BAPTIST REVIVAL

Reaffirming Baptist Principles
in Today's Changing Church Scene

DAN NELSON
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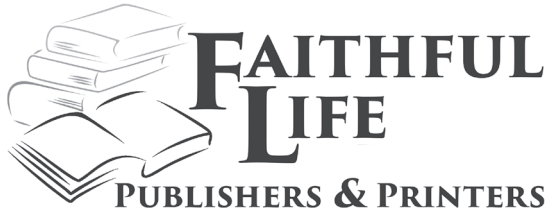

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Dedication Page

***Baptist Revival**: Reaffirming Baptist Principles in Today's Changing Church Scene*

is dedicated to the congregations I have had the privilege of serving as their pastor.

First Baptist Church of Camarillo, California

First Baptist Church of Burney, California

Seminary Baptist Church, Hintonville, Mississippi

Endorsements for Baptist Revival

Baptist Revival: Reaffirming Baptist Principles in Today's Changing Church Scene provides **a generous portion** of spiritual food for hungry souls, who desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dr. Dan Nelson makes **a gracious plea** for biblical doctrine using his gift of teaching as he rightly divides the word of truth. As you read these pages, you will grow stronger as a serious student of God's Word, thus fulfilling **a glorious purpose**. I heartily recommend it!

Dr. Franklin L. Kirksey, Pastor,
First Baptist Church
Spanish Fort, Alabama

Dan Nelson combines the heart of the pastor who loves the local church with the academic knowledge of a church historian in this theological work on the distinctives of the Baptist tradition. Anyone serious about understanding Baptists and the way they have interpreted Scripture specifically as it relates to the local church will want to read this volume carefully.

Dr. Thomas White, President & Professor of
Theology, Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio

Dr. Dan Nelson has written an engaging book which, while it entertains, will also open a totally new vista of truth to the average Baptist reader and even encourage those who are not Baptist. *Baptist Revival: Reaffirming Baptist Principles in Today's Changing Church Scene*, comprehends the simple truth that the unchanging rules of being the church have suddenly become unhinged. Some of this is good, allowing for us to divest ourselves of traditions that are not Scriptural. But in the process, Nelson knows that the mariners on the Baptist boat have thrown so much overboard that the boat is listing. He counsels a recovery of New Testament Baptist principles that will open the way to a new age of missions and churchmanship. Our nation needs a revival. So does our denomination. Nelson knows that this will come only as we rediscover the truths elucidated in this volume. Every pastor must read this book.

Dr. Paige Patterson, President,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas

What do Baptists believe? *Baptist Revival* provides a thoughtful answer to this question from biblical and theological perspectives. Dr. Dan Nelson has been a student of Baptist history and theology, as well as serving as pastor of Baptist churches for many years. This book should be read by Baptists everywhere.

Dr. Steve W. Lemke, Provost,
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
New Orleans, Louisiana

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for
BAPTIST REVIVAL

Foreword

The newfound freedom to study the Scripture and boldly proclaim salvation was exciting and real to Balthasar Hubmaier in his native Germany, where the Reformation happened before his very eyes. As a young man, he consecrated himself to God as a priest growing up in Friedberg, Germany. He went to the University of Friedberg; succeeded his teacher, the famous Master Eck; and received his Master's degree there. He eventually attained a doctorate from the University of Ingolstadt on September 29, 1512.[1] Afterwards, he served the parishes of Regensburg and Waldshut on the Rhine.[2]

His intense study of the Scripture led him to see a sharp contrast between the universal church, which controlled the destinies of kings and countries within its sphere of existence, and New Testament Christianity. Confronted with the truth of Scripture, Hubmaier made his break with the church in Waldshut, where he decided to leave the priesthood and Catholicism. He married Elizabeth Hugline in Waldshut and began seeking a church more biblical in nature.[3] He continued to minister to an independent congregation. His freedom to be true to Scripture in belief and practice was not visualized completely, as he was associated with the Reformation in nearby Zurich, Switzerland. The reforms taking place there were under the headship of Ulrich Zwingli, the Protestant leader of the reformed movement in Switzerland. Although allegiance to Scripture exalted was the norm, the statues of the formerly worshipped saints were

1. William Estep *The Anabaptist Story* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 51.
2. Ibid., 52-53
3. Ibid., 53.

destroyed, and the worship in churches changed, Hubmaier was still troubled over the lack of further change.[4]

Wandering in his religious experience, Hubmaier wanted to be true to Scripture in his efforts to find what he felt was true church practice patterned after New Testament doctrine. The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith had been wrested from the ash heap of clutter associated with church ritual and tradition. The obstructions had obscured the pure message of the Bible. Biblical authority was proclaimed in Protestant churches, but adherence to its teaching was still an elusive dream for Hubmaier. Notable was the reformed church's practice of baptizing infants. The state continued to be in league with the church to enforce a state church, even in the religiously free environment of Switzerland. The very concept of the church as a *gathered assembly* was still a foreign concept to those who traded the universal control of religion for that of the state controlled religion.[5]

At the same time, Ferdinand I, emperor of Austria, pronounced Hubmaier a heretic. Hubmaier fled to Schaffhausen where the governing officials would not surrender him to Ferdinand. Hubmaier became associated with a group in Zurich who had begun baptizing adults. Conrad Grebel was the leader of this group and George Blaurock was the first candidate to request baptism as a believer.[6] As an aspiring biblicist, Hubmaier sought them out and began to study with them, identifying with their teachings. They had no building, but gathered in caves and out-of-the-way places. Now the oppressors

4. Hubmaier was troubled over the unbiblical practices in Catholicism that were continued in Reformed churches after the Reformation.
5. The assent for these groups to a state-church concept was a natural consequence of the lack of religious liberty that reformers like Zwingli did not give to other groups.
6. Mark Gstohl**,** *Conrad Grebel, the Father of Anabaptism* (accessed January 28, 2016), http.//cat.xula.edu/tpr/people/Grebel/.2004/Theological Perspectives on the Reformation.

were not just a universal entity, but the state and local government of Zurich, which was much under Zwingli's influence.[7]

Hubmaier found what he was looking for in this group of simple people, which also included profound scholars like Grebel. The more he gathered with them, the more he was convinced of the necessity for believer's baptism. He went back to the church in the Waldshut community and received baptism there (along with sixty other people) administered by Wilhelm Reublin, an Anabaptist refugee from Zurich.[8]

The devoted former priest gave his energies to defending the pure form of Christianity he had found through the Anabaptists—which were known by this name because of their rejection of infant sprinkling. Also, there was the freedom to come, assemble, and worship freely without any government regulation.

The new, energetic Anabaptist leader began to write about the Anabaptist beliefs, which he had adopted. His works were quickly disseminated throughout the region. In September 1524, he wrote of the persecution of those dissenting against the state-sponsored reformers in *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*.[9]

On May 28, 1525, Zwingli published a pamphlet entitled, *On Baptism, Anabaptism and Infant Baptism*. The writing was a direct attack on Anabaptism. Hubmaier countered by publishing *The Christian Baptism of the Believer* in July. In this work, he laid out biblical support for believer's baptism by immersion. It was one of the best unapologetic pieces for believer's baptism by immersion of the day.[10]

7. The only safe places for many Anabaptist groups to meet were in these areas because of ruthless oppression from civil governments aligned with the state religion of their country.
8. Estep, 59.
9. Ibid., 56.
10. Ibid., 59.

The Anabaptist leaders had confronted Zwingli during a disputation in Zurich. They were destined to a showdown with Zwingli over their faith. Stating their views, Grebel, Blarouck, and Hubmaier conflicted with Zwingli over New Testament baptism, a free church, and a regenerate membership fully identified through baptism. Hubmaier also confronted the Swiss reformer with what he felt was the truth of Scripture, in regards to the church and baptism. Subsequent debates with Zwingli put Hubmaier and others in danger of a state-mandated religion that rejected believer's baptism and retained infant sprinkling. In a debate over the issue, Zwingli declared himself the winner. He then ordered the group to submit their children to infant baptism and abide by the dictates of the government. The leaders refused his religious dictatorship and were quickly tried and imprisoned. However, the movement quickly grew and some in the group arranged to help the prisoners escape from prison.[11] They were soon preaching and standing for their beliefs that liberated them from ignorance. Grebel preached to flocks of people everywhere; but this was short-lived as he succumbed to the plague, dying as a young man.[12] Felix Manx, another Anabaptist leader, became the first martyr for the faith; he was drowned in the Limmat River in Zurich.[13]

Hubmaier bore the brunt of Zwingli's wrath when he refused to follow the reformed leader's order to recant his teachings. The Anabaptist preacher was arrested again and tortured severely, in order to get him to recant his beliefs. Eventually, in excruciating pain, Hubmaier recanted his teachings.[14] However, shortly afterwards, he recanted his recant. Expecting to hear tales of the freed pastor informing his congregation of his recant, Zwingli was very frustrated. Hubmaier did the exact opposite—he led a congregation

11. J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism,* (Herald Press: Scottdale, PA, 1987), 50.
12. Ibid., 57.
13. Estep., 32.
14. Ibid., 63.

at Nikolsburg, Moravia, where he preached the truth of Scripture and wrote in defense of his beliefs.[15]

Hubmaier enjoyed a season of relative freedom and became the theological voice of the Anabaptist movement. In Nikolsburg, at least seventeen pamphlets were accounted as his writings during this time.[16] William Estep believes Hubmaier's most important work was *On the Sword*. It delineated the defense of religious liberty and called to task those civil authorities who enforce state religion, a subject Hubmaier knew well from personal experience.[17]

The long arm of the civil government raised its ugly head again. This time in Austria it arose through the Catholic Emperor Franz Ferdinand, who pledged to wipe out the Anabaptists in his region. Ferdinand exerted pressure on the Moravian ruler, Leonard von Liechenstein, to turn Hubmaier and his wife over to his jurisdiction. [18]

Hubmaier was taken to Kreuzenstien Castle, near Vienna, where he suffered through torture on the rack. However, in excruciating pain again, he refused to recant this time. Knowing it meant certain execution, he resigned himself to his fate. On March 10, 1528, Hubmaier was paraded into the public square in Vienna and burned at the stake by his captors. As further punishment, his wife suffered drowning in the Danube River three days later.[19]

During his execution by burning, Hubmaier exhorted the brethren there to remain steadfast in the faith, as he was doing. His wife encouraged him to be courageous. The executioners put gunpowder in his beard so he would burn quicker. He replied, "Oh,

15. Mark Gstohl**,** Balthzar Hubmaier, *Truth is Unkillable* (accessed January 28,2016), / http.//cat.xula.edu/tpr/people h%FCbmaier. 2004/Theological Perspectives on the Reformation.
16. Estep, 64.
17. Ibid., 66.
18. Ibid., http://cat.xula.edu/tpr/people/h%FCbmaier.
19. Estep. 67.

salt me well!"[20] Raising his head, he called out, "Oh dear brothers, pray that God will forgive me my guilt and that by this death, I will die in the Christian faith."[21] Hubmaier penned a poem before he died. The last lines state:

With angry flame to face thy name
In vain shall men endeavor
Not for a day
The same for aye
God's Word stands sure forever. [22]

Hubmaier believed in the truth of God's Word—a believer's church, believer's baptism by immersion, and a free church in a free state. He died with courage for his convictions. We see in Hubmaier's writings, believers not only should commit themselves to follow Christ through baptism, but they also should become members of the local congregation of believers through their baptism. He believed after saving faith in Christ, *he (the believer) is baptized in water where he professes publicly his faith and his intention. Through baptism the believer commits himself to live a godly life and expects the local congregation, he is a part of to hold him accountable as a member of its body.*[23] Through this entrance door, he becomes accountable to the local congregation.

If Hubmaier were to peer into the beginning decades of the 21st century, what would he see? He would be glad to discover religious freedom far greater than what he could imagine. Yet, he would probably be concerned in this day of generic Christianity, when churches, church growth leaders, and denominations shy away from

20. Ibid. http://cat.xula.edu/tpr/people/h%FCbmaier.
21. Estep. 67.
22. Ibid. 68.
23. Benjamin Hawkins, *Discipleship: The Anabaptist Vision for Life and Theology*. An article in *The Southwestern News: An alumni publication of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary* volume 71, number 1, Fall 2012 (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), 22.

what their church believes. He would most likely be concerned about how lightly we take the name Baptist, especially since he died for their principles. If God's truth was enough for him to preach and die for, why have we silenced our voices concerning what the church really is, what baptism is, and why biblical authority is diminished in churches today?

The work before you is an attempt to espouse the principles for which some Anabaptists died. It is an effort to not depart from those principles and explain why these are so important to the Christian movement. If you are able to catch a glimpse of Hubmaier and his teachings, how he gave his life for what Baptists believe today, then my efforts are not in vain. Nothing could honor the memory of this martyred saint more than knowing we have not betrayed his convictions. God's truth truly does last forever!

