

# Baptist Distinctives and a Brief History of Christianity

These 2 related sermon series were written and presented back-to-back during the Spring of 2021 at Calvary Baptist Church and Red Spring Baptist Church.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Baptist Distinctives

Biblical Authority	1
Autonomy of the Local Church	4
Two Offices/Congregational Governance	7
Separation of Church and State/Religious Liberty	10
Salvation By Grace Through Faith Alone	13
Immersion and Believer's Baptism	16
Two Symbolic Ordinances	19
Priesthood of the Believer/Soul Competency	22

### Christian History

The Early Church	26
The Middle Ages	29
The Reformation	32
The Baptist Church	35

# Baptist Distinctives: Biblical Authority

Originally Preached on 1/10/2021

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. - Psalm 119:105*

This morning we are going to begin a new sermon series titled “Baptist Distinctives”. In this series we will summarize certain doctrines and beliefs that are held particularly by Baptists. Baptists are one of many Christian denominations that all share some common convictions with one another. This limited series will focus exclusively on beliefs that are most closely associated with Baptist faith and practice. In other words, “What makes Baptists uniquely different from other Christian denominations?”

It is not my intention to disparage or discount the sincerely held beliefs of other Christian groups or persuasions. I am certain that they are as earnestly convinced of their religious positions as we are of ours and that they’d vigorously and passionately defend them. That said, there is no denying that there are marked differences between the faith and practices of various Christian churches. This disparity does not necessarily make one right and the other wrong. The purpose of this series is simply to point out what makes Baptists distinct - nothing more.

Several years ago I preached a lengthy collection of messages called “What Do Baptists Believe?”. In that series, we addressed every article of The Baptist Faith and Message - the entire statement of faith for Southern Baptists. This study will be much shorter, as it has a more narrow scope, and will recover some of the same ground as before - albeit from a different angle. I am not preaching these sermons to be needlessly redundant, but rather to remind us of and reinforce some of the basic beliefs that make us who we are. Things that are important need to be repeated from time to time, wouldn’t you agree?

The first and arguably most important Baptist Distinctive is Biblical Authority. All of the other distinctives we’ll discuss rest upon this one. Baptists believe that the Bible - the written Word of God - is the sole, supreme, sacred, settled, and sufficient authority for all matters of religious faith and practice. Every question of life, both small and great, boils down to this: What does the Bible say about it?

## I. THE SOLE AUTHORITY (Acts 17:11)

Baptists recognize the Bible as the one and only authoritative source for all aspects of Christian life. While creeds and confessions may be useful in some contexts, they do not replace or serve as a viable substitute for the Word of God. Likewise, theological commentaries, books, and other teachings - while they may be useful for interpreting and understanding Scripture - are not an alternative to the Bible itself. No human opinion (including those expressed by the most learned and respected religious leaders), no decree of any church group or council (which

includes all ecclesiastical conventions and bodies), no religious traditions, customs, liturgies, or rites, indeed no other thing supplants the Bible.

## II. THE SUPREME AUTHORITY (Acts 5:29)

Baptists recognize the Bible as the highest authoritative source for all matters of life. There are many voices that seek to exert influence and/or control over a person's thoughts, speech, decisions, actions, and so forth. To a certain degree, these powers may be legitimate to the extent that they are rightly derived from God and consistent with His Word. However, the Bible always holds supreme and absolute authority over all other authorities. The teachings, truths, and commands of Scripture take precedence above everything else. Any decree, dictate, or other such rule is illegitimate and nonauthoritative if it conflicts with the Bible.

## III. THE SACRED AUTHORITY (1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Hebrews 4:12)

Baptists ascribe all authority to the Bible because of its holy nature and inception. The Bible was written by divinely inspired men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to record the very words of God. As such, it possesses the inherent authority of God Himself. The Bible is both infallible and inerrant, which is to say that it's totally true and completely trustworthy. The contents of Scripture are timeless, and thus always relevant and contemporary in each generation. The Word of God is powerful and effective to always accomplish that which it intends. The Bible is a sacred text, not of human origin, and bears the supernatural traits of its divine and perfect Author, God Almighty, from Whom it derives its credibility. The Word of God is fully and flawlessly embodied in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

## IV. THE SETTLED AUTHORITY (Jude 1:3)

Baptists recognize the Bible as the final, unchanging authority for all matters of religious faith and practice. Its contents have been determined, settled, and do not evolve over time. They are not open to be edited, modified, appended, retracted, updated, or altered in any other way. While Baptists may debate and deliberate over the precise meaning of certain Biblical passages, they do not purport to change them. There are a variety of opinions on the methods and manners by which God speaks to believers today, but all Baptists agree that the Bible is the full and immutable revelation of God. All other subjective, personal, and/or charismatic voices or impressions attributed to God may be considered valid only if they contain no new or additional revelation. In other words, the Holy Spirit doesn't provide us with new instructions or directives but rather guides us on the basis of those already given.

## V. THE SUFFICIENT AUTHORITY (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Baptists recognize the Bible as the complete and sufficient authority for all areas of life. It contains every moral truth, standard, and instruction necessary for proper Christian faith and practice. Nothing is missing. While the Bible does not tell us everything we'd like to know about

God, it does provide us with everything we need to know in order to rightly live for and serve Him. Therefore, all other religious writings or teachings are ultimately superfluous. Where the Bible speaks, we should listen and obey. Where the Bible is silent, we should freely follow our conscience in keeping with its more general principles. We should not seek answers from other non-Biblical, worldly sources.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, Baptists have historically been nicknamed “The People of the Book”. This flattering description refers to their stringent and uncompromising stance on Biblical authority. Baptists insist that all of their beliefs and practices mirror those plainly taught in Scripture. They aspire to follow the model set by the New Testament churches as closely as possible. They are not overly concerned with religious trappings, relics, traditions, or opinions, but instead strive for Biblical consistency and fidelity.

To summarize what we’ve discussed this morning, Baptists uphold the Bible as:

The sole authority - it has no substitute or alternative

The supreme authority - it is the highest standard

The sacred authority - it is the Word of God, divinely-inspired and absolutely true

The settled authority - it is unchanging and timeless

The sufficient authority - it contains everything we need to know

Seeing that Baptists have such a high esteem for the Bible, it would seem reasonable to expect that they’d spend ample time reading, studying, and memorizing it. Sadly, all-too-often, this is not the case. Biblically illiteracy is rampant among Baptists today, which - not surprisingly - has led to many problems within the church. What a great and tragic irony!

That said, I urge you to read from the Bible everyday. Allow it to become the authoritative guide for your life. Wholly trust in the Word of God, which is manifested both in the written Scriptures and in the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! It (and He) will never let you down.

# Baptist Distinctives: Autonomy of the Local Church

Originally Preached on 1/17/2021

*He [Jesus] is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. - Colossians 1:18*

Good morning! We recently began a new sermon series titled “Baptist Distinctives”. Over the course of the next few weeks, we will consider some of the major beliefs and practices that make Baptists uniquely different from most other Christian denominations.

In last Sunday’s message, the first of this study, we talked about “Biblical Authority”. Baptists recognize the Bible as the sole and final authority for all aspects of Christian faith and practice. It is the inspired Word of God, divine, and perfectly manifested through Jesus Christ. No human opinion, teaching, or directive carries the weight or power of Scripture.

Today we will highlight a second Baptist distinctive - the “Autonomy of the Local Church”.

## I. INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATIONS (1 Corinthians 12:12,27)

The word “church” is found over 110 times in the New Testament. It is derived from the Greek word “ekklesia” which literally means “an assembly” of “the called out”. Though technically it can apply to other groups of people (such as in Acts 19:32), in almost all cases the term “ekklesia” describes Christian gatherings. Depending on the context, it can refer to all Christians everywhere (the universal church), those in a particular city or area (the regional church), or the members of small, individual congregations (the local church). All 3 of these meanings are appropriate and valid.

The Bible describes the church metaphorically as “the body of Christ”. Jesus is the head of the body, and thus the leader of it. Apart from the head, the body is made up of many members. These members, though distinctly and necessarily different from one another, all work together for the good of the whole. The eyes, the ears, the hands, the feet, and all of the various parts of the body are important to and mutually affect each other. Again, the word “church” can be rightly applied to both the entire body and to its separate members. In other words, the Church is made up of many churches.

Differences exist between denominations due to their emphasis on one perspective or the other. Most prioritize the body as a whole, and thus view the church principally as a single religious institution. On the contrary, Baptists prioritize the various members of the body, and thus view the church primarily as a collection of many individual, local congregations. Though this distinction may seem nominal at first, it has significant implications...

## II. INDEPENDENT CONGREGATIONS (Acts 16:5)

The governance and operation of the church is largely dependent upon its understanding of what a church is. Those denominations that stress the universal, institutional nature of the church have a very different administrative approach than Baptists do. Such churches are led by centralized authorities that govern through prescribed, hierarchical religious structures. Doctrinal positions and practices are determined at the higher levels and passed down to the local congregations. Individual churches have little, if any, say such matters. This methodology tends to be more rigid and promotes uniformity within the denomination.

