Bancroft, who said: "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists." Such historians

will concur with John Locke who said: "The Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty." Baptists have ever been the unwavering champions of liberty, both religious and civil. Our fundamental principles have made our Baptist people the unyielding protagonists of religious liberty, not only for themselves but for everybody else as well. More than any other people, Baptists have contributed to the world the belief that the union of church and state is contrary to God's Word and to natural justice, and that it is injurious to both parties when there is such a union.

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

1. We must properly appraise it.

Concerning our heritage, our Baptist forefathers are saying to us, "With a great price obtained we this freedom." While we enjoy the heritage which we have, let us not forget what it cost those who have given it to us.

2. We must earnestly guard it.

We shall prove ourselves unworthy of our Baptist heritage if we let it slip away from us. The temptation to compromise is becoming stronger. The effort to get us to compromise our Baptist position comes from three sources.

(1) The appeal to sentiment.

Family relations are often placed above the loyalty to God, but this procedure is unworthy of any devoted Christian. Making compromises to please others is never pleasing to Christ.

(2) The union movement.

Repeatedly we are asked to lay aside the things in which we differ.

(3) The insidious efforts to encroach upon the sacred principle of separation of church and state.

3. We must share it with the world.

The needs of the world, the command of Christ, and our own spiritual welfare impel us to share our distinctive Baptist heritage with the peoples of 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.