~ Dan Nelson

Introduction

There has been a decided shift in Baptist circles in my lifetime regarding the church and its ministry. In the last few decades, I have witnessed many churches using a contemporary worship format. The driving force for their change in worship style is to reach un-churched people. Many believe the name *Baptist* is a turn off, so in the last decade we have seen a shift in terminology. Through this change, it is hard to find a Baptist church, even with a scorecard. In an effort to be more user-friendly, churches interested in this approach have dropped the name *Baptist*. You hear statements like, "They'll never go through the doors, if we have Baptist in our name."

I have written this book not to examine the wisdom of dropping the name *Baptist,* for I can identify with wanting to reach the un-churched. I do have a fear, however, that what started out so innocently and with sincere desires will lose its original purpose. Could dropping the name *Baptist* be tantamount to losing our Baptist identity?

There is a risk to those who drop the name *Baptist* and still try to hold on to Baptist beliefs. Years, and maybe even generations, down the road, I wonder if those who drop the name *Baptist* will retain the identity they said they would not lose, if we just drop the name.

I am assuming the majority reading this work, are concerned about maintaining a Baptist identity and still believe in the uniqueness of Baptist churches and their doctrines. It is crucial we uphold these Baptist distinctives, lest we fall into a generic nothingness that does not hold our positions as unique in some respects.

I am still proud to wear the name *Baptist.* I do not know if it is really a major turn off, as many say it is. We must remember that Baptists never chose that name; we were called Baptist in derision for immersing believers in water, instead of sprinkling them. Catholics and Protestants labeled the Anabaptists with this name because of their rejection of the incorrect mode and meaning of infant baptism in Reformation times.[24]

My suspicion is more people attending church are bothered by the name *Baptist* than non-Christians. I have found showing guests they are welcome and being hospitable, regardless of what a church calls itself, is a more important factor in determining whether people are drawn to a church. Ultimately, our confession of Jesus as Saviour and Lord stands paramount over all other labels. First, we are Bible-believing Christians as Baptists. As Bible-believing Christians, we should have a desire to know what classifies us as Baptist and how the truths we hold help us to serve our Lord in a more devoted way.

There was a stigma of the name *Baptist,* or *Anabaptist*, as they were called during the Reformation period. This rejection of the traditional mode of baptism led to major sacrifices. Some Anabaptist leaders paid for this distinction by enduring torture, discrimination, harassment, and eventual martyrdom. It was very meaningful to be called a Baptist in past centuries and it meant something that was not positive in some of the colonies. The colony of Virginia (where Baptists were not permitted to preach in public) required a license for every minister from an unfavorable government. The Church of England was the colony's official religion and their ministers were considered the only legitimate ministers.[25]

In past history, what one was called determined their association with a cause. In their beginnings, we find Baptists struggling to

24. Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (Harper: New York 1951), 60-61.

25. Paul Stevens *Why I Am a Baptist* Odle, Joe T. Compiler *Why I Am a Baptist: Multiple Testimonies,* (Broadman: Nashville, 1972), 68.

restore the practice of believer's baptism by immersion and the local church assembly of baptized believers. Their beliefs separated them from government sponsorship of religion and its regulation. To imply the name *Baptist* does not mean much is not true to the history of the movement that paid so much for association with the name. Thomas White shares how three thousand legally sanctioned executions occurred from 1520-1560 for religious beliefs and that two-thirds of these executions were Anabaptists.[26]

Those who are raised in Baptist churches and do not wish to identify with the name or heritage should remember our spiritual ancestors in heaven and those who have paid so dearly for wearing the name. The wearing of the name cost them everything in a way we can hardly comprehend today.

Because of the difficulty of finding Baptist churches, there needs to be a focus on what makes them identifiable. Rather than thinking about the name, think of the practice of Baptist churches. Do we have distinct practices that identify with the Baptist movement? Is the Baptist movement good for our country and world?

My primary concern is what Baptists believe and how important that is to them. I am not the first to write about this subject; for over a generation ago, there were more books out on this subject than today. What Baptists believe is important to our day. My contention is that the only way to find out about these distinctions is to explore God's Word. If we believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, we are bound by its precepts and practices.

We need to know how we have gotten to this place in the history of Christianity, as Baptists. What sacrifices have been made by Baptists that have shaped our distinct identity today?

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26. Thomas White, *The Defense of Liberty by the AnaBaptist and the English Baptists* Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III ed. *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty,* (Broadman and Holoman: Nashville, 2007), 49.

Baptists have a dedicated history in their struggle for survival in Europe, as well as America. The struggle has produced a determined people, who have not backed down from what we believe or compromised our faith in times of great difficulty.

It is my concern that many of these cherished teachings may be forgotten, in a rush to not turn off people by teaching doctrines for whom many have fought and even died. I believe it will cost us big-time, if we lose our identity and forget from where we have come.

I am not for preservation, however; as much as I am for fresh truth that will invigorate and give new life to churches, where there is staleness and where churches have plateaued or are dying. The common remedy for this condition has been to not emphasize doctrinal distinctives and to downplay anything that would turn off others from coming to church. Instead, when we know our beliefs and proclaim them boldly, God can use these truths to bring revival to churches in a way we have not seen possible before. We will see revival become reality, if we will study and proclaim the truths that have made us great.

Many are close to our Baptist heritage today, but take it for granted. They have either not learned these distinctives and history about them or someone has withheld the truth from them. Possibly, Baptist churches are not willing to study or investigate their history and practices. We are living with earned freedom, but learning the truth about it could make us more appreciative of it being available to us.

Unfortunately, there are some who really do not care much about what Baptists believe and do not think it matters much in our present day. They are wrong in their conclusion, if they fall into this type of thinking. They have access to a tremendous history, but choose to ignore it and its teaching—which could unlock even greater truth. This truth could liberate anyone in his or her quest to make a difference in the world today.

Questions are immediately raised, if a baby is placed on a doorstep by a mother who abandons it. Who placed the baby there? Why did they leave the baby in the basket here? Do the real parents live close by? What circumstances necessitated putting the baby on a doorstep and relinquishing all responsibility to raising it?

I submit those who do not want to know the answers to these questions either do not care or wish to live in an uninformed state. It is not only helpful, but also needful to know these things.

We did not just evolve as Baptists, without twists, turns, heartaches, or martyrdom. Do we know these avenues of interest for our present day? We must learn to appreciate the distinctive doctrines that many have sacrificed so much for; and we must know we are missing vital information, if we do not want to know these truths. We are in state of danger, with an apathetic attitude toward our beliefs in both the Christian world, as well as the unbelieving one.

When we discover the vital truths that have forged us as a people, I think we will be surprised to know what we took for granted. The close proximity of our beliefs and practices is something we have lived with and need to give serious attention. May God help us learn to appreciate and emulate the sacrifices made for our faith, so we can have freedom to worship and minister as Baptists with great confidence.

Chapter 1:
The Church as a Local Assembly

Which church is the right one?

Our move toward political correctness in religion, tolerance, and many more distractions have produced less loyalty to the local church today. Common refrains are, "We don't need the church as a local institution" or "I'm a member of the *universal church* or the *true church*." There is a constant conflict between the church as a local body of believers and a universal entity. One of the most popular statements is, "I'm not into organized religion." I wonder if these views are popular because people know organized religion means accountability, faithfulness, and growth. Being a Christian does not mean sitting around and getting spiritually flabby.

Against this background, the validity of church membership is being questioned. After all, if you are a believer, you are in the church, right. So why be in the other one? Our Anabaptist forefathers would have chuckled at this convoluted dilemma. They longed for togetherness and assembly and took the Bible literally in what it said about fellowship. They realized the corruption of a universal church on earth and the brutal power of a state church, with the Protestant Reformation division of countries into Protestant or Catholic. The universal church concept gave power to countries and the secular marriage of the state with the church. Anabaptists longed to come out of the world and be separate from the cradle-to-grave mentality—that you are in the church, regardless of what you believe or how you live.

The crucial test of the Baptist idea of the church is what the Scripture says. There we find a remarkable divergence from common thinking today in our beliefs about the church. The church is overwhelmingly described as a local institution. The word *church*, *ecclesia* in Greek, means *called-out ones, an assembly, or gathering*. It is the same picture the Greeks used to describe a city council that came together to govern community affairs on a regular basis.[27]

The New Testament is clear in describing the church as a local entity. One hundred and ten out of 114 times, the New Testament's description of a church is local bodies of believers in Christ who assemble and whom, I believe, were identified by believer's baptism by immersion.[28]

The other four times the word *church* is used, describes the churches as an institution that can only be applied locally. Jesus told Peter, *...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* (Matthew 16:18)[29] He was describing a visible body going against the gates of hell. It is similar to us saying we are trying to save the *family* from the destructive forces in culture today. The *family* can only be applied locally, if you are going to save your specific family. There should be a brotherhood of mankind, but someone else's family cannot be my biological family, neither can my family be yours.

To be fair, we must address the future estate of the church. The previous confessions of faith among Baptists made no mention of the church as a universal entity. The 1963 and 2000 versions of the Baptist Faith and Message refer to the church along with its primary

27. James Strong *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*: Greek Dictionary of the New Testament (Mclean, VA: MacDonald 1881), 26.
28. The sheer weight of evidence demonstrates the church always referred to functionally as a local congregation of believers while here on earth.
29. All Scripture quotations taken from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise indicated.

nature as local, *the redeemed in Christ of all ages*.[30] This expression is in keeping with the assembly of *the first-born* description, as described in Hebrews 12:23.[31] In heaven, we will be one family of redeemed people through all eternity. The church, by virtue of our glorified nature, will change. There will be no unbelieving world out of which to call people.

Today I am concerned, though, with the nature of the church on earth. We know with certainty the church is local and we are commanded to be part of it (Hebrews 10:25). We are not told that it would be "a good idea" to be in a local body, because the necessity of church membership and involvement is demonstrated by the example of the churches in Acts. If we see the church on earth as both local and the visible body of Christ, why are we not a part of one?

The confusion about church today comes from various sources. The universal church has propounded this theory throughout Christian history; it has close ties with state religion codified with *The Edict of Milan* in *311* A.D.[32]

Catholicism still maintains there is only one invisible church. Many evangelical Christians will say this invisible body is entered into by faith in Christ. For the Catholic, it is easy and difficult at the same time to be a part of their invisible church; one needs to only be baptized by sprinkling as a baby and sponsored by their parents.

30. All confessional statements of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention at their annual national meeting are a consensus of belief among its churches revised every 40 to 50 years. They reveal several earlier versions such as the New Hampshire of 1833 and Baptist Faith and Message 1925 confessions have no mention of the church in any form other than existing as a local body of believers. (Also see Appendices 2 and 3.)
31. Russ Bush and Tom Nettles, *Baptist and the Bible: Baptist Views of Inspiration, Inerrancy, Historical Roots and Present Controversies,* (Moody: Chicago), 389-390.
32. Frank S Mead, *The Ten Decisive Battles of Christianity,* (Bobbs-Merrill: New York, 1935), 46-47, 51-52. The first acknowledgement of the State Religion and the power of the state to enforce religion was first introduced in this infamous edict by Constantine.

However, the arduous journey continues as they participate in the sacraments, such as: first communion, confirmation, confession, marriage, and the last rites. Then, and only then, does the Catholic have a hope for heaven through good works. The errors in this system were reasons for the Protestant Reformation.

The mistake of not knowing what the church is and emphasizing a *universal church* leads to a false security of being a believer in Christ by virtue of infant baptism. When asked if they are Christians, many Catholics would say, "Yes, I'm Catholic." However, these terms are not synonymous without personal faith in Christ.[33]

The corruption of these distorted views is perpetuated by the belief in a universal church and the empowering of it through the state. It continued through the conversion of whole countries into Catholicism during the Middle Ages. Force used to enforce state religion became the weapon of suppression to those who questioned its authority. The Protestant Reformation did not release Christianity from the throes of this type of thinking. It did better at moving the authority from the universal church to Scripture. It made justification by faith in Christ of paramount importance, while stating that works cannot save us. Essential teachings on salvation that came from Luther and other Reformed leaders postulated these truths, but did not solve the ecclesiological problem that still persisted.

Anabaptist leaders, who knew the New Testament taught believer's baptism by immersion, felt the Reformation did not go far enough in teaching about the church and baptism. When Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock in 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland, it was a landmark event for the present day practice of baptism. The separation was clearly cut from state sponsored religion. Baptists would no longer exist under state-controlled religion or a universal

33. Personal experience, more than any other factor, leads to my encounter with traditional Catholics and this remark being made constantly. An assured declaration they are Catholic is usually synonymous with being a Christian, leading to a false assurance of salvation.

invisible entity that labeled countries as either Protestant or Catholic. Infant baptism was the test of allegiance to the state church; while Baptists boldly stated their allegiance to the Scripture. Several Baptist leaders (Hubmaier, Manz, Sattler, and Grebel) either died for the practice or paid for it by always being on the run from an oppressive govenment.[34]

My question in light of these sacrifices is: *Why should I wish to affiliate with an organization that killed some of my spiritual ancestors?* Protestantism and Reformed theology did not clarify the teaching on the church and baptism, but instead glossed over it and used it as a control method.