In stark contrast, Baptist churches are completely autonomous (that is, self-governed and self-supporting). Each local assembly is fully independent. There are no authoritative bodies outside of or over the local congregation. There is no hierarchical ruling system in place. Each church, under the headship of Christ alone, is free to make its own decisions regarding its particular beliefs and practices. There are no universally prescribed dictates. Thus, while all Baptists share some unifying core beliefs, there is great diversity within the denomination. In fact, many fundamentalists would argue that Baptists are not a denomination at all - at least not in a strict sense - as they are not formally connected in any way.

But what about The Jerusalem Council? In Acts 15, a gathering of church leaders from Jerusalem and Antioch met to discuss whether or not Gentile Christians must be circumcised (like the Jewish Christians were) in order to be accepted as legitimate members of the church. After much deliberation they determined not to impose any arbitrary mandates on the Gentile Christians regarding circumcision (or any other issue). Instead they chose to offer constructive advice on several topics intended solely to help edify the Gentile believers. No consequences for “disobedience” were given. It is noteworthy that The Jerusalem Council chose not to act as an authoritative body over the universal church, but rather as a counselor and an advocate for the free expression of the local church. It did not assume any administrative power or control over the various and scattered Christian congregations.

### III. COOPERATIVE CONGREGATIONS (Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:25-26)

Although Baptists strongly emphasize the individuality and independence of each local church, they also recognize the need for churches to cooperate with one another. It is plainly obvious that churches can accomplish more when they work together than they can separately. This is the basis for localized alliances, regional associations, and state and national conventions which consist of multiple Baptist churches. Participation in and giving to these bodies is completely voluntary, their proclamations are non-binding, and churches can choose to disassociate at any time. The resolutions and opinions of such conventions are generally representative of the majority, but not necessarily shared by all participating churches. Though cooperation provides numerous benefits, there are some Baptist churches that choose not to associate or affiliate with any other church or group (and that’s their prerogative).

There is a recurring storyline that runs through several of the New Testament epistles known as “The Collection for the Saints”. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem suffered intensely from persecution and famine during the first century. The leaders of those congregations, likely during the aforementioned Jerusalem Council, asked the Apostle Paul to take up a contribution from among the various Gentile churches he visited during his missionary journeys. Paul gladly agreed to do so. This was a free-will offering, voluntarily given by those congregations who chose to participate, that was used to support the saints in Jerusalem. This collection was encouraged, but not required. Paul promoted this during his second missionary journey, collected it during his third, and subsequently carried it to Jerusalem. Baptists cite this as an exemplary model for how individual churches can and should willingly cooperate with one another to make a greater impact.

## CONCLUSION

When the word “church” is used in the Bible, the overwhelming majority of the time it clearly refers to local congregations or assemblies. There is no indication in the New Testament of any hierarchical system or governing structure over the local church. Each individual congregation was distinct and autonomous, answering to the Lordship of Christ alone. To the extent possible, many (if not most) of these churches communicated with, held fellowship with, and even cooperated with one another in order to advance the Kingdom of God. Each church was uniquely different in some respects, as evidenced by the letters that were written to them, yet all were like-minded in their fundamental beliefs. Modern Baptists strive to follow this example. They encourage unity between the churches, not uniformity of churches.

I’ll close with an analogy. Though it isn’t accurate in all respects, it is helpful to me in understanding how Baptist churches are structured and related. Local Baptist churches function more like separate small businesses, while local churches in many other denominations operate more like franchises or branches of the larger corporation. Does that make sense? See you next week...

## Baptist Distinctives: Two Offices

Originally Preached on 1/24/2021

*Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. - Philippians 1:1-2*

This morning we will continue our study of “Baptist Distinctives” with the third message of this series which I’ve titled “Two Offices”. We have already discussed “Biblical Authority” and the “Autonomy of the Local Church”. Last week we highlighted the fact that Baptists emphasize and uphold the individuality and independence of each local church. In today’s sermon, we will dig a bit deeper and take a closer look at the specific offices and operation of the local church.

Before we begin, let’s clarify that the offices of high priest, priest, levites, and so forth are associated with Judaism - not Christianity. Therefore, they do not pertain to this message. Looking to the New Testament, we find that the Bible uses several titles to describe the officers of the early Christian church including bishops, elders, shepherds (pastors), and deacons.

In keeping with their governing structure, some denominations have bishops who are responsible for overseeing a regional collection of local congregations. Others have bodies of elders, sometimes referred to as assemblies, that perform this same function. Following either of these models, the leadership of individual congregations is distinct from and falls under the purview of these higher officials. Baptists, however, do not place authorities outside of or over the local church and instead acknowledge only 2 offices - the pastor and the deacons.

### I. PASTORS (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3)

While some interpret the words bishop, elder, and shepherd (or pastor in Latin) as 3 distinct positions, Baptists assert that they are 3 names for the same position. Consider, for example, that a man might simultaneously be called a husband, father, and employee. In like fashion, the pastor of a church is properly understood to be its bishop, elder, and shepherd. Thus, they are different roles of the same office. Paul and Peter use these titles interchangeably in their epistles to accentuate the various duties of the pastor.

The Greek word for bishop, which is sometimes translated in the English Bible as overseer, is episcopos. It refers to the supervisory and/or administrative role of the pastor. The Greek word for elder is presbuteros. It refers to the life experiences and, therefore, the acquired knowledge and wisdom of the pastor. Finally, the Greek word for shepherd is poimaino. It refers to the love and care of the pastor for his flock. Together these words describe a pastor who lovingly provides spiritual leadership for his congregation by rightly teaching and dividing the Word of God, by boldly protecting the flock from heresy and false teaching, and by making sound,



righteous, and God-honoring decisions that keep his church operating in an orderly and effective manner.

Most Baptist churches, especially those aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention, limit the office of pastor to men only. This limitation is not due to sexism or chauvinism, but rather is based upon their sincerely held understanding of Scripture. Such Baptists insist that God established a particular order in both the home and the church in which men are assigned the leadership role. Women are scripturally precluded from preaching to or teaching men publicly in the church. Though there are some objections to this interpretation, as a rule Baptist churches have far fewer women pastors than other denominations do.

## II. DEACONS (Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-13)

The Greek word for deacon is diakonos, which is defined as a servant or waiter. Deacons are tasked with the critical responsibility of taking care of the physical needs of the congregation, thereby freeing the pastor to focus on the spiritual needs. As the fledgling New Testament church began to grow, the first deacons were chosen in order to manage the distribution of food to the church's widows. These were godly men, highly respected among the congregation, who committed themselves to Christian service. They set the enduring standard for deacon ministry.

Many Baptist churches do not formally require deacons to be men, though practically speaking the overwhelming majority of them are. Even the conservative Southern Baptist Convention takes no definitive stance on this issue. As always, each local church is free to decide for itself. Deacons are, by definition, helpers who minister to the needs of others. Women are certainly permitted to do this - in fact, they are often much better at it than men! The Biblical qualifications given for deacons are regularly interpreted to include women. Furthermore, in his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the word diakonos to describe Phoebe. Was she, perhaps, a deacon or deaconess? It can't be totally ruled out. Either way, this matter should not cause division within the church.

## III. CONGREGATIONS (Acts 13:1-3, 1 Timothy 4:14)

While Baptists recognize pastors and deacons as the 2 offices of the local church, neither is seen to have any special authority over it. Pastors are to be spiritual leaders, not dictatorial tyrants. Deacons are to be servants of the congregation, not domineering rulers over it. Each autonomous church practices a democratic form of congregational governance in which each member has a voice and a vote. While some reasonable and limited control may be delegated to church officers, committees, teams, and so forth in order to conduct routine operations, the congregation retains the power to make all major decisions. Most Baptist churches have a written and approved "constitution and by-laws" document in place to help define and guide their operating procedures. It is imperative to remember that congregational governance is still subject to the Lordship of Christ, who is the head of the body, and the assembled members of the church should prayerfully strive to discern and follow His direction in all matters.

The New Testament church practiced congregational governance in several ways. First, the entire church was given the responsibility of implementing church discipline. Second, the ordinances were committed to the entire church. Third, the congregation chose its own deacons, missionaries, and other representatives. While it was necessary for the apostles to appoint pastors during the first century to start new churches, established congregations selected their own leaders going forward. The process of selecting and formally endorsing individuals to serve as pastors or deacons in the church is known as ordination. Most Baptists see ordination as an important safeguard for protecting the doctrinal integrity of the church.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, local Baptist churches adhere to the congregational model of church governance. Following a democratic process, all members may freely participate in the discussion and decision-making of the church. The 2 offices of the church are pastors and deacons. Pastors are primarily responsible for providing spiritual leadership for the flock, while deacons are tasked with addressing the congregation's unmet physical needs. Both pastors and deacons should be Biblically qualified, tested, and proven to the extent possible. That said, age is not always the best measure for making such determinations...