The confusion continued with various groups, either being started by men or theology. The allegiance to men, such as Wesley, Luther, and Calvin, spawned denominations they viewed as their church.[35] Governing bodies superseded the local church and confused the people in their lack of understanding concerning biblical teaching on the church. They worked against local assemblies as being the visible body of Christ assembled and served as a roadblock to local church autonomy.

Even today, we find many well-meaning Christians and leaders referring to the church on earth as a universal invisible entity. The National Day of Prayer, along with other gatherings with other types of believers, generates rhetoric that is interesting, to say the least. This past year at the National Day of Prayer in our city, a popular pastor of a non-denominational church stated his conviction about *the church*. He stated that there was really just one church in our town. He said, "We are the Church of Camarillo." He continued by saying that we only attend different buildings or places, we meet because of certain preferences, and with people who are friends. This

34. Estep, 10-11.

35. The very fact that Luther or Calvin have denominations and systems of theology named after them illustrate a human origin of these movements. This observation does not mean they receive worship as men.

sweeping generalization was incorrect (at least from my perspective), because the Bible does not refer to the church that way. I gather with fellow believers in the Baptist church where I pastor, because of convictions people were willing to die for—such as believer's baptism by immersion, the gathered assembly, religious liberty, and congregational rule in church governance. These are not just preferences. They created a movement that stood against the tradition laid churches, which did not use the entire Bible for church practice.

After all, if you were to put everyone together each Sunday, something would have to give—in the style of worship, the use of spiritual gifts, the mode and meaning of baptism, how we make decisions that affect the church, and views related to disagreements in doctrine. Getting together to preach the Gospel or fellowship is helpful and useful in our collective witness to the world. Getting along Sunday after Sunday, however, is another matter. Some are still bold enough to say it will not work on a functional level this side of heaven. We must go to the church where our convictions lead us.

Many mainline denominations refer to their denomination as the church. Baptists, instead, never refer to the denomination as the church. A few years ago, a newspaper reporter wanted to get my opinion of an issue in Southern Baptist Life. He asked what the position was of the Southern Baptist Church. I asked him, "Which one? There is no such thing as *the Southern Baptist Church*. The Southern Baptist church does not exist." Startled, he asked what I meant. I had the opportunity to share how Baptists do not refer to their denomination as *the church*. Instead, we have over 42,000 churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, as a denomination for missions and primarily doctrinal fellowship. I cannot speak for another Baptist church.[36] Churches did not try to govern another church's affairs in the Bible.

36. *Attitudes vary among local pastors concerning the Southern Baptist Convention boycott of Disney*, was the article in the Ventura County Star, June 1999 I refer. The newspaper interviewed me and several other local Southern Baptist pastors concerning our attitude to the boycott of the Southern Baptist Convention of the Disney theme parks and products.

The church at Corinth took an offering for the Jerusalem church, but did not try to govern its ministry (II Cor. 8:16-9:5). Because of the New Testament referring to the church as local, I will not slap a loose tag on this description of our denomination as *the church*.

The subtlest form of confusion today arises with the many parachurch groups and Christian organizations that say they are part of the invisible or true church. Many of these groups are doing worthy things and are ministering in ways churches are not; but they can never be *the church,* for they are not constituted in the proper way the church is organized.

I enjoy universal fellowship with all true believers in Christ, who have trusted Him as Saviour. Yet, this fellowship is with those in the kingdom of God, or heaven, that Jesus referred to with Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5). The tragedy of this confusion in evangelical Christian circles is that people are more loyal to the *invisible group* than they are to the local body of believers. It is interesting that those who believe they only need to be in the invisible church for ministry, always come around and ask for money from the visible church.[37]

At best, I know people mean well; at worst, I know they find it is easier to be in their *invisible church*. They have no pastor, no building to come to, no address, no group of people to commit to, no method of identifying with public ordinances like baptism or the Lord's Supper. There is no zip code, no website, no responsibility, and no accountability to a universal church. I know the vast majority of people that do not see the local church as a part of their life, think just being a believer in Christ is enough. Could it be, however, that many cannot find fulfillment in their lives spiritually, because there is more to the Christian life than just believing in Christ? Local church involvement, not seen as essential in their lives, leaves a void because of this omission.

37. Unfortunately, we witness this recurring phenomenon in our day: Groups outside the visible church want support from visible churches not tied to any specific church body themselves.

The authority of the local church has been diluted in the present day. Consider that Jesus called the disciples, who for the most part received the baptism of John the Baptist and believed in the promise of the Messiah, because he preached that message. Jesus called these simple fishermen to be *fishers of men* who believed in Him as Messiah. Jesus called them as a visible body of believers and He gave guidelines for dealing with matters before the church in Matthew 18:15-18.

When He appeared after His resurrection, Jesus said, *All power is given to you in heaven and earth* (Matthew 28:18). This is an authority given to Jesus' disciples as the first church. They were His followers assembled together, given the authority of the Holy Spirit to carry out His work. The Great Commission was to make disciples, baptize and instruct new disciples, and was given to an already formed church before the day of Pentecost.

Many believers feel the church started at Pentecost and believe this strategic point in time is when the Holy Spirit came upon the church in mighty power. However, the authority Jesus talked about was before Pentecost. Pentecost was the empowering of the church. It was a very important event, because it raises the question: Who has authorization to baptize? If the church began at Pentecost, then any believer can baptize. If the church began in Jesus' ministry, then a local body and their successors have the authorization to baptize. Jesus said, *I will be with you till the end of the world* (Matthew 28:20). Not all Christians have the authority to baptize. The disciples who are in heaven have successors who will lead people to be disciples, baptize, and instruct new believers. If a local body of believers will observe these commandments, then they will have the authority and blessing of God's power on them.

The church must have already been in existence before Pentecost, for they elected Judas' successor, Matthias, (Acts 1:23) and new believers were added to the church, which was already

in existence (Acts 2:41). You do not add to something not already in existence. It was not an invisible body Jesus commissioned, but rather a local body of believers in Christ who were called out and assembled—which is what the Bible refers to as *the church*.

How dare we ignore the body God has blessed with divine authority from above, if the church is a local assembly of believers and they are doing what Jesus instructed them to do? The true churches are those who will do what Jesus commanded and have received instruction to do in the Great Commission. Baptists refuse to give accreditation to a group that is not a local body of believers as *the church*. This true definition and function of the local church is a key belief among Baptists.

Chapter 1 Scripture References

Matthew 16:18; Hebrews 12:23; Hebrews 10:25;
II Corinthians 8:16-9:5; John 3:3, 5; Matthew 18:15-18;
Matthew 28:16; Matthew 28:20;
Acts 1:23; Acts 2:41.

Chapter 2:
Believer's Baptism by Immersion

Are there really two modes and meanings of baptism?

Many believe that believer's baptism by immersion is the most treasured belief among Baptists. Indeed, our name is derived from the mode of baptism for believers, but anyone could go dunk someone in water. Is it possible the body Jesus commissioned to baptize is only represented in a local body of believers who are obedient to the Great Commission?

Believer's baptism by immersion has an age-old struggle. One wonders—why the confusion with the clear teaching in the Bible about what baptism is, who it is for, and who is supposed to administer it? Why has there been such a struggle for its practice? Possibly because taking the Bible at face value runs counter to the traditional practice of many mainline groups, which will not use the Scripture as their highest authority.

John the Baptist, in preparation for Christ's coming as Messiah, first introduced the New Testament practice of believer's baptism by immersion. It served as a preparatory rite John used to ready Israel for Christ's coming in a visible way. John demanded *fruits meet for repentance* before he would baptize anyone, including the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 3:7-8).

One day, Jesus came to be baptized by John, causing many to wonder why the sinless Son of God was being baptized. Jesus said to John, *Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all*

righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Jesus' baptism was an example to us that we need to submit to the only authority, at the inception of Jesus' ministry, authorized to baptize believers.

John had power from on high and exercised that power in calling people to repentance and into the kingdom of God. Jesus was baptized to foreshadow His redemptive work of dying for our sins, being buried, and rising from the grave. Through this understanding of His work, it appears baptism had paramount significance because of Jesus' wilderness temptation shortly after His baptism. The impact of His ministry, culminating with the cross, hit Jesus and He was tempted to follow Satan's distractions and not to go through with it.

Jesus' baptism was extremely important, since it would foretell what Jesus would do in His ministry. In this light, we must see immersion is the only proper mode to picture Christ's redemptive work and for those who receive baptism to illustrate their faith in Christ's saving work. We know Jesus was immersed, because He came *up straightway out of the water* (Matthew 3:16). Jesus would not have been in the water had He not been immersed. The word for baptism, *baptizmo,* clearly translated is *immersion*.[38] There can be no other form of baptism if we will abide by Scripture in this matter.If anyone wants a substantial reason for being baptized, they need only to see it as following the example of Jesus in the manner He was baptized.

John's identification was as *the Baptist,* because of the mode of baptism he administered to those coming to him. The Qumran Community, through the ritualistic cleansing of their members, could have introduced immersion to John.[38] He administered the mode of baptism Jesus accepted. Later, John was told that Jesus' disciples were baptizing more than he was baptizing. John the Baptist said,

38. This is conjecture based on John's close proximity to the community in the Judean desert and his asceticism like that of the Qumran community as well as the baptism he administered.

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, referring to His disciples as both the bride and the church (John 3:29). John was pivotal in initiating believer's baptism by immersion. Jesus continued the practice, commissioning His church to baptize after His death, burial, and resurrection. People often ask, "Where are we commanded in the Bible to be baptized?" We know Jesus commanded the church (His disciples), to baptize believers (Matthew 28:19). When we become believers in Christ, we are given an indirect command to be baptized by immersion, because the church was given the command to baptize all new believers in Christ.

The big question is: Was the practice of believer's baptism continued by the Jerusalem church and others spawned by its leaders and did it continue through the rapid expansion of the Gospel? On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the Jews after the Holy Spirit fell on the infant church. Peter revealed Christ as the Messiah they *had taken by wicked hands and slain* and how *God had declared Him both Lord and Christ* (Acts 2:23). The shock of crucifying the Messiah, coupled with sudden conviction cut them to the heart. They said, *What shall we do?* Peter said, *Repent, and be baptized, for the remission of sins* (Acts 2:37-38).

Peter was not preaching baptismal regeneration at Pentecost. The word *for, eis* in Greek can also be translated *because of* or *in light of* their repentance.[39] In the next chapter, Peter preached again and nothing is said about baptism in his calling people to be converted (Acts 3:19). He probably saw the mitzvah baths surrounding the temple and told them to show evidence of their repentance by turning to Christ and receiving baptism.

Baptism was not only evidence of their faith, it was a visible identification with Christ and the church. After their baptism, Peter

39. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of the Biblical Words* (Nelson: Nashville), 1286.

instructed them further. They received His words for them to save themselves, were baptized, and the Lord added to them those being saved (Acts 2: 40-41).

All through Acts, the consistent theme continues concerning baptism. The book of Acts talks about faith in Christ, baptism, and identification with the body of Christ or cause of Christianity through baptism. We see this in Acts 8:15-16 when Peter and John laid hands on new believers at Samaria. It shows how believer's baptism is under the authority of the church. Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert reflected the commission of the church, after the Samaritans received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on their body of believers (Acts 8:26-40).

In Caesarea, Cornelius and his household received baptism after Peter took delegates from the Jerusalem church and asked them, *Can any man could forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as we?* (Acts 10:47). This reference shows how baptism is the visible symbol of identification with Christ and the church.

Acts 16:25-34 gives us the account of the Philippian jailor coming to Christ, after the earthquake in the Philippian jail. He and his house were baptized after his conversion experience; then they attended to Paul and Silas.

Paul led *Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue* to believe in Christ *with all his house* and *many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized* at Corinth (Acts 18:8). Later, Paul told the church at Corinth he was thankful he only baptized a few there (I Corinthians 1:14-17). They were squabbling over which human leader who ministered at Corinth had baptized them. Paul was really illustrating that baptism is not necessary for salvation, and trying to remove himself from self-aggrandizement, while following the pattern Christ gave in the Great Commission.

In Galatians, Paul indicated baptism identifies us with Christ and the Gospel (Galatians 3:27). Just as when military personnel wear uniforms and we know instantly they are in the service; baptism shows we belong to Christ and we are identifying with what He did for us.

Paul clinched the proper mode of baptism by declaring, *We are buried with Christ in baptism* (Romans 6:3-4). Just as Jesus died, was buried, and rose, we depict this salvation experience through believer's baptism by immersion.

We surmise these important factors about baptism in the New Testament. These are derived from B.H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Proper Subject: All who have placed faith in Christ for salvation and forgiveness of sin are the proper subjects for baptism as a true believer in Christ.

The Proper Mode: Baptism is always by immersion to depict our faith in the Gospel, identifying us with Christ, and is a demonstration of our commitment to Christ.

The Proper Meaning: Baptism shows our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, so it is a public testimony of what we have personally come to believe about the Gospel.