So far in this series we have talked about how individual Baptist churches operate internally and how they relate to one another externally. In next week's message we address their position on the church's proper relationship with the state or secular government. That promises to be a fun sermon that you'll not want to miss! Have a blessed week.

# Baptist Distinctives: Separation of Church and State

Originally Preached on 1/31/2021

*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." - John 18:36*

Hello again, beloved! Let's continue our study of "Baptist Distinctives". These are particular beliefs and practices that distinguish us as Baptists from other Christian denominations. Thus far in this series, we have highlighted 3 such distinctives:

Biblical Authority - Baptists recognize the Bible as the sole and final authority for all aspects of Christian life. It is inspired, infallible, and inerrant. No other source of authority, including any human opinion or church tradition, exceeds or even equals the Bible.

Autonomy of the Local Church - Each local Baptist church is fully autonomous, which means it is self-governing and self-supporting. Individual congregations operate under the Lordship of Christ alone. There are no governing authorities outside of or over the local church.

Two Offices - Baptists recognize 2 church offices, namely pastors and deacons. Pastors provide spiritual leadership for each local church and serve as it's bishop (or overseer), lead elder, and shepherd. Deacons serve to meet the congregation's physical needs.

As you can see, much of our previous discussion has focused on ecclesiology - the structure and practices of the church. Baptist churches operate quite differently than many other major Christian denominations. Some believers feel that the Baptist style of worship is too informal or casual, while others find it to be liberating and sincere.

In this morning's message, we will talk about religious liberty and the separation of Church and State. The First Amendment of The United States Constitution, which was heavily fashioned by Baptist thinking, succinctly expresses our position on these issues. It reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". Let's explore what this means.

## I. NO STATE CHURCH (Mark 12:17, Philippians 3:20)

The civil government has no rightful authority to establish a State religion, nor to favor one ecclesiastical group over another. Unfortunately, throughout most of the church age secular civil leaders and religious church officials worked together in a formal and mutually-beneficial partnership to advance their respective goals. During these centuries numerous nations, kingdoms, and empires (especially in Europe) illegitimately designated a particular denomination or faith to serve as the official religion of the State. Mandates were issued and

laws enforced that required allegiance to the sanctioned church, often leading to the harsh oppression and vile mistreatment of those who held other “non-approved” beliefs. In fact, many of the early colonists fled to the New World in hopes of escaping this widespread religious persecution. America’s founders wanted to end this unhealthy intermingling between the Church and State once and for all.

The Bible warns the righteous not to be “unequally yoked” with nonbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). If a pair of oxen are yoked together, and one is significantly faster or stronger than the other, they will go around in circles and get nothing done. In similar fashion, Christians should be extremely cautious about entering into binding relationships with lost people, including marriages, business endeavors, and the like. Such unions are a recipe for disaster. Applying this same principle on a larger scale, the Church should purposefully keep itself separate from the State, realizing that entanglement between them will predictably and invariably lead to corruption, impurity, and abuse within the Church.

## II. INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY (Galatians 5:1, Romans 14:22)

The civil government has no legitimate authority to prohibit the free exercise of religion. All people have the right to worship God (or not to worship Him) and to practice their faith (or not practice any faith) as they so choose, provided that their actions do not infringe upon the inalienable rights of others. This is the essence of religious liberty. Baptists have always defended this freedom, even for those with whom they disagree. The State should strive to protect the Church and its pursuits, not limit or restrict them.

Jesus repeatedly taught about the clear distinction between earthly kingdoms and the Kingdom of God. They coexist side-by-side. He explained that individuals have a responsibility to both. While all Christians should practice good citizenship and abide by the laws of their civil government whenever possible, their first and highest devotion is to God. Jesus aptly described His disciples as being “in this world, but not of this world” (John 17:14-16). Following these Biblical teachings, Baptists consider themselves as dual citizens who have separate and distinct obligations to both the Church and the State.

## III. THE CHURCH’S FAILURE (Ezekiel 23:29b, Luke 24:29)

During Old Testament times, the people of God were collectively known as Israel. Over the centuries, they rebelled against the LORD in several ways. They foolishly chased after the false gods of other heathen nations. In times of desperation they sought the military and economic assistance of other pagan nations. They even chose for themselves a human king and set-up a monarchy. Again and again the people of Israel placed their faith in worldly leaders, institutions, and might (which is to say, the State) rather than relying on God. The LORD compared their unfaithfulness to prostitution and strongly commended it. The New Testament church would be wise to remember and learn from Israel's mistakes.

The Church should not resort to civil powers to do its work, nor should it compromise itself to the world's system. The mission of the Church can only be accomplished through spiritual means. It requires the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The State is not properly equipped to do this. Nevertheless, the Church has a long history of delegating its responsibilities to the State. This has greatly contributed to the vast expansion and overreach of the government (and human secularism), while simultaneously diminishing the influence and effectiveness of the Church. To a large degree, the decline of Christianity has resulted from its dependence upon and alliance with the State.

## CONCLUSION

Baptists strongly support the separation of Church and State and the principle of religious liberty. The government should not interfere with or infringe upon the peaceful worship and benevolent ministry of the Church, but rather should concern itself strictly with civil matters. It should reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. Furthermore, it should ensure that all people are free to worship as they choose.

Christians who wish to engage in politics or public service should do so knowing that it is not the State's job to enforce the will of the Church. Instead, it is the Church's responsibility (and that of individual believers) to be the salt and light of the earth. Christians should set an example that encourages sinners to voluntarily submit themselves to God, rather than imposing His will upon them through the means of human authority. This lost world will never be won to Christ through the auspices and efforts of the State, even when well-intentioned.

# Baptist Distinctives: Salvation through Faith Alone

Originally Preached on 2/7/2021

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. - John 3:16*

We are halfway through our current sermon series called “Baptist Distinctives”. This study focuses on certain beliefs and practices that are peculiar to and indicative of the Baptist faith. These “markers” help to distinguish Baptists from other Christian denominations.

Baptists accept the Bible as the sole and final authority of all Christian faith and practice. They support the autonomy of the local church and practice congregational governance. They encourage voluntary cooperation between churches, but do not require it. Baptists have no governing structure outside of or over the local church. They recognize only 2 Biblical offices - pastors and deacons. These officers serve to meet the spiritual and physical needs of each congregation. Baptists are also staunch defenders of individual religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

This morning we will consider what Baptists believe regarding the manner of salvation. In other words, what must a person do in order to be saved and receive eternal life? This is one of the most important questions that anyone can ask. It is imperative that we know the answer. Does water baptism save the sinner? Does placing one’s faith in Jesus save the sinner? Or, does salvation require both?

## I. BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

According to GotQuestions.org, “Baptismal regeneration is the belief that baptism is necessary for salvation, or, more precisely, that regeneration does not occur until a person is water baptized.” In other words, it holds that a sinner is not truly forgiven and born-again unless, and until, they are baptized. This position is held by several religious groups and denominations. There are a handful of verses in the Bible that seem to promote this doctrine.

Mark 16:16 says, “The one who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but the one who has not believed will be condemned.” Is Mark saying that a person must be baptized in order to be saved? No, he isn’t. Consider this statement, “The one who has boarded the bus and sat down will be taken to his destination; but the one who has not boarded the bus will be left behind.” In this example, the determining factor for reaching one’s destination is whether or not they get on the bus. True, they will get there if they sit - but they’ll also get there if they stand. In like fashion, the imperative for salvation is belief or faith, not baptism.

In Acts 2:38 Peter says, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Is Peter teaching

that a person must be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of their sins? Not necessarily. The preposition “for” can mean either “in order to” or “because of”. Consider these statements: “I paid \$5 for the hamburger” (meaning in order to get it) and “I took some medicine for my sore throat” (meaning because of it). Both usages of “for” are correct. Therefore, Peter could have been urging the people to be baptized because of the forgiveness they’d receive as a result of their repentance (prior to baptism). Since either interpretation is possible, this verse can’t be cited as absolute proof that baptism is necessary for salvation.

Jesus answered Nicodemus in John 3:5, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Is Jesus telling him that baptism is necessary for salvation? Again, no. The phrase “born of water” could mean something other than water baptism. Some interpret it as referring to one’s natural birth, noting that a pregnant woman’s water breaks typically before or as they go into labor. Thus, a person must be born physically and the re-born spiritually. Others suggest that “born of water” is a figurative description of the living water that washes away or cleanses sin. Either way, Jesus is not definitively saying that one must be baptized in order to be saved.

While these and other similar verses may appear to teach baptismal regeneration, none of them are conclusive. In order to determine the true manner of salvation, more definitive verses and passages must be used. These verses should then be clarified and more precisely interpreted in light of those whose meanings are indisputable.

## II. REGENERATION THROUGH FAITH

If one takes all of Scripture into account, it becomes abundantly clear that faith alone is the proper manner of salvation. There are numerous verses and passages that make this point. These are straightforward, unambiguous, and conclusive.