The Proper Authority: The church is the successor of the disciples whom Christ commissioned to baptize new believers. Therefore, the church (as an assembled body), administers baptism.[40]

Through the ages, various groups held a desire to be true to the Scriptures or had an affinity to the Baptist structure. These groups also practiced believer's baptism. History is replete with groups that

40. B. H. Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, Providence Baptist Ministries, (May 24, 2010), (accessed December 10, 2015), John Leland University, Georgetown, Kentucky, http://www.pbministries.org/Theology/B.%20H.%20Carroll/baptist_principles/carroll_01.htm

have baptized believers by immersion. These groups pre-date the Reformation, but nonetheless practiced New Testament baptism. The practice did not disappear off the face of earth, but vanished only in the universal church. Certainly, not all these groups have been orthodox; however, we can say there has been a steady stream of believers who have practiced believer's baptism by immersion. All groups will not be described, but it is important to look at several important junctures in the continuance of baptism.[41]

The first important diminishment of believer's baptism was the origin of infant sprinkling. History is scattered concerning the practice of baptism in the first three centuries of the record of early Christianity. We get some glimpses into the practice of baptism in Tunisia, a hotspot of Christianity in the first three centuries. Carthage and Hippo served as the theological centers of northern Africa in this area. Recent archaeological digs in Tunisia reveal ancient baptismal pools at the lowest level of strata, dating the first five centuries since Christ. The higher the strata, the more the baptismal pools changed to fonts.[42] What brought about the change in the mode of baptism? Why did the universal church change the mode and meaning of baptism?

Much of the history of this change is centered in Constantine joining church and state together after he came to power in Rome. He declared in his *Edict of Milan* in 311 A.D. that all pagans would be Christians, all pagan temples Christian temples, and all pagan priests Christian priests.[43] For the first time (but not the last time), people were converted by *edict.* Constantine, who delayed baptism until his deathbed, hoped there might be something magical about his

41. This is a common conviction Baptists have held in the past because of finding groups in every century since the time of Christ that have practiced believer's baptism by immersion.
42. Gary D. Myers Bapt*isteries in Tunisia illustrate early church views on baptism* An article in *The Vision: A alumni publication of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary* vol. 66, no. 1 Spring/Summer 2010 (New Orleans: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), 7.
43. Meade, 46-47.

baptism, ushering him into heaven. Historical conjecture indicates Constantine was probably sprinkled instead of immersed at the hour of his demise.[44]

The practice of baptism seemed to change with the entire population *going Christian*. It appears this happened on a massive scale and was accompanied by infant sprinkling to assure everyone became Christian according to the emperor's edict. Sprinkling may have been the easiest way of accomplishing the goal of the supposed conversion of an empire to Christianity. There may have been some pagan practices associated with infant sprinkling; unfortunately, but there is not much evidence in history about this transition, if indeed there were such a ritual.[45]

With government sponsorship of religion, sprinkling became the initiatory rite of infants and adults into the church. The practice of believer's baptism by immersion faded into the background, except for certain groups and individuals.

One of these individuals, Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is a sterling example of misrepresentation in history. There is strong evidence he baptized believers in Christ by immersion. When going back to Ireland to do mission work from Britain, he rejected church authority telling him not to go there. He had escaped from slavery there as a young man and returned as a Gospel preacher, bringing many to Christ. He baptized many converts and baptismal pools have been discovered in ancient ruins dating back to Patrick's ministry there.[46]

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44. Kenneth Scott Latourette *A History of Christianity* : *A Revised edition* Volume I: to A.D. 1500 (Harper Row: New York, 1975), 93. The basic intent of the *Edict of Milan* was to make citizens Christian by government edict and the power of state religion if need be.
45. This reasoning is the most logical explanation for the origin of infant baptism: convenience and solidifying the intent of insuring the child would be *Christian*.
46. John A. Christian, A *History of Baptists: Together with some account of their principles and practices,* Volume I, (Bogard: Texarkana, Ark-TX, 1922), 178.

W.A. Criswell, the famous former pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, told of the origin of his family name. Criswell said his Irish ancestors earned the name from being baptized in certain pools designated for baptism, obviously by Patrick and his successors. The pools were called *Christ-wells* and the practice of believer's baptism by immersion in these ancient times is clear, evidenced through these wells, dedicated for this purpose. The practice of immersion was evidence Patrick was connected to this unique Baptist practice at the time.[47]

These are two pictures of Pre-Reformation baptism, both its change and retention; but believer's baptism, as a practice by churches, came to a crest in Reformation times. The Anabaptist movement led the way in a revival of what the Bible reveals about baptism.

Two distinguishing marks of Anabaptist churches were brought to the forefront in the Reformation. The first was the validity of the local church without state control and ecclesiastical entanglements. The second most cherished view of Anabaptist was their view of believer's baptism by immersion. In disputations with Ulrich Zwingli, the reformed leader of Switzerland, over the mode and subject of baptism, it was clear the magisterial reformers would fiercely contest the practice of immersion of believers.

When Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock in 1525, a movement was born. It was really a continuation of what several groups through the centuries had already affirmed—baptism for believers by immersion.[48] State control of religion in Switzerland, Germany, and modern Austria forbade the practice of baptism by immersion. The tragic consequence of this was the imprisonment, persecution, and martyrdom of some Anabaptist leaders. Despite the struggle, the practice survived and tenuously made progress in the Reformation time, because groups of Anabaptists spread, some

47. W.A. Criswell, W.A. Criswell Sermon Library, Dallas, TX, Sam Hull administrator: St. Patrick was a Baptist Preacher, 1958 (accessed December 27, 2015), http://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1958/st-patrick-was-a-baptist-preacher/.

48. Estep, 10-11.

even coming to America seeking religious freedom.[49] Freedom came at a cost, but Baptists continued the practice of immersion baptism, despite hardship for accepting what the Bible said about baptism.

John Smyth led the first Baptist church in England to break with the state church of England. Converts were baptized by immersion and churches began to grow. The English Baptists spread as a branch of the Separatist movement, refusing to accept state control of religion and believing strongly in the right to immerse converts as believers, rejecting infant sprinkling.[50]

There was no continual dominant leader of Baptist churches in America. During the time Roger Williams was a Baptist he established Rhode Island as a colony devoted to complete religious freedom. Many Baptists migrated to the south, although the first Baptist association of churches originated in Philadelphia. Baptists continued to preach the Gospel and baptized new converts as a hallmark of their identity.[51]

In the South, Shubal Sterns, a pastor in the Separatist Baptist movement, did much to perpetuate the Baptist idea of baptism and evangelism throughout North Carolina and the south.[52] First Baptist Church of Charleston was also a leading bulwark of Baptist identity in the south.[53] The Baptists in Virginia struggled against the oppressive hand of the colony, where the Church of England was mandated as the only official religion. Believer's baptism by immersion was looked upon as odd and led to oppression by the local governments, which were linked with the Church of England. Henry Vedder revealed, "…. the Assembly provided that a fine of two thousand pounds of tobacco should be imposed on parents who refused to have their

49. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Broadman: Nashville), 32-39.
50. Ibid, 44-45.
51. Ibid, 124-138.
52. Ibid, 227-235.
53. Christian, vol. 2, 110-111.

children baptized."[54] This penalty was the beginning of more drastic measures that were to come against Baptists in the largest colony in America.

Before the American Baptist regional split in 1845, Northern and Southern Baptists were sending missionaries to distant places. One tandem of missionaries (Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice) were members of the Congregational church who sensed God's call to Burma and parts of the Far East. They had been strongly moved to answer God's call to missions at the Haystack prayer meetings at Williams College. In further study of the Scriptures, they were convinced immersion was the correct mode of baptism.[55] On their first tour, they stopped in India to discuss believer's baptism with William Carey, the father of modern missions, who had gone there from England. They were baptized by William Ward, in Carey's Lal Bazar Chapel, into the Baptist church at Calcutta. Judson had a stellar missionary career in Burma and Rice became a strong leader in organizing and recruiting others for foreign mission work.[56] This mission effort, through both individuals, was a forerunner for Southern Baptist mission work.

Baptists have spread all across America, preaching the Gospel and baptizing new converts by immersion. Baptism has become a sign of identification with a church, showing the seriousness of a commitment to Christ, and declaring His death, burial, and resurrection. Southern Baptists have taken the Bible at face value and declared all following Christ, as believers in Christ, need to identify with Him through believer's baptism by immersion.

54. Henry C. Vedder, *Short History of the Baptists,* (American Baptist Publications: Philadelphia), 307.
55. Robert Torbet, *A History of the Baptists,* 3rd ed. (Judson: Valley Forge), 300.
56. Armstrong, 130.

Scripture References for Chapter 2

Matthew 3:7-8; Matthew 3:15; Matthew 3:16; John 3:29;
Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:23, 36-41; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:15-16;
Acts 8:26-40; Acts 10:47; Acts 16:25-34; Acts 18:8;
I Corinthians 1:14-17; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4.

Chapter 3:
No State Control of Religion

Should Government protect Religious freedom or restrict it?

Certain periods of history have made it difficult for Baptists to practice their faith. Opponents have used government sanctions to control and regulate religion. Government control of religion has created tension-filled times, making Baptists enemies of the state and targets of harassment in their quest to practice their faith. I am careful to distinguish the proper wording for this tenet of Baptist practice, because separation of church and state has been a source of controversy by virtue of the terminology used. *Freedom of religion* is a positive statement, despite its different interpretations by Christians and non-Christians.

The popular terminology of *separation of church and state* has suffered a serious revision of thinking in recent times. Particularly, many of the non-churched population think separation of church and state means to silence all Christian voices, denying their ability to exercise First Amendment rights. They fail to understand that *forbidding the establishment of religion* means forbidding the establishment of a certain Christian denomination as a state church in our country or region.[57] Separation of church and state is not a means of keeping religious influence out of government.

57. United States Constitution, First Amendment, 1787.

The second part of the freedom of religion clause in the First Amendment states, *nor prohibit the exercise thereof*.[58] The practice of religion is not restricted only to the right of assembly as a church. The medieval church sought the state as the enforcer of religion. With an understanding of the oppression Baptists experienced, our heartfelt desire is to never let this happen again. We do not believe government has the right to enforce what a church can or cannot do.[59]

The struggle to even exist as a church began early. It was the hypocritical religious leaders who took Jesus by treachery and turned him over to the Romans for crucifixion (Matthew 20:18-19). Jesus had declared, *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's* (Matthew 22:21). Jesus set the example for His followers by describing their duty to the government and paying their taxes, when He had Peter pull a coin from a fish's mouth (Matthew 17:27).

It was not the Romans, but the blind religious leaders, who brought pressure on the early church to shut up and stop noising abroad the message of the Gospel. The first few chapters of Acts feature the early church coming before the Sanhedrin, who in a theocracy had enforcement powers against what they considered blasphemous teaching. Stephen's martyrdom illustrates the hatred faced by early Christians and their murderous response to their message (Acts 7:51-60).

Peter's response to the council is significant in illustrating the freedom of conscience in the face of opposition. When asked to stop preaching in Jesus' name, he stated, *We cannot help but speak those things we have heard and seen* (Acts 4:20). When faced with the threat of execution after spending time in prison, he said, *We ought*

58. Ibid., First Amendment of Constitution.
59. Matters of religious practice are off limits to the government as described in the First Amendment. The persecution of state controlled religion has cured Baptist of such a notion.

to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). Religious conviction rose over ecclesiastical or government edicts concerning the early church.

Throughout the book of Acts, there was a reluctance of the Roman government to deal with the new movement of Christianity. Paul's encounters before Roman justice featured his protection by various governors and centurions, as he was tried and then later sailed to Rome as a prisoner. The typical attitude of the Roman officials toward Christianity was seen when Demetrius and others at Ephesus stirred up opposition against Paul in Acts 19:17-41. The Roman town clerk did not want to have anything to do with matters of religion. The most intense hostility came from Judaizers who followed Paul and Barnabas throughout Asia Minor in their first journey. This ecclesiastical purge did not bode well for Christianity in its early history.

What could be worse than the outright imprisonment, torture, and death of early Christians throughout the first three centuries? No one could imagine anything worse than the hostility under the enforced extermination attempts of Nero, Dominion, Diocletian, and others.[60]

When the empire suddenly became *Christian*, the state had the power to enforce conformity to the church through Rome's decrees. The councils formulating doctrine in this era were helpful, but the civil power joining with religion to enforce conformity was bad for all who had differing opinions.[61]

The medieval church pushed the enforcing power of the state to its zenith. The Inquisition and Crusades were two glaring examples of state enforcement of religion. In 800 A.D. Charlemagne cemented

60. Eusebuis Pamphilus *Ecclesiastical Church History* Bishop of Cesarea in Palestine (Translated from The Original by Christian Fredrick Cruse Baker: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 169-183. He chronicles the sad plight of the early Christians who suffered much; many were martyred for their faith.
61. Roland Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and Its Impact on Western Civilization*, Volume 2 (Harper: New York, 1966), 92-94.

the states' inseparable bond with the universal church in protecting and enforcing religion. His crowning by Pope Leo III as the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire made the state beholden to the church. It was a league destined to split Europe into religious hostility.[62]

During medieval days, the Albgenses were purged from France by the Catholic authorities there. The Waldenses were persecuted, as well as were the Lollards, who carried out John Wycliffe's directives. By the time of Huss and Savonarola, the power of the state to swoop down and do the bidding of the church was unbelievable. They trumped up charges against John Huss (an early morning star of the reformation), that led to his execution. The accusations of Savonarola against the papacy led to his quick arrest, trial, and execution.[63]

Luther's stand against the corruption of the church and the power of the state to control religion was an effective challenge. Luther's summons to a hearing before the Holy Roman Emperor by the Roman church was a turning point in his stand *against* the church and *for* the truth. The *Augsburg Confession* and *Peace of Augsburg* are remarkable, in that what Fredrick did in protecting Luther was duplicated with the stand of the German princes' resistance to the enforcement power of the universal church. The Council at Trent solidified Catholic belief and led to continual hostility between Protestants and Catholics.[64]

What then was the fate of the Baptists in their quest for liberty to practice their faith? A unprecedented phenomenon occurred in the denial of religious freedom by Catholics and Protestants. As the Anabaptists arose, calling for a free church in a free state, they were slammed down, particularly by Ulrich Zwingli (the Swiss reformed leader). Zwingli was determined to imprison Anabaptist

62. Latourette , Volume I, 329.
63. John Fox, *Foxes Book of Martyrs* ed. by William Byron Forbush, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1926), 43-87.
64. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand, A life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon: Nashville), 324- 325.

leaders, enforce infant sprinkling, and even execute leaders, like Felix Manz. Michael Sattler was burned at the stake by the state in Germany. Many believed Luther could have done more to silence the enforcing power of the state against Anabaptists and others. Balthazar Hubmaier execution by the Catholic regime in Austria, wiped out his great theological voice and lead to increased hostility. Baptists had no freedom to practice their faith and were scattered, along with some of their fellow non-conformists, coming to the New World.[65]

The *divine right of kings,* asserted by James and Charles I in England, did much to use the state to control religion there. Henry VIII's assertion of being the head of the Church of England started a dangerous trend. His daughter Mary, a Catholic, brought hostility to the Protestant movement in England. However, Elizabeth, a Protestant, brought moderation to both factions for a time. The struggle however, was destined to be a continual problem in England.[66]

When the English Civil War was over, a definite attempt was made to bring freedom from the king's oppressive measures, including his enforcement of liturgical practices similar to Catholicism. Puritans took over through Oliver Cromwell, after the beheading of Charles I, and sought freedom from the Catholic influence of prior kings. This attempt replaced the king with a theocratic Puritan rule, which controlled the government.[67]

John Smyth and Thomas Helwey's congregation marked a break with tradition and sought a new day and complete religious freedom from the state in England. The Separatist Movement sought to establish this freedom elsewhere, hence the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Bay in the New World. Although religious freedom was sought, a familiar trend of state religion continued in the colonies. Roger Williams' establishment of the colony of Rhode Island granted

65. Estep, 51-68.
66. Latourette, vol. 2, 816-820.
67. Bainton, vol. 2, Christendom, 68-90.

pure religious freedom, while the other colonies were provincial at best, due to the control of religion in these respective colonies.[68]

Baptists were scattered, but hardly silent in their protest of religious favoritism. For instance, Isaac Bacchus became a vocal critic in Massachusetts of the partial taxes in the colony going to support the Congregational pastors, churches, and parsonages there.[69]

As Baptists moved south, Shubal Sterns with the Sandy Creek Baptist Church and the Charleston First Baptist Church established a free environment of religious toleration.[70] This newfound freedom of religion was not uniform everywhere. Some colonies brought about the same oppression witnessed in the mother country. Virginia was the worst representative of this suppression. They not only forbade preaching without a license, but also imprisoned Baptists and silenced them in jail—although some continued to preach there. Patrick Henry was their lawyer who defended Baptist preachers and decried their imprisonment in America.[71]

In Virginia, Baptists owed a great debt of gratitude to John Leland, a Baptist preacher who suffered oppression firsthand for his religious beliefs. He lobbied steadily for the Bill of Rights and Freedom of Religion Clause in the Constitution. He achieved this important legislation working with James Madison, the chief architect of the Constitution.[72] Thomas Jefferson had attended the church where Leland served as pastor and worked with the Baptist leader for religious liberty. Jefferson was familiar with the Baptist representative government in an ecclesiastical setting and understood their quest for religious liberty.[73] These insights led Jefferson to

68. McBeth, 36-37.
69. Christian, 382-383.
70. McBeth, 232, 233.
71. Stevens, 69.
72. Bruce Prescott, *Baptist Patriots: John Leland, Mainstream Baptists*, (April 7, 1999), (accessed December 10, 2015), http://.mainstreambaptists.org/mbn/Patriots.htm
73. Torbet, 241.

sponsor *the Statute for Religious Freedom* in the Virginia General Assembly as early as 1784, before *the Bill of Rights* was adopted in the Constitutional Convention.[74]

Other religions have cause to thank Baptists for their stand on religious liberty and the restriction of government to regulate religion. True separation of church and state was defined in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut to Jefferson when he was President in 1803. It illustrates what the phrase really means. The association was concerned about the rumblings of making the Congregational Church the state church of America, despite the freedom of religion promised in the Constitution. Jefferson not only quelled the rumors of such a move, but also went one step further.

Jefferson explained there was a strong wall between church and state, which prevented government from controlling religious practice. The wall was one-dimensional, in that it prevented the government from controlling religion, but did not forbid religion from influencing the government. This belief continued until the strict forbiddance of religious influence in recent times.[75]

Baptists have always been forerunners of religious liberty and have never insisted on special favoritism. They were restricted in the practice of their faith in colonies that did not relinquish such restriction when they became states. They have only wanted freedom from state control. Eventually, they led the way in the United States toward the freedom of religion which they worked so hard toward, while enduring many difficulties. Today, we still strike a balance in this country between religious liberty and loyalty to government.

The only exception to the tenet of religious liberty is when one's religion endangers the physical safety of someone else. Notable

74. O.K. and Marjorie Armstrong, *The Baptists in America,* (Doubleday: Garden City, NY.1979), 11.
75. David Barton, *Original Intent*: *The Courts, the Constitution & Religion*, (Wall Builders: Aledo, TX 1996), 43-48.

examples would be forbidding blood transfusions to little babies, as Jehovah Witnesses espouse; or the Sharia law of the Muslim faith, which oppresses women and others, instead of seeking due process of our legal system for justice.[76]

Will there ever be true religious freedom this side of heaven? An apparent ignorance persists in our culture over the local church, its place in government, and its forbiddance of free speech of the church in society. This ignorance of what religious freedom really is will inevitably lead to future challenges.

Church/State relations need further study and enlightenment, because of the confusion that persists as to their specific roles in a free society. In many cases, Baptists restricted their influence because of some ministers' inference that churches ought to stay out of government affairs altogether. I am sure many religious leaders had this attitude toward Hitler also, only to pay for their silence with blood. Baptists come from a heritage that fought for this freedom and we must never lose it by our silence.

Chapter 3 Scripture References

Matthew 20:18-19; Matthew 22:21; Matthew 17:27; Acts 7:51-60; Acts 4:20; Acts 5:29; Acts 19:17-41.

76. When a person's physical well-being is in jeopardy because of one's religious practice, then for public safety the authorities have the obligation to protect life. Religious practice applies to conscience in religion and its public expression.

Chapter 4:
Local Church Autonomy

How does a church govern itself?

Baptists, by nature, are reactionary. When they find a system of belief or practice that is foreign to their thinking and scriptural support, they draw the distinction between truth and perceived error. To this end, it is important to know how the early church was structured. Is there a clear pattern in the Scripture? After all, the early church structure was still developing, as indicated in Acts 2:42-47. The apostles' doctrine and authority were the basis for many of the decisions made in the early church. Is there a pattern or are we left to pragmatism when it comes to church government?

Within Baptist circles, there are varied views on church structure. My employment in a denominational office featured my encounter with a young man who came from a Baptist church tradition that allowed only elected elders to make decisions on behalf of the church. He asked for evidence in the New Testament of all the church making decisions and whether everyone had a say in its governance. Deferring to the teaching concerning apostolic authority, he thought it was not wise, practical, nor scriptural for all church members to make decisions in the church.

Much of the contemporary church movement considers it wise to be pragmatic in the matter of church government. For purposes of efficiency and honoring the pastor's leadership, it is seen as useful to allow the pastor to make most decisions. If necessary, he may defer

to a group of people who assist him in carrying out his vision, but the pastor-led model is predominant in new church starts, which have an absence of leadership in the church.[77]

I must concede the apostles' regulation of its early ministry is the church model for decision-making in leadership. However, this model in Acts is a developing picture, concerning church government that continues to progress today to congregational decision-making.

It is of essential importance to have the correct definition of the church when dealing with church governance. A New Testament church needs no ecclesiastical hierarchy telling it what to do and it does not shut out members or individuals from the decision-making process. When the church governance is restricted to one or a few people, these limitations will happen. What is the purpose of having the correct view of the church and rejoicing in the freedom from outside control, if it does not practice congregational church government?

The word images in Scripture illustrate joint participation of the church membership (I Peter 2:5, I Corinthians 12:27). The binding together, as Christ's body, allows the church to function in every body part to insure total participation in the church (I Corinthians 3:9). The idea of total involvement of the membership, however, may be true in concept, but may not be practical in the everyday maintenance of the church. There is nothing noble about having small churches. Every church that preaches the Gospel and helps new believers in spiritual growth after baptism should be growing. Practical daily maintenance of the church will be given to the leadership as the church grows, but the membership should never be shut out of major decisions.

Are there scriptural examples of church government? We first begin to understand congregational participation through the concept

77. It is not difficult to understand how a new work would defer most of the decisions to the pastor. It is similar to the apostles starting new congregations and the influence they had.

of equality in salvation and the equal footing we have at the cross with no hierarchy (Galatians 3:28-29, Romans 8:16-17). Part of joint heirship means we, as the body of Christ, have equal function. This picture is seen in Ephesians 5:20-33, by portraying the church as an example of how the home functions and is a visible manifestation of the *soma* (body) representing the church.[78] Just as family members have parts to play in their function, so does the church body. God gifts individuals to assist the church in ministry and the equipping task of the church is for the whole body to function in ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Many want to separate the two forms of decision-making in the church. They believe in total involvement in ministry, but not in the decision-making process of the church. Some have interpreted the self-governance of the church in local autonomy as the right a church has for delegation. This delegation can be done and still fits with the realm of the local church autonomy. However, power wrested from church membership or taken from them to make major decisions is establishing different levels of authority in the church.

Looking at the example of the early church in their decision-making processes is insightful. At Pentecost, the church was designed according to the instructions of the apostles and according to their teaching known as the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). We must ask the question: Was the church, which was growing like wildfire, kept under tight supervision of the apostles as they sat back and watched the explosive expansion of the church? Practicality would illustrate the *meeting from house to house* (Acts 2:46) was delegated to others in leadership, rather than the apostles.

In Acts 6:1-7, the major ministry problem (needy widows) was solved by the apostles continuing to minister by giving themselves *to ministry of the word, and prayer* (Acts 6:4). The first deacon's selection was for the purpose to *wait tables*. The task of servanthood

78. E. Vine, 76.

did not feature tight confinement to seven men. These men supervised the ministry, but did not do it all. Stephen, *a delegated deacon*, expanded the ministry entrusted to him by preaching the word in the longest recorded sermon in the Bible (Acts 7:1-53).

After Philip went to Samaria, he sent for Peter and John to lay hands on new converts, leading to another manifestation similar to Pentecost through the coming of the Holy Spirit on them (Acts 8:14-17).

In Acts 9:26-31, Barnabas vouched for Paul's conversion and sincerity before the church in Jerusalem. The church then accepted him as a genuine believer and part of their fellowship.

In Acts 10:22-24, 47-48, Peter brought a delegation with him to Cornelius' house in Caesarea. Peter later, in Acts 11:1-18, explained his ministry at Cornelius' household to *the apostles and brethren in Judea* to have accountability to the church body.

The church at Antioch *fasted and prayed* in Acts 13:1-3, before sending Paul and Barnabas out on their first missionary journey. It says the church sent them out; they did not go out on their own.

The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-21 was a meeting of church leaders to decide about the Gentiles' inclusion in churches. However, when a decision to include them after much discussion evolved, Paul and Barnabas became ambassadors to inform the churches of the council's decision (Acts 15:22-31). The joint accountability of God's choicest servants to the church is a recurrent theme in the book of Acts and the epistles. As Paul started churches through much of his missionary work, he delegated decision-making to them.