In Ephesians 2:8 the apostle Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” There is no mention of baptism in this verse. Believers are regenerated by God’s grace, solely as the result of their faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that even the Old Testament saints, who lived under the Law and were never baptized, were saved by faith (Romans 4).

Paul describes the manner of salvation in Romans 10:9 when he says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” The key here is belief, which is to say faith. Those who truly believe in Christ will publicly and boldly confess Him as their Lord and Savior, even in the face of persecution. Confession provides visible evidence of one’s faith. Such people are certain to be saved, without respect to baptism.

Jesus taught in John 5:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of

death into life.” In this sermon, Jesus explained to the crowd that belief (or faith) is the determining factor between those who have eternal life and those who are under judgment. Again, baptism is not named as a requirement for salvation.

While the Lord was dining at a Pharisee’s house, a sinful woman approached Him and tearfully anointed His feet. Jesus responded in Luke 7:50, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” After being miraculously released from prison, Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” In both instances salvation was contingent upon faith, not baptism.

These and numerous other verses confirm that regeneration, or the new-birth, comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is the manner of salvation.

## CONCLUSION

Baptists wholly reject the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. They maintain that faith alone saves the sinner. Those who have repented of their sins, confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and trusted in Him for their salvation are truly born-again. Apart from such saving faith, a person is still in their sins. Water baptism does not bring about regeneration. Therefore...

- Someone who has been baptized but has never actually placed their faith in Christ is lost, because they lack faith.
- Someone who has faith in Christ and has been baptized is saved, because of their faith (not their baptism).
- Someone who has faith in Christ but hasn’t been baptized is saved, because baptism is not necessary for salvation.

Although baptism does not affect regeneration or save the lost person, it is still very important to Baptists. This is quite evident by the name of their denomination. So what do Baptists believe about baptism? We will talk about that next week.



# Baptist Distinctives: Immersion and Believer's Baptism

Originally Preached on 2/14/2021

*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. - Mark 1:4-5*

Good morning. What a joy it is to be in God's house together for worship! Last Sunday we talked about the manner of salvation. Baptists, and some other like-minded denominations, believe that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Based on our understanding of Scripture, we reject the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. While baptism is vitally important, we do not believe it is necessary for salvation.

Now follow me here... if you believed that people were saved by water baptism, and that faith was either unnecessary or secondary, what would you do? The logical (and compassionate) answer would be to baptize them as soon as possible, in order to minimize the chance that they'd die before being saved. For this compelling reason, most churches who embrace baptismal regeneration also practice infant baptism.

During the message today we will consider another "Baptist Distinctive". Using last week's sermon as a backdrop we will ask: What do Baptists believe about baptism? What does the Bible teach about it? Why is the Baptist denomination named for and identified by it?

## I. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM (Acts 2:41a, 8:12, 8:36-38, 16:31-33)

Baptists do not baptize babies. Instead, they hold to a practice known as believer's baptism or credobaptism. They teach that baptism is only meaningful when undertaken by a believer. In other words, faith must precede baptism. This is always the order found in Scripture. The apostles and disciples in the New Testament never baptized unbelievers. Instead, water baptism always took place after an individual repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ. First the person was saved by faith, then they were baptized.

Babies (and even young children) are unable to consciously, knowingly place their faith in Christ. They do not have a sufficient understanding of who Jesus is and the sacrificial atonement that He made for sinners. They don't recognize their sinful depravity and need for salvation, thereby making true repentance impossible. Simply put, babies are not yet believers, and therefore should not be baptized. Infant baptism inverts the proper order laid out in scripture by placing baptism before faith. There are no examples of this practice in the Bible.

Baptists understand baptism to be a public declaration of one's salvation. It is an act of obedience and one of the first steps of Christian discipleship and maturity. Jesus demonstrated

this by being baptized before launching His earthly ministry. When an infant (or any unbeliever for that matter) is baptized, there is no saving faith to declare. Such baptisms are misleading and misrepresent the truth. However, in the case of a believer, baptism is a joyful announcement to all the world that the person being baptized has been born again and is beginning their walk with Jesus!

## II. IMMERSION (Mark 1:10, Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12)

The Greek word for baptize used in the New Testament is baptizo which means “to fully submerge in water”. This is also referred to as immersion. It is the only mode of baptism presented and practiced in the Bible. Over time however, churches that routinely baptized infants devised other forms of baptism such as sprinkling and pouring. At first these were used only in cases of necessity, but eventually were permitted and accepted in all instances. Ironically, these alternative methods of baptism don’t comply with the definition of the word!

Baptism is meant to be symbolic. It represents death to one’s old life of sin and resurrection to one’s new life in Christ. It pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and identifies the new believer with Him. Baptism is a physical and visual depiction of a spiritual and invisible reality. It is important that the manner of baptism properly illustrate this truth. Immersion is the only mode that plainly and dramatically displays a death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, Baptists recognize immersion as the only Biblical and acceptable form of water baptism.

## III. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (Acts 2:41b, Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 12:13)

Not only does baptism identify the new Christian with Jesus, but it also identifies them with His church. Salvation involves many aspects, including both regeneration and reconciliation. Regeneration refers to one’s new life in Christ, while reconciliation concerns the restoration of one’s relationship with God. When a person trusts in Jesus for salvation, which is sometimes described in the Bible as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they are placed in the Body of Christ or the universal church. This is a miraculous and unseen phenomenon. They are adopted into the family of God. Following this spiritual model, Baptists require water baptism for membership in the local church. Though never directly stated, this seems to be the New Testament pattern by which converts were “added to the church”.

One of the probable consequences of baptizing infants or others without respect to faith is a church filled with nonbelievers. Baptism is commanded in Scripture and should take place as soon as possible after one’s profession of faith. If a new believer is unwilling to be baptized in obedience to the Lord’s command or publicly identify themselves with the local congregation, why should the church trust that their salvation is genuine? Baptism provides evidence of true conversion, and therefore provides a safeguard against an unregenerate church membership.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout much of the past 2,000 years, the prevailing practice of the dominant Western church was infant baptism. Therefore, most people were baptized and recognized as members of the church while they were still babies. However, in each passing generation there were those who opposed this custom and considered infant baptism to be invalid. If someone sought to break away from the official church and join them instead, they would first have to accept Jesus by faith for salvation and then be rebaptized by immersion. For centuries these dissidents were contemptuously referred to by the state church as “rebaptizers” or “anabaptists”. Eventually the prefixes were dropped, leaving these nonconformists to simply be called Baptists. They were the forerunners of our denomination.

In conclusion, Baptists are distinguished from many other denominations by their observance of believer’s baptism. Baptism is reserved for believers only, and is a public declaration of the salvation that one has already received by faith. Baptism in water symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of the new believer and identifies them with both Jesus and His church. Believer’s baptism is commanded in scripture, is one of the first acts of Christian obedience, and is required for membership in the local church.

If you have any questions about baptism, please let me know. I’d love to talk with you about them. Until next week, may God bless you.

# Baptist Distinctives: Two Symbolic Ordinances

Originally Preached on 2/21/2021

*Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the ordinances for them to follow which had been determined by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. - Acts 16:4*

Good morning and welcome. What a wonderful privilege and blessing it is to worship our Lord Jesus Christ together! I am so glad you have joined us today to exalt His name and learn from His holy Word.

We are nearing the end of our sermon series on “Baptist Distinctives”. Over the past six weeks we have talked about various issues pertaining to bibliology (the study of the Bible), ecclesiology (the study of the church), and soteriology (the study of salvation). We have highlighted and examined some of the specific beliefs and practices that are most closely associated with Baptists.

During the next half-hour or so, we are going to discuss yet another Baptist distinctive. Modern Baptist churches observe 2 ordinances - baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These ordinances are symbolic, and should not be thought of as sacraments. Let me explain...

## I. SACRAMENTS VERSUS ORDINANCES (1 Timothy 1:9, Titus 3:4-7)

Some denominations consider the Lord’s Supper and baptism, along with a few other rituals, to be sacramental. A sacrament is “an act that conveys the grace of God to an individual”. Those who hold this view believe that God supernaturally blesses a worshiper as they conduct the act. According to this doctrine, baptism invokes God’s grace for regeneration and the Lord’s Supper (which they refer to as the Eucharist) conveys God’s grace for ongoing sanctification. Stated simply, baptism is necessary to initially attain salvation and the regular practice of the Lord’s Supper is necessary to maintain salvation. Following this doctrine, those who neglect partaking of the Eucharist are in danger of committing a mortal sin.

An ordinance, on the other hand, can be defined as “a God-ordained ceremony”. It is a practice that was commanded and prescribed by the Lord to be observed by the church. Ordinances do not invoke God’s grace or convey His blessings. They are simply acts of human obedience to the teachings of scripture. They are ceremonial reenactments meant to memorialize Christ, proclaim His salvation, and edify His church. Baptists, along with several other Protestant denominations, believe that God’s saving grace is poured out fully and sufficiently on the new Christian at the moment that they trust in Jesus for salvation. Therefore, no additional or continued outpouring of grace is required.