Paul trained Timothy, Titus, and others, sending them forth to work with churches. The pastoral epistles are letters of instruction to settle matters in the church together, not just autocratically by the leaders. A note of attentiveness to church matters is seen all through Paul's writings. For instance, Paul rejoiced that the church

at Rome was serving the Lord and looked forward to visiting them and ministering there. Furthermore, Paul longed to see the church in Rome, not to assert apostolic authority, but to minister by the imparting of a spiritual gift (Romans 1:11-12).

The deference given to the church to decide matters, in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, brings clarification through the many problems they had to correct in the church there. One major problem was the man living in immorality, who was obviously a church leader. Paul pronounced a sentence on him, because it was greatly affecting the church; but he left it up to the church, as a church body, to take action against the man (I Corinthians 5:1-13). He asked the church to act in removing the man temporarily from the church body to aid the offender in repenting of his sin.

Church discipline cannot be scripturally administered without local church authority acting upon it. Discipline needs to be reinforced by the consent of the church body. If church discipline is done by the leaders only, it undercuts Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:15-17 and becomes discipline by the leaders and not by the church.

The Baptist view of the Lord's Supper is much like the reformed view of the Lord's Supper. It is a memorial observance, not the body and blood of Christ or something more mystical.[79] Christ is always present in Spirit when two or more are gathered together (Matthew18:20), and this would definitely pertain to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper looks back at Christ's sacrifice, looks inward at our commitment to God, and looks forward to when we will observe it in His Father's kingdom (Matthew 26: 26-29). The Lord's Supper, observed collectively and in unity with those who are members of the local church living a consistent Christian life, is the scriptural model for its observance.

79. *The Baptist Faith and Message*, A confessional statement of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, Article VII: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 14.

In the Corinthian church, the Lord's Supper was the means of church discipline, as seen in I Corinthians 5:7-8. The church took action in denying the Lord's Supper to the man living in immorality. This action of restricting the Lord's Supper cannot be done in a church that allows the pastor to make such decisions without church support. Neither is discipline administered if a church opens the observance of the supper to everyone. Those members in good standing from sister churches can possibly partake of the supper; but if discipline is a part of granting the right to observe the Lord's Supper, it can only be suited to a church exercising local church autonomy.

There is scriptural justification for local church governance by its members, if we understand the proper make-up and function of the church and the granting of every member the right to have a say in church decisions.

There is one final, but emphatic word about opening up church decisions to members, primarily at a church business meeting—no one has the right to say anything they want, in any manner they choose. *Robert's Rules of Order* is helpful when used as the guide to rule someone out of order, if they are unruly.[80] The head of the church is Christ and we submit to his Lordship, especially during a time of seeking His wisdom and guidance in all church decisions. Business meetings are not free-for-alls. They are a time of order for business, in which equality is given to dissenting opinions in a Christ-like manner.

The case for local church autonomy through spiritual leadership, consultation, and declaration of the membership is seen in Scripture. What about the reaction to those who have different views of church government? Differing views of church structure and practice are interesting and informative in contrasting different views of church government. Let us examine some of these views.

80. Henry Robert, *Roberts Rules of Order revised, 75th Anniversary ed.* (Scott, Forseman: Chicago 1943).

Monarchical Church Government: The Monarchical Church governance method visualized through Catholic Church structure is very evident. Decisions are handed down from the Papacy to a College of Cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and other people. The parishioners have little say in matters of doctrine and practice. Neither do they have a say over the appointment of priests and the ministry they will have. The priest is the intermediary who ministers on behalf of the people. Catholic people may believe differently about matters than the decision-makers, but they have little say about the way the church is structured or its governance.

The groups of people who are Catholic and are meeting at a building do not use the term *church*, but use the terminology of *parish*. It is a comfortable method for many, since it relieves members of any responsibility except to come and be *good Catholics*. I know this is a generalization, but it illustrates what this structure leads to.

Baptists would say this is a wrong view of the church and its function. The leaders do not minister for the people, but lead them into ministry. Decisions are not made by a hierarchy and passed down; they are made by a local group of people under the Lordship of Christ as they seek God's leadership in the governance of the church.[81]

Episcopal Church Government: The rule of the church by bishops is the common method of leadership and congregational governance in the Episcopal method of church government, patterned after a monarchal method. The Episcopal structure only hands the power one level down to a ruling few that make decisions *for* the church, but not *with* the church. Methodists are also ruled by archbishops in directing the pastoral tenure at a church through this method.[82]

The Episcopal leadership makes decisions, such as ordination of homosexual priests and bishops, so that members of the body

81. Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Broadman: Nashville, 1973), 19.
82. Ibid, 18.

who believe differently have little power to do anything except start another group.[83]

Those who practice the Episcopal method refer to their church as the denomination and cling to the parish idea of the church. The *real church* and governing body is the denomination and there is not much governance by members in its affairs.[84]

Baptists would be frustrated with this system since it does not allow for decision-making by members in major decisions. One of the most important decisions of a church is the calling of a pastor, but this decision deferred to someone outside the church body is at the digression of the denominational leadership. Various decisions are made by the denomination in governing sessions through the Episcopal method of church government. Baptists would say the decisions of a few do not have binding authority over a local congregation in which hierarchical leaders are not a part of the congregations.

Presbyterian Church Government: The Presbyterian form of government takes the governance of the church to another level. The Presbyterian system leads to participation with the church in its decision-making and has two variations. First, it has a *session* composed of members from various churches who make decisions for the church. While the church may elect these members, it is still a method of handing responsibility to a few people, not total participation of the members. The checks and balances of the church are not built into this system. The members, again, depend on others to make decisions for them. The ruling body may be closer to a

83. Actions taken by the Episcopalian Church illustrate the frustration of such a system. Those who would have an affinity with most Baptist on this moral issue are helpless to oppose this action because of the action of the ruling bishops speaking for the church, although in contradiction to a vast number of its members.

84. This truth is proven by this matter in which the denomination acts as the church and speaks for it despite dissenting opinions by local parishes and even regional groups of members.

local body, but they still make decisions for the church. The church is usually seen as the denomination in this method, which allows *sessions t*o give directives to local congregations.[85]

The second variation of this method is to take a group of elders in a local congregation and empower them to make decisions for the church. The kind of decisions the church makes gives a good indication of their moving toward either a Presbyterian or Congregational model of church governance. If finances, calling leaders, and other major decisions are made by ruling elders, then the church has more of a Presbyterian structure. If the local church body votes on major decisions, they are moving toward more of a Congregational model of church government. [86]

Baptists would say the Presbyterian method still takes church governance out of the hands of the membership and gives it to a few elected leaders. The leadership group elected have the final authority. What recourse do members have if they do not agree with the decision made by the ruling body? Are all sales final? It really appears they are with this system of church government.

Congregational Church Government: The Congregational form of church governance is in accord with the definition of the church being *a local body of baptized believers joined together for the faith of the Gospel and practicing New Testament doctrine*. Freedom is granted to believers to come at designated times to voice their opinion and designated leaders do not act without local church consent. No denominational act is binding on the church body in the Congregational form of government. A church can choose to act in accordance with the denomination or they can choose not to act in accordance with the denomination.[87]

85. Foshee, 20.
86. The type of church structure is revealed by how much decision-making power is given to the membership. There are hybrids of these two systems in larger churches.
87. Foshee, 17.

The church body chooses leaders and votes on major decisions. Some cases result in a representative body making minor decisions, but the church is responsible for its governance and work with the leadership as truly being the body of Christ.

The Congregational governing church accepts members, practices church discipline, and grants or refuses letters for membership. The church is never uninformed in church actions, if they will come and participate in a called business session.

No single person makes decisions for the church, as the sole authority in congregational rule. Just as we are equal in salvation and coming to Christ, so we have equal participation in church governance and practice. The Congregational form of church government is the Baptist way and has led to revolutionary cooperation with churches unparalleled in their participation.

There are no separate little fiefdoms in the Congregational form of church government. The Congregational method of church structure gives ownership and responsibility to members, as inherit within local church autonomy.

Many fear chaos in this system of congregational rule. The opposite effect of this structure is true, however, because when churches can freely act and cooperate, then others are free to do more in church. It is not that we have to act in cooperation with other churches, but it is what we want to do. Many churches support missionaries and work together in cooperation, instead of second-guessing decisions made by others.

When William Carey went to India to become the *father of modern missions*, he told Andrew Fuller, the pastor of the congregation in Kettering England, “I will go down to India, if you will hold the ropes.” He was referring to his church and missionary

society supporting him.[88] That type of cooperation is what happens freely and cooperatively, and birthed the modern mission movement. The movement was born when God used William Carey to establish a beachhead for the Gospel in India. This type of cooperation is the New Testament pattern that yields such results and it is the Baptist way of working together.

Local church autonomy does not shortcut cooperative mission efforts—it enhances them. Local church autonomy puts the power to act responsibly in the place it should never be wrested—in the hands of the people.

Chapter 4 Scripture References

Acts 2:42-47; I Peter 2:5; I Corinthians 12:27; I Corinthians 3:9; Galatians 3:28-29; Romans 8:16-17; Ephesians 4:11-13; Acts 2:42; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 7:1-53; Acts 8:14-17; Acts 9:26-31; Acts 10: 22-24, 47-48; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 15:1-21; Acts 15:22-31; Romans 1:12; I Corinthians 5:1-13; Matthew 18:15-17; Matthew 18:20; Matthew 26:26-29; I Corinthians 5: 7-8.

88. Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (New Hope: Birmingham, AL), 74.

Chapter 5:
Soul Competency

Can you truly sponsor someone's salvation?

One of the famous doctrinal truths Baptists have embraced wholeheartedly is that of soul competency. A common thread of all confessional statements is that the soul is competent to decide in matters of faith and practice. R. Stanton Norman said, "Soul competency suggests the right and responsibility of every person to deal directly and personally with God without human imposition or interference of any kind. Further it implies that any individual has the freedom to study and obey the Scriptures to the best of his or her ability."[89] This belief can also be approached another way by calling it *the right of individual conscience* to decide in matters of faith and practice. Each person must decide on their own, without someone else deciding for them, concerning their own personal faith and trust in Christ.

Martin Luther developed the concept of soul competency, which was contrary to what he later wrote in his classic work: *Bondage of the Will.* Luther said that man does not have a free will to follow God—and man's will, bound by his sin nature, is not free in this latter work. He believed we accept the choice of our personal salvation God has already made for us.[90] At the Diet of Worms, during his trial

89. R. Stanton Norman, *More than Just a Name: Preserving our Baptist Identity.* Broadman and Holoman: Nashville, 2001), 136.
90. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will: A New Translation of De Servo Arbitrio (1525): Martin Luther's Repy to Erasmus of Rotterndam* by J. I. Packer and O.R. Johnston. (Fleming H. Revell Co.: New York, 1957), 104-108.

for perceived heresy by the church, he initially believed differently. Luther asserted there that the conscience is free and not suppressed by a corrupt universal church. The individual's belief is free, unrestricted by any hierarchal system. When he was asked to recant his criticisms of the papacy and the church, he said, "…if I have spoken contrary to Scripture, I will retract these writings. But if my writings are in accordance with Scripture, my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I can do no other." So, conscience in matters of faith and practice was crucial to Luther in the beginning of his ministry and in his great revelation that *the just shall live by faith*.[91]

Baptists have spoken out against sponsorship for salvation all throughout their history. One of the basic reasons for believer's baptism by immersion comes from the reaction to infant sprinkling and the idea that parents, church, or tradition can decide for others, concerning the church you would be a member of and the faith you would possess.

Balthazar Hubmaier said, "The only thing an infant knows how to do when doused with water is to be startled and cry."[92] Hubmaier knew, as everyone does, an infant should be given an option when they reach an adequately accountable age to decide about their personal faith in Christ and church affiliation. We do know if a child is reared in a certain tradition, they will strongly be inclined to follow in that particular religious tradition.

A special time in a worship service praying for children and parents can be helpful to the family, because the value of praying for children in the church is very powerful. Churches can provide such a service for parents to enlist the support of the church in praying for their children and for dedicating them to the Lord. Such a service should set the environment for children to trust Christ as Saviour

91. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* : *A Life of Martin Luther,* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1950), 185.
92. Jack Manning: Classroom lecture: *Reformation Studies* (Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary: Mill Valley, CA Sept. 1974).

and live for Him. However, no one can decide on his or her behalf for salvation. The Bible does not teach group salvation. This is why one of the most dangerous declarations against the concept of soul competency was Constantine's *Edict of Milan* in which, by edict, everyone declared *Christian* came according to imperial command.[93]

The Bible teaches what John McArthur calls *turnstile salvation*. He reminds us that in Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said to enter the straight gate. This is a call to enter into God's kingdom individually. Again in John 10:1-3, Jesus calls Himself th*e door of the sheepfold*, meaning we go through the door to the kingdom of God individually. You go through a narrow door one person at a time. We may go to a sporting event as a group and go through entrances together, but when you get to the turnstile at a stadium, you show your personal ticket going into the actual sporting facility one person at a time. You cannot go through the turnstile for someone else and you do not go through the turnstile because someone else has a ticket. You need your own ticket—yours only—so you may individually go through the turnstile. [94]

Every call Jesus made to believe in Him and to be born-again was to the individual. We are not seen as a group of people when we come to Christ for salvation. Galatians 3:28 indicates there is no judgment based on ethnicity, social status, or even male and female gender. We all come individually and equally to Christ—or God has demonstrated prejudice toward some and not toward others. As we all come individually to Christ in salvation, it gives us a common equality through our personal conversions. God saves us all the same way.