## II. BAPTISM (Acts 2:41, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13)

The first ordinance of the Baptist church is baptism. As discussed at length earlier in this series, Baptists practice Believer's Baptism. After a person has placed their faith in Jesus resulting in salvation, they are then baptized by immersion in water. This ceremony serves as a visible and public declaration of one's new life in Christ. It symbolizes Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and that of the new Christian, who has died to their old sinful self and been raised up as a new creation. Baptism identifies the new believer with Christ and with His church. It is one of the first acts of Christian obedience and is required for local church membership.

### III. THE LORD'S SUPPER (Acts 2:42, Matthew 26:26-29, 1 Corinthians 11:23-34)

The second ordinance practiced in Baptist churches is the Lord's Supper. This is sometimes referred to as communion. Unlike baptism, which is for individual believers, the Lord's Supper is for the entire congregation or the community of believers. Most Baptist churches observe an open communion in which all Christians (including those of other like-minded denominations) are welcome to participate and partake. There are others, albeit a minority, that practice closed communion by restricting those outside of the local congregation from participating in the service. Non-Christians should not partake of the Lord's Supper, and those who do put themselves at physical risk. Parents should not allow their children to take communion either until after they have been saved and baptized.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Himself. Just a few hours before His arrest, Jesus and His apostles gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Jewish Passover. During their meal, Jesus took the bread and compared it to His body which would be broken for them. Then He blessed it, broke it, distributed it, and they all ate. Afterwards, He took the cup and compared it to His blood which would be spilled for them. Again He blessed it, passed it around, and they all drank. Jesus instructed His disciples to continue this ordinance even after He had gone.

Like baptism, the imagery of the Lord's Supper is symbolic. It graphically illustrates the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made at Calvary in order to pay for the sins of mankind. It is a memorial to Christ's death on the cross. As often as it is observed, the Lord's Supper is to be conducted "in remembrance" of Him. When those who participate in communion eat the bread and drink the cup, they depict their own personal responsibility for His death. Jesus died for the sins of all people, and therefore everyone mutually is accountable. The church should observe the Lord's supper as a proclamation of Christ's death until He comes again.

Churches often differ slightly in the manner in which they conduct the Lord's Supper, even among Baptists. This is due to the fact that no specific, detailed instructions are given in the Bible for its administration. Some churches observe the Lord's supper weekly, others monthly, and still others once or twice annually. Most use grape juice to represent Christ's blood, while others use actual wine. Most prefer to use unleavened bread, but the Bible doesn't explicitly require it. Some distribute the bread and juice individually while others eat from a single loaf and

drink from a single cup. These and other such details are not overly significant, so long as they don't deter from the meaning of the ceremony.

## CONCLUSION

Before we're done, I want to briefly mention the practice of footwashing. Some denominations consider footwashing to be a third church ordinance. Those that do typically conduct footwashing services in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. While footwashing is certainly an admirable act, there is no indication that it was commanded by Christ and practiced as an ordinance by the early church. When Jesus told His disciples that they should wash one another's feet (John 13:14), the context of the passage reveals that He was talking broadly about humility and Christian service.

In conclusion, Baptists observe just 2 church ordinances - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both are symbolic acts conducted in obedience to the Lord's command. Both are conducted as closely as possible to the model practiced by the New Testament church. Neither is believed to convey the supernatural grace of God upon the person or people who are observing the ordinance. Instead, the ordinances are carried out in response to and as a declaration of the Lord's previously bestowed grace. They are depictions of and memorials to the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# Baptist Distinctives: Priesthood of the Believer & Soul Competency

Originally Preached on 2/28/2021

*He [Jesus] made us into a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. - Revelation 1:6*

This morning we will conclude our series on “Baptist Distinctives”. We will address 2 more fundamental Baptist beliefs and then do a final review of everything we’ve discussed during this study. Let’s dive right in...

## I. PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER (Mark 15:38, 1 Timothy 2:5, 1 Peter 2:5-9)

Priests are religious ministers and teachers who perform sacred duties and rituals. They are authorized to administer the holy sacraments of the church. Like the Jewish priests of the Old Testament who made sacrifices and offered prayers on behalf of Israel, modern priests serve primarily as mediators and intercessors between the people of their denomination and God. In such religious systems, people cannot approach God directly but must do so through the priest.

However, the Bible teaches that Jesus’ death on the cross brought an end to the priesthood. His sacrifice at Calvary fully satisfied the just requirements of God and paid the debt of man’s sin once and for all. Therefore, no additional sacrifices are needed. This is a major theme in the book of Hebrews. Additionally, Jesus Himself became the Great High Priest and serves as the one mediator between God and man.

Baptists, like most other Protestant faiths, believe that human priests are no longer necessary. They advocate that all believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. This was symbolized vividly when the temple veil that shielded the Holy of Holies was torn in 2 from top to bottom following Jesus’ death on the cross. The true wall of separation between God and man, sin, was forever defeated. Therefore, all born-again believers are “priests” in that all may communicate directly and personally to God through Christ in prayer and worship.

Besides having direct access to God, the priesthood of the believer also conveys another important and sometimes overlooked aspect. As the priests of God, all Christians bear the responsibilities of the priesthood. All believers are called to be ministers of God who give themselves as living sacrifices to the LORD. Each individual is challenged to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. Christian worship and service is not reserved for a select group to perform on behalf of the rest, but rather is the role of every believer.

## II. SOUL COMPETENCY (Joshua 24:15, Ezekiel 18:1-20, Romans 1:18-20)

God created mankind with the ability to choose for themselves whether or not they would believe in Him. People are not puppets or robots with no control over themselves. On the

contrary, they have been gifted with the power to make their own choices. God does not compel or coerce obedience to His callings or commands. Individual religious freedom is exercised within the framework of God's overarching sovereignty. Every person, or soul, possesses the God-given ability to know Him, to adequately understand His Word, and to do His will. Each person is fully competent to stand before God.

Because all souls are individually competent, each is also individually accountable. Every person is capable of placing their faith in Christ for salvation and committing their lives to Him. Those who chose not to do so are fully responsible for their decision to reject Him. One person's faith is not a substitute for another's. God reveals Himself sufficiently to each individual, and therefore each is without excuse before Him. All people will be judged individually by God based on either their own faith (the saved) or their own merits (the lost).

### III. A FINAL REVIEW

We have now covered all of the Baptist Distinctives that will be addressed in this series. Many of them are closely related to one another. Before we conclude these messages, let's review each of these distinctives briefly:

Biblical Authority - Baptists believe that the Bible is the sole and final authority of all aspects of Christian faith and practice. It is inspired, infallible, and inerrant. No other authoritative source is greater than or even equal to the Bible.

Autonomy of the Local Church - Baptists believe that each individual, local church is fully autonomous (meaning self-governed and self supporting). There are no hierarchical governing structures outside of or over the local church. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ alone and is free to cooperate with others as it sees fit.

Two Church Offices/Congregational Governance - Baptists recognize pastors and deacons as the 2 offices of the church. The office of pastor encompasses the Biblical roles of the bishop, elder, and shepherd. The pastor and deacons work together to serve the spiritual and physical needs of the local church. Major decisions are made democratically by the entire congregation.

Separation of Church and State/Religious Liberty - Baptists believe that the Church and State should be separate. Both were established by God and each has its own responsibilities. The Church should not resort to the State to achieve its purposes. Furthermore, the State should protect each individual's right to worship God as they choose.

Salvation By Grace Through Faith Alone - Baptists believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is affected by God in the life of the repentant sinner at the moment that they place their faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism, though important, is not necessary for salvation.



Immersion & Believer's Baptism - Baptists believe that water baptism is reserved for believers only and should be conducted as a public declaration of one's salvation by faith. The only acceptable mode of baptism is immersion. Furthermore, baptism is required for local church membership.

Two Symbolic Ordinances - Baptists practice baptism and The Lord's Supper as the 2 church ordinances. Both are symbolic, not sacramental. They are practiced in obedience to the Lord's command as memorials and depictions of His sacrifice. Neither invokes or conveys God's saving or sanctifying grace upon the individual.

Priesthood of the Believer/Soul Competency - Baptists believe that all Christians are "priests" because all have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. In addition, all Christians are called to priestly service and sacrificial living. Each individual person is fully competent to either accept or reject Christ and is therefore without excuse before Him.

## CONCLUSION

I will conclude this series with an acronym to help us remember these Baptist Distinctives. I will list them in a different order than they were presented so that the acronym will work.

B iblelical Authority  
A utonomy of the Local Church  
P riesthood of the Believer/Soul Competency  
T wo Church Offices/Congregational Governance  
I mmersion and Believer's Baptism  
S alvation by Grace Through Faith Alone  
T wo Symbolic Ordinances  
S eparation of Church and State/Religious Liberty

It is my prayer that, through these 8 sermons, we have come to understand and recognize several beliefs and practices that are closely associated with the Baptist faith. These characteristics form our unique identity. We are unashamedly and unapologetically Baptists!



## A Brief History of Christianity: Part 1 (30-500 AD)

Originally Preached on 3/7/2021

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth. - Acts 1:8*

Today we will begin a 4 part overview of Christian history, with emphasis on the Baptist faith. These messages serve simply as an introduction to this vast and fascinating topic. You could devote your entire life to the study of this field - as many have. Though we will only scratch the surface, I believe it is important for us as Christians to have a basic understanding of our history. Knowing our past helps us to better face the future and meet the challenges of the present.

### I. THE GOSPEL SPREADS (30-100 AD)

Christianity was founded by and is based upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the grave sometime around 30 A.D. After appearing to many of His disciples over a period of 40 days, He ascended into Heaven. 10 days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles in Jerusalem. Peter began preaching the gospel to the crowds and some 3,000 people were saved. This occasion marked the official beginning of the Christian church.

The early disciples and new converts faced extreme pressure from the Jewish authorities who viewed their faith as a threat to Judaism and desired to crush it completely. Heavy persecution led many of the disciples to flee from Jerusalem, initially carrying the message of Christ across the region of Judea and into neighboring Samaria. Within a few decades, the gospel reached Syria, then Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome through the missionary travels of Paul and others. Christian churches were established in many cities - both large and small. The original disciples and their contemporaries strategically fanned out across the Roman Empire, proclaiming the name of Jesus in the Middle East, Western and Central Asia, Northern Africa, and all across the European continent.

At this time the Romans observed a polytheist, pagan religion that had been derived primarily from the Greeks. Their gods were very human and secular in nature. As Christianity continued to spread and take hold across the empire, the officials in Rome began to take notice and persecution against the early church intensified. Starting with Nero, many of the Roman emperors implemented sweeping and systematic persecutions against Christians. Many were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred for their faith. Despite these oppressive measures, the gospel continued to advance during the Apostolic Age and the Christian faith took root.

In addition to the original apostles and disciples, whose names are recorded in the Bible, historians recognize several other prominent Christians during this era. Most of them personally

knew, worked alongside, and/or studied under the apostles. These include men such as Clement of Rome, Linus, and Polycarp.

## II. HERESY CREEPS IN (100-325 AD)

Eventually it became clear that the advancement of Christianity could not be stopped, so many of its critics turned their attention to discrediting or distorting this new faith. With the original apostles having all died, the second and third generation Christians faced new challenges as they sought to maintain the fidelity of the early church to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. False teachers began cropping up in many churches promoting heresies, such as gnosticism, that perverted and sometimes contradicted the gospel message. These false teachers wrote and distributed many spurious letters and documents claiming them to be of equal standing with those of the original apostles. Some of the most well-known Christian apologists of this era, who boldly sought to defend the Christian faith even in the face of heavy persecution, included Irenaeus, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr.

Though religious denominations did not yet exist, major differences were beginning to develop within Christianity. The bishops (or pastors) of larger and more prominent churches began to claim and exercise regional authority over the numerous smaller congregations. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration was preached and became widely accepted among the churches. This naturally led to the practice of infant baptism which began during the early to mid second century. Within a few generations, the prevailing church had become filled with members who had been baptized involuntarily as babies but had no meaningful adult relationship with God. Those who spoke out against the growing impurity and unregenerate membership of the church were ostracized and/or excommunicated from it.

The persecution of Christians continued throughout the Roman Empire until the reign of Constantine the Great. On the verge of battle against a much larger foe, Constantine claimed to have seen a vision of Jesus, who subsequently led him to win a great victory which led to his emperorship. Perhaps out of genuine sincerity, or perhaps out of political expediency, Constantine showed sympathy for the Christian cause. As emperor, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. allowing for the religious toleration of all faiths within the Roman Empire. Thus, the era of Roman oppression against the Christianity formally ended. Following Constantine's lead, many people across the empire embraced the Christian church for the first time and subsequently converted to the faith.

## III. A CHURCH EMERGES (325-500 AD)

During Constantine's reign, a major controversy arose regarding the deity of Christ. The emperor summoned many of the empire's leading bishops to convene and discuss this and other issues. This meeting, the Council of Nicea, was held in 325 A.D. and was the first of several such ecumenical councils that would take place over the coming centuries that sought to clarify and define theology and church administration. The council affirmed that Jesus was of

the same divine nature and essence as God the Father. They formulated the Nicene Creed, which would later be edited and amended, formally codifying the church's doctrinal stance on several basic issues of Christianity.

About 55 years later, in 380 A.D., Christianity was recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thus began the long and entangled relationship between the Church and the State. Exercising their newly acquired credibility, the prevailing church sought to universally apply its theology and practices across Christianity. To this end, a Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate was produced to serve as the official text of the church. Liturgies were written to standardize the church's worship. A new movement known as monasticism led many devout people to withdraw from society and live in seclusion as monks. Increasingly, Christians had become more preoccupied with debating and defining doctrinal beliefs than actually sharing the gospel with the lost. Some of the notable characters of this period include Augustine, Chrysostom, and Eusebius.

As the officially endorsed Catholic Church grew stronger and more organized through the fifth century, the western Roman Empire itself began to crumble. The European continent had been populated by several Germanic tribes who, along with the invading Huns, rebelled against and decimated much of the Roman military. Internal corruption and mounting economic pressures took their toll as well. While the eastern Roman Empire remained strong and intact (and became known as the Byzantine Empire), the western Roman Empire collapsed in 476 A.D. Still, the church remained and continued to thrive across Europe even after Rome's demise.

## CONCLUSION

During the first 500 years of church history, Roman Catholicism emerged as the prevailing form of Christianity and viewed itself as the one and only purveyor of truth. Unfortunately, it had greatly deviated and departed from many of the central teachings of Jesus and the original apostles. There were, however, groups of Christians in various places that stood opposed to the errors of the Catholic church. They were largely condemned and slandered. Though many were flawed in their theology to some extent, at least they maintained the New Testament doctrines of salvation by grace through faith alone, the autonomy of the local church, the priesthood of the believer, and individual religious liberty.

During this first phase of Christianity, the mission of the church devolved from declaring and demonstrating the gospel, to debating and defending the gospel, and finally to defining and dictating the gospel. By and large the church transitioned away from being an executive body, focused on simply performing the call and commands of Christ, and morphed into a legislative body, concerned with creating and prescribing rules and procedures to govern its own practices. Sadly, we still see evidence of this same misguided preoccupation today.

## A Brief History of Christianity: Part 2 (500-1500 AD)

Originally Preached on 3/14/2021

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. - Matthew 5:11-12*

This morning we will continue our month-long overview of Christian and Baptist history with a message covering the Middle Ages. This era is also commonly known as the Medieval Period. It spans roughly 1,000 years from around 500 A.D. (when the western Roman Empire fell) to 1500 A.D. (when the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire fell).

### I. THE DARK AGES (500-750 AD)

The early part of the Middle Ages has been characterized by many historians as “The Dark Ages”. In the wake of Rome’s collapse, much of western Europe faced significant economic and cultural declines. The various Germanic tribes that populated the continent struggled with extensive poverty and disease. During these years there was a notable lack of literature, music, art, and other intellectual advancements. Despite these challenges, Christianity continued to spread and the Roman Catholic Church became increasingly organized and influential.

The fall of Rome left a power void across western Europe. With no centralized government in place, Catholicism was the common tie between many of its people groups. Between 590-604 A.D., Gregory the Great became the first Bishop of Rome to act on behalf of and exercise authority over the entire Roman Catholic Church. He is widely considered to be the first true pope, because he was the first to actually practice papal supremacy. Until this time, bishops acted more like local or regional pastors. As the Medieval Period unfolded, the pope would gain more and more power to sway kings, rulers, and nations.

New doctrines and practices were contrived throughout the Middle Ages that carried the prevailing church even farther away from the teachings of Christ and the New Testament. The veneration of the virgin Mary, through prayer and worship, was formally approved by an ecumenical council in 553 A.D. During subsequent councils, the Catholic Church also introduced the practice of venerating the saints and embraced the use of religious images, icons, and relics. Later, it developed the doctrines of infant communion, purgatory, penance, and the use of indulgences.

Meanwhile in Saudi Arabia, sometime around 610 A.D., a prophet named Muhammad began teaching a new religion called Islam. Muhammad claimed to have an angelic vision, after which he wrote the Quran. Though initially peaceful, his teachings and exploits became increasingly violent. Unlike Christianity, this new religion was spread “by the sword”. Within a few centuries, Muslims had conquered all of the Middle East and Northern Africa. Christians in these areas

were forced to either convert or be martyred. Muslims briefly occupied parts of Spain, France, and Italy, but were ultimately driven out. The growing presence of Islam posed a serious threat to Asia Minor and the Byzantine Empire (or eastern Roman Empire).