The reactions to soul-competency are interesting, to say the least. Reformed theology teaches a covenant theology, believing the patriarch of the family establishes a covenant with God, for themselves and all members of the family. Abraham and the Israelites, in their

93. Latourette, Vol. 1, 92-93.

94. John MacArthur*: Which Way to Heaven? Study Notes: Matt. 7:13-29, 9:9-17* (Word of Grace Communications: Panorama City, CA, 1985), 6.

parental influence seen in the Old Testament, serve as an example of this practice and the blessings extending to family members because of the faith of the patriarch.[95]

There is no evidence in the New Testament for family salvation to the exclusion of individual choice. The predominant theme of Scripture is a personal response one must make to the atonement of Christ. The concept that comes closest to the concept of covenant salvation is in Acts 16:13-15, where Lydia and her household came to Christ. Also, the Philippian jailor brought Paul and Silas home to bathe their wounds, which resulted in his household believing and being baptized (Acts 16:25-34). Some even try to find infant sprinkling in this incident, but nothing can be specifically found and this practice is not taught anywhere in the New Testament. To argue anything by silence, which is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, is foolish and wrong.

The Halfway Covenant perpetuated by Solomon Stoddard and Cotton Mather in Puritan New England, did more damage than good in admitting unconverted young people into church membership automatically at age twelve, due to their parents membership. Despite the strong religious influence of the time, many youth were not converted when they were accepted as members in the church. [96] It took the Great Awakening, with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield preaching the necessity of the new birth, to bring a conviction of being lost and the need for Christ. Many who converted in this period of tremendous revival came out of the abuse of this practice that clearly espoused *sponsorship salvation*.[97]

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95. This is a perceived understanding of the Reformed approach to justify a standard argument against free will and justification for infant baptism.
96. George M .Marsden. *Jonathan Edwards, A Life.* (Yale University Press: New Haven, CT 2003), 354.
97. Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *The Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield and the Creation of America* (Baylor Press Waco TX: 2011), 41.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God was preached by Jonathan Edwards to a group of these unconverted church members that were accepted into the church through the practice of the Half-way Covenant. His message scared them to deep conviction in the Congregational Church at Enfield, Connecticut, on July 8, 1741. People were gripped by the realization they had a false assurance about their salvation. [98] Soul competency is not only an emphasis in doctrine; it is a needful teaching, because people's eternal souls are at stake.

Biblical disagreement with sponsorship salvation is crucial with Catholicism and other groups who believe in basic Christian truths, such as the virgin birth, the Trinity, and biblical morality. The danger of sponsorship salvation is that many may trust in the wrong object for salvation or trust in someone else's decision in their place. Everyone must decide for himself or herself concerning their own salvation. The diversion toward the wrong object of salvation leads people down the wrong path, if they do not decide individually what they will do with Christ's sacrifice for them.[99]

By signing children up as members, we make church membership and salvation synonymous. As Baptists, we have always asserted that church membership is attained only through believer's baptism by immersion. Some who slip into church unconverted will be tares among the wheat, but every effort should be made to insure those that become members are truly saved.

It is less involved to just sign up children, rather than counsel with them individually and share the Gospel on their level. Influence on children is easy and they sometimes receive baptism because their best friend receives baptism. However, there has to be personal faith

98. Marsden, 220-223.

99. It is a great encumbrance to people if the religious body is teaching another method of salvation than the Bible does, which is evident all through the teachings of Roman Catholicism and in their reaction to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith at the Council of Trent in 1555.

or a child's baptism is meaningless, leaving them in an unconverted state. Baptism must display what we confess about our faith in Christ.

Paul taught he *was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died* (Romans 7:9). Paul was saying there was a time in his life (presumably as a small child), he had no knowledge of what sin meant. When he *was alive* means he was safe or seen as innocent of sin, when he did not understand he was responsible for his sin. Later, when Paul understood the law and his life in light of the law, he died inside because of his understanding he was a sinner and had broken the law (primarily embodied in the Ten Commandments). The commandments brought an understanding he was lost.

Logically, we believe God would not condemn someone incapable of belief. But when a child is capable of belief, we must not force them or decide for them, but bring them to trust Christ individually as their Savior. It is not as easy as some would make it to lead children personally to faith in Christ. It is easier to sign little children up as members, because their family is sponsoring them. It is needful and essential that we instruct children because they are naturally drawn to Jesus and need to trust in His saving work to be saved. When children know they are sinners and hear of Christ's sacrifice for them, they can understand their condition without Christ.

The illustration of my daughters' conversions reveals how I believe children should come to Christ. My oldest daughter came home one day from kindergarten at the Christian school she attended, telling her mother that her teacher had asked Jesus into the heart of everyone in her class. We did not take the news very seriously, but just watched and waited for God to work in her life. Two years later, we moved to another church field. One day, she came into our room with the Billy Graham*: Peace with God* tract. She wanted to read me the booklet and trust in Christ as her Saviour. When I reminded her she had told us her teacher asked Jesus into her heart for her, she

replied, "I didn't understand what I was doing." With confidence, she indicated how she knew she needed Christ, because she was a sinner and she trusted in Christ and His work in her behalf on the cross for salvation. She knew Christ saved her and she received baptism several months later. I feel confident her coming to Christ was at God's leading, which led her to a genuine salvation experience.

One night while going to bed, my other daughter asked questions about what happens when we die. She had just begun to understand she needed Christ as her Saviour and felt if we all died she would not be with us in heaven. She wanted confirmation she would be with us in heaven. After realizing this was not simply a stall tactic to stay up later that night, I explained and reviewed with her what the Gospel said. She trusted in Christ to save her and received baptism on Easter Sunday that year. The fact she was convicted of being lost and needing to trust in Christ's work to be saved, reassured me she was honestly and sincerely coming to Christ as Saviour.

We must be careful about how we deal with children, but we should not turn them away when the Holy Spirit convicts them of their need of salvation. They must come to Christ individually and personally, not because someone is deciding for them. This is the New Testament way and is at the core of soul competency.

Baptists ought to be proponents of doing things right in church and not in a loose or incorrect manner. Some of the emphases covered already in this work can lead to disagreement, be ignored or dismissed, and still people can be called Baptists. Of all the practical emphasis though, soul competency is most crucial, for we are discussing people's eternal souls, final destinations, and right relationships with God. To decide for someone else or to lead them to trust anything other than Christ's sacrifice for salvation is not only foolish, but dangerous beyond what we can even imagine (Mark 8:36-37, Matthew 10:28). Soul competency is litrerally, the crucial doctrine for all to hear the gospel and trust Christ personally for

entrance into heaven. Instruction must correct wrong notions, if we are to believe in the message of our individual accountability and our need for the Gospel.

We are bound by the Scripture to tell the truth about how a person is truly saved in trusting Christ's work on their behalf. We owe it to our loved ones, our family, and friends to lead them into a personal relationship with God and to not substitute other things for true salvation.

Satan *exchanges the truth of God for a lie* (Romans 1:25). He has many deceptions, but the greatest one is to confuse someone about salvation and how to come to Christ. Individual accountability through soul competency, taken in this light, is an obligation, not only an emphasis. We should always give the Gospel to people so they individually trust Christ as Saviour.

Chapter 5 Scripture References

Matthew 7:13-14; John 10:1-3; Galatians 3:28; Acts 16:13-15; Acts 16:25-34; Romans 7:9; Mark 8:36-37; Matthew 10:28; Romans 1:25.

Chapter 6:
The Priesthood of Believers

Do we currently have human priests in the church?

"You are a priest. I don't care what anyone says," said a lady in my Bible study at a nice retirement home in our area. She was Catholic. Although she knew I liked to be called pastor, she had a more lofty title for me. I tried to shrug it off and said, "All believers are priests to God, now that we have access to God through Christ." There is a scriptural teaching reinforcing the statement I made to her, featuring our duty as priests individually that covers our ministry in the church.

The woman was insistent there was a special class of people that should have an elevated position over regular parishioners. That person in Catholic tradition is whom they come to for confession, absolution, spiritual concerns, correct interpretation of church tradition, infant baptism, confirmation—you name it, he's the man.[100]

The elevation of the priesthood in the Middle Ages really came to fruition because many in the population were illiterate. The only real education was offered to the clergy who studied the classics and languages. The universal church trained the clergy to teach people about doctrinal matters and spiritual life to avoid heresy.[101]

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100. Her observation was based on the women's perceived notion of what an earthly priest should do and the Catholic churches repeated practice of elevating men over the congregation as the intermediary to God.
101. Latourette, Vol. 1, 132-133.

One of the most important reasons leading to a wide margin between clergy and laity was the tremendous gain associated with clerical office. The practice of *Simony*, the buying and selling of church offices was named after Simon the Magician. He offered Peter money in exchange for the power of the Holy Spirit, which he saw evident through the miracles done through this early church leader. The fame seekers of this corrupt practice ignored that Simon was smitten blind and rebuked by Peter saying, *Your money perish with you to think that you can buy the gift of God* in Acts 8:20. Nevertheless, the buying and selling of higher church office became the bane of the medieval church.[102]

The very concept of the papacy and hierarchal church structure led to restricting the equal participation of people in the life of the congregation. The Catholic Church policy, structured outside the parish, means there is no equal representation, but a surrogate use of the congregation according to whelms of the interest of the universal entity. Certain priests stood between God and man, discharged with the oversight of people.[103]

We must understand that the New Testament abolishes any position of a human priest as an intermediary between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). There is no priesthood, known as a special type of clerical work, that gives any individual special access to God more than others who do not have such a standing.

The only High Priest we have is our Lord Jesus Christ; He is the continual representation for us in heaven (Hebrews 7:25, 9:24). Jesus represents the redeemed sinner, as our heavenly advocate before the Father (I John 2:1-2). Only Christ can and did offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sin (Hebrews 9:12, 28, 10:10-12), mandating that no one should be referred to as priest in the same breath with the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

102. Bainton, Christendom, Vol. 1, 170-174.
103. This is the typical viewpoint of the church in Catholicism: There is one universal church and each congregation is a parish.

The Bible does make it very evident when it references the priesthood of all believers (Revelation 1:6). Scripture pictures every believer as a stone in a building that should fortify the church (I Peter 2:5). Our standing of equality in salvation espouses the principle of equality for all believers (Galatians 3:28). We must equally serve together, in the same way we come to Christ for salvation, and work together as fellow believers so that our standing leads to proper function in the church (I Corinthians 3:9).

Baptists believe the church is a local assembly of baptized believers. For this reason, we do not recognize a dominant hierarchal influence over the church. Christ is the head of the church, not any human entity. The equal function in ministry is the responsibility of every member in the body of Christ.

Spiritual leaders are called to lead the church in ministry, but they are not to do ministry in place of members (Ephesians 4:11-13). Equal participation in the body of the church leads to a dynamic that should propel the church to action in many areas. It is not possible to fully function as a church, when someone is designated to do ministry for all the people.

Luther, in fairness to his position, espoused the concept of the *priesthood of believers*. Yet, the Reformed Movement quickly adopted the leadership by delegation in church policy, through elders and appointed leaders who were sometimes elected and other times were not.[104]

The unholy alliance of church and state, in regard to suppression of contrary views, was made easier by a hierarchal system. This system dealt with one or several leaders as an authority over people, as opposed to the whole congregation of church members serving together in ministry and equal church governance.[105]

104. Bainton, Here I Stand, 137-138.
105. Ibid., 312..

Baptists, after the Reformation, wholly embraced the concept of the priesthood of believers. The Baptist movement under John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in England was quick to restore a biblical pattern to church policy and ministry.[106] Roger Williams, in his time as a Baptist, established Rhode Island and church congregations after this concept.[107]

Several factors are important to understand about priesthood in this juncture. Critics of Baptist policy say the concept of equal representation, which supports local church autonomy, leads to mass chaos at business meetings and a shackling of pastors' and leaders' ability to lead congregations into the place they feel God wants them to be.[108] However, equal representation, made possible by equal access and ministry, allows the whole church to minister and serve, instead of only a few designated individuals. Scripture gives us a team concept, which leads to a sharing together in ministry and decisions made in ministry by local congregations.

So what does the priesthood of believers mean?

1. The priesthood of believers means having equal access to God. There is no intermediary priest to pray for people, take confession, dole out penance, absolve sins, and approach God due to any member's inability of doing this on their own. There is no need of a special minister to do it, since God has given us the right to do it on our own (I John 1:9).

There is no restriction on our ability to come boldly to the throne of grace and find help in a time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Equal access entitles us to equal participation in the church of the living God.