## II. THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE (750-1000 AD)

Charlemagne, king of the Franks, was a staunch defender of the papacy and advocate of the Roman Catholic Church. Leaning on his sweeping influence throughout most of western Europe, in 800 A.D. Pope Leo III unilaterally crowned Charlemagne as emperor over the revived Roman Empire. With the church's support, Charlemagne implemented a host of reforms that helped revive the economy and culture thereby pulling Europe out of the Dark Ages. He also expanded and strengthened the Catholic Church, using his formidable military to force conversions. This led to tremendous persecution and the martyrdom of those Christians who refused to comply.

Following Charlemagne, no one emerged as emperor and the Church's attempt to resuscitate the western Roman Empire faltered briefly. Almost a century later in 962 A.D., following the same precedent set earlier, Pope John XII crowned King Otto I of Germany as emperor. This coronation marked the official beginning of the Holy Roman Empire which would endure for over 700 years. The Holy Roman Empire was a confederation of smaller kingdoms in western and central Europe which were ruled by a single emperor who'd been selected and installed by the pope. The papacy of the Roman Catholic Church held tremendous power during this time.

## III. THE CHURCH'S EXPLOITS (1000-1500 AD)

The Byzantine Empire of the east became increasingly uncomfortable with the resurgence of a Roman Empire in the west. Over time, cultural, linguistic, and other differences had caused Catholicism in the east and west to drift apart. When the newly emboldened Roman popes began assuming authority over the eastern Catholic churches, tensions flared. About this time an old and unsettled debate arose regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit, prompting the pope to impose changes to the Nicene Creed without even consulting the eastern churches. In revolt, the Catholic churches of the Byzantine Empire broke away from those in the west. This split took place in 1054 A.D. and is called "The Great Schism". It resulted in two similar, but distinct religions - Roman Catholicism and Eastern (or Greek) Orthodoxy.

Spanning from approximately 1095 A.D. to 1230 A.D., the Roman Catholic Church, in league with several European kings and emperors, launched a series of military conquests in hopes of regaining control of the Holy Land from the Muslims. These efforts collectively became known as the Crusades. It was during this era that the Knights Templar were formed. Justifying their actions as holy war, the crusaders conquered lands, murdered innocents, and leveled cities in the name of Jesus Christ. Thousands were forced to convert to Catholicism or be slaughtered. Though the Holy Roman Empire briefly regained control of Jerusalem, the Muslims were eventually able to take it back and maintained their grip on the Middle East.

Around this same time, and in response to what it viewed as a rising trend of heresy, the Roman Catholic Church began implementing a series of judicial tribunals known as the Inquisitions. Starting in 1184 A.D. and continuing periodically for a few hundred years thereafter, culminating in the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, the papacy designated special inquisitors and authorized them to arrest, question, and severely punish heretics throughout the Holy Roman Empire. These inquisitors could even take action against nobles, such as kings and princes. For the first time in its history, the church endorsed and used torture as a means of extracting truth from those being questioned. Thousands were condemned as heretics for their opposition to the Catholic Church and many were brutally executed and/or disposed of leadership.

With the Crusades having failed, Islam persisted in the Middle East. In 1453 A.D. the Byzantine Empire finally fell when the Muslims invaded Turkey and toppled Constantinople. This event formally marked the end of the Middle Ages and led to the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

## CONCLUSION

The Middle Ages were a time of great sorrow and suffering for Christianity. The prevailing Catholic Church veered so far off course that many of its doctrines and practices no longer resembled or represented the original teachings of Christ. It gained unprecedented power to dictate its own will over kings and rulers, and to persecute those who would not consent to its many errors. The Church systematically collected and destroyed many of the writings and historical records of those it labelled as heretics. Still, even in the face of such intense adversity, small pockets of Christians persisted here and there who firmly and uncompromisingly held to the teachings of the New Testament.

Some historians estimate that as many as 50 million Christians were killed during the Middle Ages. Sadly, many of these deaths came at the hands of other professing Christians. While one might expect pagans to oppress and martyr Christians, it is shocking to see such actions undertaken by the church. Yet, this is the bleak reality of the Medieval Period. Perhaps the greatest wounds are those we inflict upon ourselves. Fortunately, a period of revival and restoration was right around the corner...



## A Brief History of Christianity: Part 3 (1100-1600 AD)

Originally Preached on 3/21/2021

*You who have shown me many troubles and distresses will revive me again, and will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. - Psalm 71:20*

Good morning. In last week's message, we covered the history of Christianity during the Middle Ages. We saw the rise of the Roman Catholic Church and the strengthening of the papacy. We talked about some of the Church's misguided undertakings and its wayward doctrines. We learned that millions of Christians who opposed beliefs and practices of Catholicism during medieval times were labeled as heretics, persecuted, tortured, and/or martyred. Despite this heavy oppression, small groups of dissenting Christians persisted who remained committed to the original teachings of Jesus Christ.

Before moving on into the next phase of Christianity history, we will backtrack a few centuries into the latter part of the Middle Ages. I want you to see that even then, in the midst of such desperation and gloom, God was beginning to work through certain individuals and groups to bring about transformation and change. Their courage and faithfulness would pave the way for the Reformation that swept across Europe during the 1500's.

### I. THE EARLY REFORMERS (1100-1500 AD)

Peter Waldo was a wealthy merchant who lived in Lyons, France. Sometime around 1170 A.D. he started a movement preaching against the lavish extravagance of the Catholic Church. He took a vow of poverty and renounced his wealth. Waldo and those who followed his teachings committed themselves to a simple, quiet lifestyle lived in strict accordance with the New Testament. They began preaching publicly against many Roman Catholic practices, and were declared to be heretics. As persecution against them increased, they fled to the Alps and then migrated throughout Switzerland and southern Germany. Their numbers increased steadily, and they became known as the Waldensians (or Waldenses).

Later, around 1370 A.D., a leading philosopher and theologian at Oxford University named John Wycliffe began writing about the ungodly leadership within and the unrighteous conduct of the Roman Catholic Church. Wycliffe's statements were strongly condemned by Pope Gregory IX and he was forced into retirement. Nevertheless, Wycliffe resolutely advocated for the sufficiency of scripture. He believed that everyone should be able to read and study the Bible for themselves - not just the clergy. Late in life he began the monumental work of translating the Latin Bible into English, a task that was completed after his death. John Wycliffe has been called "The Morning Star of the Reformation." His followers became known as the Lollards.

In the mid-1400's, Johannes Gutenberg invented the first European printing press. Within a few decades, printing presses were being used across the continent. Up until this point, copies of

the Bible had to be individually handwritten. Accordingly, they were few and far between. The printing press made it possible to mass produce books and literature - including the Bible. As more and more people began acquiring, reading, and studying God's Word, the glaring excesses and falsehoods of the Roman Catholic Church became increasingly evident. The long-held tyranny of the papacy and Catholicism was starting to crumble.

## II. THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION (1500-1600 AD)

Martin Luther was a German monk and university professor. After years of study, he became greatly troubled by Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences as a means of absolving sin. In 1517, he wrote his "95 Theses" and posted it on the door at the Wittenberg church listing numerous errors and offenses of the Roman Catholic Church. This marked the official beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther believed that the Bible - not the Church - held ultimate authority and that salvation was affected by grace through faith in Jesus Christ - not by works. Luther's teachings were condemned by Pope Leo X and he was excommunicated from the Church. Undeterred, he continued writing against many of the false teachings and practices of Catholicism. His influence emboldened other reformers to do likewise.

John Calvin was a French pastor, who had originally been educated to become a lawyer. As such, he was able to brilliantly explain and defend his beliefs. Like the other reformers, he took issue with many of the false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Around 1536 A.D. he wrote the Institutes of the Christian Religion, which was later developed into a 4-volume systematic theology supporting Biblical Christianity. He also wrote several commentaries and letters. His teachings and writings were widely disseminated in Switzerland, France, and elsewhere. Calvin also started a school in Geneva and was a proponent of public education.

Luther, Calvin, and other reformers (such as Ulrich Zwingli) had a profound influence on Christianity in Europe. Their followers established the Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches. While these new denominations didn't completely abandon all of the teachings and practices of Catholicism, they successfully remedied many of its most egregious flaws.

## III. THE ENGLISH REFORMATION (1500-1600 AD)

The reformation in England was more of a political movement than a religious one. King Henry VIII wished to divorce his wife, but needed permission from the pope to annul their marriage. For various reasons, Pope Clement VII refused to grant the king's request. Encouraged to take action by his advisors, the frustrated king renounced papal authority in 1534 A.D. and declared himself to be the leader of The Church of England. In truth, King Henry VIII was a devoted Catholic who personally opposed the Protestant teachings of Luther and others. His break from the Roman Catholic Church was done for personal reasons, not theological ones.

When Queen Mary I rose to the throne, she moved to restore papal authority over The Church of England. In addition, she imposed severe punishments against and held mass executions of

those who protested the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholicism. For this, she became known as “Bloody Mary”. After a short and turbulent reign, Mary I died and her successor, Queen Elizabeth I came to power. In 1559 A.D. she reasserted her power, again throwing off the papacy, and reviving The Church of England. During her long reign the English church implemented many of the Protestant reforms that had occurred elsewhere. It became known as the Anglican church.

#### IV. THE RADICAL REFORMATION (1500-1600 AD)

For many centuries, well before the Reformation of the 1500’s, the Catholic church had collectively labeled the many Christian groups who opposed it as “Anabaptists” due to their dogged insistence on believer’s baptism. Thus, the word anabaptist was more of a general title than a specific denomination. It included numerous groups such as the Novatianists, Donatists, Albigenses, and Waldenses. The Reformation seemingly provided an opportunity for these believers to finally gain legitimacy and standing outside of the Roman Catholic Church.

Rather than just reforming the errors of Catholicism, however, the Anabaptists sought to establish a wholly separate church that rejected even the practices of infant baptism and establishment by the state. These traditions had been maintained by most of the newly formed Protestant churches. Unfortunately, these views put the Anabaptists at odds with both the Roman Catholics and the majority of Protestants. As a result, persecution against them continued and their efforts were deemed as “radical”. Unable to find refuge, many began seeking a place to flee, where they could exercise their Christian faith freely.

#### CONCLUSION

The Reformation of the 16th century finally ended the Roman Catholic Church’s monopoly over western Christianity. Many new denominations were formed out of Catholicism. In the years that followed the Lutherans became the official church of Germany, the Presbyterians became the official church of Scotland, the Anglicans became the official church of England, and the Reformed church took firm root in France. Meanwhile, Catholicism continued its dominance in Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Despite these changes, sadly the Anabaptists were still widely shunned and unwelcomed in most of Europe. In next week’s message - the final one in this brief series - we will learn where and how many of these Anabaptists finally found a home.

Before we close, I would like to briefly mention the “5 solas” that were popularized during the Protestant Reformation. These served as corrective statements to the heretical doctrines of the Catholic Church. They are, in Latin: Sola scriptura (“Scripture alone”), Sola fide (“faith alone”), Sola gratia (“grace alone”), Solo Christo (“Christ alone”), and Soli Deo gloria (“to the glory of God alone”). Following these ideals, the reformers sought to restore Christianity to the original teachings of Jesus as documented in the New Testament.

## A Brief History of Christianity: Part 4 (1500-2000 AD)

Originally Preached on 3/28/2021

*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. - Matthew 16:18*

Today's message is the last of a short, 4-part series on Christian history. In this sermon we will narrow our scope to primarily just the Baptist denomination, rather than discussing all of Christianity in general. Furthermore, we will gradually shift our focus away from Europe and place it on America - where the modern Baptist church has flourished.

To set the stage, let's take a moment to highlight some important background information. In 1492 A.D. Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in a Spanish ship and landed in the West Indies. For the next century, while Reformation and Renaissance were sweeping across most of Europe, Spain was busy exploring and colonizing Mexico, Central America, and South America. In 1588 A.D. the English navy defeated the Spanish Armada thereby opening the door to British colonization of the New World starting in the 1600's.

### I. BAPTISTS IN ENGLAND (1600-1700 AD)

The Church of England, which had come into existence during the Reformation, retained many of the troublesome beliefs and practices of Roman Catholicism. As such, there were many English Christians who believed that its reform was not sufficient. Two major opposition groups emerged - the Puritans and the Separatists. The Puritans hoped to purify or cleanse the Anglican church from within, by restoring it to the principles of the New Testament. The Separatists viewed such efforts as futile and sought to establish a brand new church. Both groups were ostracized and persecuted by the Church of England.

To escape this persecution, a group of English Separatists fled to Amsterdam, Holland, where they met and were influenced by the Anabaptists who lived there. Subsequently, their leader - John Smyth - renounced the practice of infant baptism and rebaptized himself, along with many others in the group, including Thomas Helwys. A few years later, Helwys led a portion of this same congregation back to London. Upon their arrival, in 1611 A.D. he established what is widely considered by historians to be the first Baptist church in England. Coincidentally, this is the same year that the King James Version of the Bible came out.

Within a few decades Baptist churches were springing up all across the country. Some of these churches were considered General Baptists while others were known as Particular Baptists, because they differed on their views of atonement, but both faced the ire of the official Anglican church. It was illegal to preach and/or practice any faiths contrary to the Church of England. Therefore, many of these Baptists, along with several other strands of Puritans and Separatists, began migrating to America in hopes of achieving greater religious freedom.

## II. BAPTISTS IN AMERICA (1600-1800 AD)

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the original 13 colonies were being established all along the eastern coast of America. More and more people were coming from parts of Europe to settle in the New World, including many Baptists. Unfortunately, most of these new colonies formally adopted a particular denomination or church to the exclusion of all others. Even in colonial America, Baptists were not welcomed in many places and faced great adversity.

Around 1631 A.D., a Puritan minister named Roger Williams left England for America. He eventually made his way to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. However, the colony expelled him for teaching “dangerous” Baptist doctrines. Williams ventured southward into unclaimed territory where he befriended the Indians and established the Providence Plantations, which eventually became Rhode Island. His desire was to create a colony that allowed for full religious liberty to serve as a refuge for those Christians who were shunned in other places. In 1636 A.D. he organized the first Baptist church in America, which was located in Providence. A few years later his friend and colleague, John Clarke, also founded a Baptist church in nearby Newport.

While the Baptists had established a presence in the New World, for the most part it remained small and isolated for many decades. In fact, all expressions of Christianity in America gradually lost their fervor. Then, mostly between 1720 A.D. and 1740 A.D., a spiritual revival called “The Great Awakening” swept across colonial America. Perhaps the most well-known theologian of this time was a Puritan pastor named Jonathan Edwards. It was during this period that Methodism began, following the teachings of John and Charles Wesley. The Baptist faith, in particular, benefited greatly from the effects of “The Great Awakening” and began to multiply throughout the colonies.

The rise in patriotism and the desire to be free from the rule of Britain was fueled, in part, by the advance of religious liberty during and following “The Great Awakening”. America declared its independence from England in 1776 A.D., and following the Revolutionary War, it became a new nation called The United States of America. Many of its founding documents were heavily influenced by Baptist theology, including the First Amendment of the Constitution. It was around this same time, in 1777 A.D., that the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia began. It is regarded as the oldest black church in America.

## III. MODERN BAPTISTS (1800-2000 AD)

Following the American Revolution, the newly formed United States began to spread westward across the North American continent. During this time, from around 1790 A.D. to 1840 A.D., another national revival began known as “The Second Great Awakening”. Evangelism swept across the American frontier and into the New England states. Many preachers began holding tent meetings. Entirely new denominations were formed, such as the Church of Christ, and thousands of people were saved. Once again, the number of Baptists grew dramatically.

Despite their strong belief in local autonomy, by this point many Baptist churches had begun to realize that they could accomplish more if they worked together in cooperation. Baptist churches began to organize themselves into various voluntary associations and conventions. In 1845 A.D., the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was established after a split between Baptists in the north and south over the issue of slavery. Though its begins were marred by slavery, the SBC has since renounced this horrible practice and moved forward. In fact, there are over 3,000 predominantly black churches in the Southern Baptist Convention today.

Back in England, during the late 1800's, a famous Baptist preacher named Charles Spurgeon became prominent. He is known today as "the Prince of Preachers". Meanwhile in America, a growing number of Baptist missionaries were being sent around the world. In 1925 A.D. the Southern Baptist Convention launched the Cooperative Program to support these missionaries and keep them on the mission field. Beginning in 1947 A.D. and continuing for over 50 years, a famous Baptist minister named Billy Graham held evangelistic crusades all around the world. During the 1950's and 1960's, a Baptist pastor named Martin Luther King, Jr. led the Civil Rights Movement to end segregation and promote racial justice.

Today, Baptists are the second largest Christian denomination in the United States. The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest single fellowship of Baptists consisting of over 47,000 churches. Both Red Springs Baptist Church (founded in 1907) and Calvary Baptist Church (founded in 1948) are affiliated with the SBC.

## CONCLUSION

The modern Baptist denomination began in England during the early 1600's. It was started by Separatists who broke away from the Church of England. These Separatists were influenced by and shared many of their core beliefs with the Anabaptists. Though the Baptist church came into being following the Reformation, it is unlike any other Protestant Church. In fact, the Baptists were persecuted by both the Catholics and Protestants in both Europe and America. Though the Baptist church began as an institution in the early 17th century, various groups of Christians have held the distinctive beliefs and practices of Baptists dating back to the time of the New Testament. In fact, many experts today agree that the early Christians were more similar to modern Baptists than any other current denomination.

There is so much more we could talk about as it pertains to the history of Christianity and of the Baptist church. That said, I hope you have found this brief overview to be informative and beneficial to your faith. We as Christians, and particularly as Baptists, have a long and rich heritage that - though imperfect at times - is something to be proud of.