106. McBeth, 35.
107. Ibid., 135.
108. Many have a misunderstanding of governance in churches that exercise Congregational church government. Nevertheless, this is a viewpoint used to justify churches governed only by a few.

2. The priesthood of believers means having equal access to Scripture. Not everyone can have an interpretation of Scripture and expect to be right, to the exclusion of all others. However, everyone has a right and responsibility to study the Scripture, so they can peer into God's Word and expect answers and guidelines. They do not need someone with more learning and education to personalize the Scripture for them (I John 2:27; Acts 17:10-11). The freedom to study the Scripture personally does not discount the leadership skill of pastors and leaders to help in our understanding of Scripture. People need private and corporate Bible study through gifted leaders **(**Ephesians 4:11-13).

I never will forget a certain family that had a Catholic background wishing to be baptized and unite with our church. Although they decided to leave Catholicism, the husband/father told the priest he was reading the Bible. The priest told the young man he was not supposed to read the Bible as it was his (the priest's) job to read and explain it to the man. The priest's attitude was the core of the corrupt church in the middle ages. People were at the mercy of an incompetent clergy who held sway over people.[109] No one gets in trouble for reading too much of the Bible in church today. However, some have gotten into trouble for not reading *enough* of the Bible and not putting its teaching into practice.

3. The priesthood of believers means having equal access to ministry. It is important for churches and pastors to ask this basic question: Who is to do the work of the ministry in the church? The pastor, biblically speaking, is in charge of equipping the church for ministry. The pastorate is not an exalted position to do ministry for everyone or even for a major portion of the church. The priesthood of believers in Baptist churches means the laity is turned loose to fulfill their calling. The pastor is there as the spiritual leader to assist the congregation in fulfilling all God has called them to do.

109. The result of the priestly system of church governance is that people are in the dark even about an understanding of the Scriptures.

While the pastor and staff, as spiritual leaders, may do the majority of the ministry in the church, this style is not in accordance to the scriptural pattern. The consumer mentality in our country tends to work against total involvement in church ministry. Through more involvement of the laity in ministry comes ownership, accountability, and all kinds of positive factors that allow the church to truly follow the New Testament pattern.[110]

There is a wide divergence of belief between the Catholic concept of the priesthood and that of Baptist teaching on the subject. In Catholicism, special access is granted to a special category of clergy that elevates them to a position akin to the Old Testament model of the priesthood. This type of priesthood indicates an access and ministry done by representation, instead of by personal responsibility.[111]

The very concept of coming to Christ presupposes no obstacles or unequal footing for all people at the cross. So, why would there be a closed door to the ministry of the church designated to only specific clergy? It is unthinkable we would think ministry and being the body of Christ would be restricted only to clergy. The priesthood of believers is not just a position we hold, but also our function as priests in the church.

The priests in Israel were not set aside to just have positions in the tabernacle and temple. These were the busiest places in the camp and city. It does not do any good for us to affirm the priesthood of believers and never function as a priest with the local congregation you attend. The concept of the priesthood of all believers can only be adequately confirmed in a local congregation where the church's ministry makes us a functional part of the spiritual house of that local congregation.

110. This observation is based on personal experience of church members accepting responsibility in the church and spreading the ministry load to others so more gets done.

111. Access to ministry is a restriction because of defined guidelines about what the priest does in an elevated status, while the people are relegated to a lower one.

Just as Israel had a house, the local church is a spiritual house, which the writer of Hebrews uses to compare Moses being faithful over his house in Hebrews 3:6 and Christ being faithful over His house, which is the church. The Baptist idea of the church means we provide the vehicle to fulfill this priesthood unlike any other group. The truth of the priesthood of believers finds fulfillment in the local church, for there is no priesthood of believers without the visible body of Christ in a congregation of believers actively functioning as practical priests in ministry.

4. The priesthood of believers means having an equal responsibility in personal evangelism. One of the most important aspects of the priesthood of believers is that every believer is responsible to share their faith and be a witness in the world. If the pastor is the sole evangelistic member, few things will get done and the Gospel will be restricted from being freely shared.

One of the best years for evangelism in the Southern Baptist Convention was 1972. This banner year confirmed a higher elevation in baptismal figures. What happened that caused such a massive increase in baptisms? That year, every church was challenged to offer training in witnessing, called the *Win School or Lay Evangelism School*. In some cases, whole associations of churches simultaneously offered training by an outside consultant or the pastor of that congregation. Many came to Christ and followed Him in baptism. A continual climate of evangelism pervaded the convention, because everyone was challenged to be a priest to God by sharing their faith. However, many churches looked upon this concerted effort as a special emphasis and not as a lifestyle, resulting in baptisms going back down the following year. Churches should have emphasized evangelism as an obligation to share our faith on a continual basis and not just as a special event.[112]

112. These statements based on figures that were widespread, illustrating the baptismal increase was due to witness training of a massive amount of people in 1972 and slacking off in 1973.

Jesus expected His church to witness in a worldwide mission effort, so we must ask the question: Is Acts 1:8 the expectation only for the apostles or for all New Testament churches? The book of Acts is clear about the early church boldly witnessing, because they went house to house declaring their faith in Acts 2:46-47. The early evangelistic thrust of the early believers certainly happened with the total involvement of the church.

We are given a responsibility to be a priest, which can only be done in full when we fulfill the calling of everyone to share his or her faith. A priest is a representative to God for people and we are to lead people, as part of this priesthood, into a right relationship with God.

The priesthood of believers represents the amazing truth that unshackles churches to fulfill the calling to the type of ministry God has given us. Baptists are guardians of this wonderful truth, as we continue to persevere in our faith and challenge all to fulfill their function in the body of Christ. When we are an active participate in ministry, it helps us experience the depth and intent of the priesthood of believers.

Chapter 6 Scripture References

Acts 8:20; I Timothy 2: 5; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:12, 24, 28, 10:10-12; Revelation 1:6; I Peter 2:5; Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 4:11-12; I John 1:9; Hebrews 4:16; I John 2:27; Acts 17:10-11; Ephesians 4:11-3; Hebrews 3:6; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:46-47.

Chapter 7:
Biblical Authority

Do we really believe and practice Biblical truth?

The last distinctive mark of Baptists we will cover is our insistence that biblical authority is our sole authority for faith and practice. I realize this is hardly an exclusive claim. Every church with a high view of God's Word could make a similar statement. There is probably a misunderstanding of a perceived arrogance of the Baptist position on biblical authority, because we feel there is a precise confirmation of our beliefs in Scripture. There is a scriptural perspective, however, for all our beliefs, which is why we have such a high regard for biblical authority.

The claim of biblical authority does not infer Baptists are the only ones approaching everything from a biblical perspective. I have often said, "We don't say we are the only ones right in our church, but we believe the Bible is our authority and we try to follow the Bible as closely as possible." This position is my disclaimer statement to those who feel we might sound arrogant or intolerant about this particular topic.

To understand this position, we need to understand the competitors to biblical authority. These competitors do not erase a biblical viewpoint or practice, but these factors compete for that position. What are these other sources of authority?

Tradition: Catholicism and all with a similar system of belief structure base their authority on tradition. Catholicism has added much

tradition through the years in the form of cultural practices—papal bulls, taking advantage of biblical illiteracy, and an accumulation of practices contribute to this strong trend. The Bible is minimized when stacked up next to tradition and, in many cases, relegated to a secondary position in Catholicism. Another way of looking at it is that tradition covers up biblical truth in Catholicism. If you have the Bible on a table and you cover it with papers and other stuff, although the Bible is under there somewhere, you have to peel everything away to find it.

One of the most obvious contrasts in doctrine between Baptists and Catholics is the mode and purpose of baptism are different. The sacramental system is built on traditional church practice through the centuries and does not have strong biblical support.[113]

Revelation and impulses: Charismatic churches actually suggest they believe more of the Bible today than other churches, because their acceptance of the sign gifts being operative and normative for today. The validity of these spiritual sign gifts is well debated; but, in reality, the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their lives, as they perceive Him, becomes more important in priority. You hear such statements: *God said this to me.* There are many levels of this type of thinking because of various kinds of charismatic influence. These churches feel they are thoroughly biblical and following existential revelation that is biblical to them.[114]

Where sign gifts are predominant, there is a minimization of knowing the full revelation of God as taught on a consistent basis. Biblical authority minimized is due to this overemphasis, deferred in a secondary sense in favor of direct personal messages by God to individuals.

113. The interesting contrast in the mode of baptism is one that is sharply contrasted by scriptural support of immersion of believers as opposed to sprinkling.
114. This statement is based on my association with charismatic Christians pastors and media outlets, such as Christian broadcasting which are predominated by these types of practice.

Liberalism and cultural relativism: The battle for the Bible in the twentieth century has led to the outcome of liberalism and skepticism, affecting most mainline denominational churches. Southern Baptists, however, have had a resurgence of biblical authority in affirming our belief in the inspired, inerrant Word of God.[115]

Lack of biblical authority is apparent in these denominations when they accept homosexuality and ordain homosexual priests. Skepticism of Scripture has been the source of acceptance for many societal sins, as evidenced in recent days by the endorsement of gay marriage in their denominations. In the political arena, a position of a political party becomes more important than moral values in these traditional mainline churches. Some have said to me after learning of my criteria for a political candidate regarding moral values, "Why don't you use something substantial?"[116] My response is, "What the Bible says about these issues is very substantial."

The basis for a low viewpoint of Scripture is a society that is changing and they feel the church needs to change with it. A significant portion of our culture today accepts gay marriage, abortion, and a lack of religious influence in society. Someone asked at a seminar where I was explaining Baptist beliefs, "Why don't you change with society to bring more people into the church?" I said, "We don't change the Bible for people's sins; we bring people to the Bible and they are changed by its message."

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115. The return to a more definite biblical authority refers to the Conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention from 1979 to 2000. It began with Adrian Rogers being elected as president of the convention and putting in motion a continual process in which those affirming inerrancy of Scripture were elected to boards, conventions, and key positions that seem to be highlighted by the adoption of the more conservative revision of the Baptist Faith and Message in the 2000 annual convention.
116. Liberalism denies the straight teaching of morality as evidenced by its support of changing social values that conservatives view as immorality.

The decline of these mainline denominational churches in the latter part of the twentieth century proves that accepting societal trends contradictory to the Bible does not work to bring more people into the church.[117]

Pragmatism: The diversion from biblical authority by pragmatism is more deceptive. Pragmatism is one of the driving forces of many contemporary churches, although all types of churches cannot be lumped into this category. The driving force in most of these churches is usually a worthy one of reaching people for Christ, by whatever means possible. Doctrine, unfortunately, in a majority of these churches is not a popular term. Topical messages and need-oriented ministry predominates the church in typical churches driven by pragmatism. The *works* mentality is different from liberalism, in that it is usually driven by belief in God's Word as truth.[118]

The difference in the pragmatist church's approach to Scripture is the contrast that results in minimizing not only Baptist distinctives, but also biblical truths, that could be emphasized, but usually are not.

It is easy to mark the differences in groups who do not have a high degree of biblical authority and there must be a clear delineation of these contrasts. These distinctives will be broadened and find more agreement with other groups, such as the beliefs discussed earlier. Our emphasis of these truths determines the depth of the Bible's authority we accept, which is very definite and clear. All truths discussed in previous chapters will be omitted.

117. This theory seems to be substantiated by those leaving churches such as this and coming to more conservative churches that support traditional moral values in the Bible.
118. The pragmatic view is driven by a purer motive of reaching people for Christ, so there does need to be a biblical motive in preaching and outreach so that the view *whatever works* does not go wild.

THE BIBLE

Inspiration: The Bible is different from any other book because it is God's inspired word. God moved upon men to write it, so that what we have today was what He inspired using human authors to write and what we have in Scripture is a production of that inspiration. (II Peter 1:20-21)

Inerrancy: All of God's Word is perfect without any error. These books, recognized and confirmed as authentic, were given by a perfect God and have a common theme. They are the product of survival by God using various human authors through the centuries in different places and situations. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Authority: The Bible is our ultimate and final authority for faith and practice in churches. All beliefs and practices are subject to its contents and direction. (Titus 1:9)

These declarations about the Bible are set against teaching that it is not inspired or only inspired in some places, but not in all of its contents. The Bible is also non-binding on groups who do not accept it as inerrant and subject to error. Liberalism and those who pay lip service to the Bible have opened the door to false teaching through their low view of Scripture.[119]

THE NATURE OF GOD

The Trinity of God: The Bible affirms one God, not three. Yet, there are three ways God has revealed Himself in the person of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which are one in substance, but different in function (Deuteronomy 6:4, Colossians 1:15-17).

We are at a loss to explain the Trinity from a natural point of view. Yet, we affirm what the Trinity is by seeing Father, Son, and

119. Lack of biblical authority is evident in many of these groups support of positions diametrically opposed to biblical teaching, such as the exclusivity of the Gospel, gay marriage, and abortion.

Holy Spirit, all referred to as God in Scripture (I Timothy 3:16, Acts 5:3-4). Jesus is referred to as God in human flesh (Titus 2:13). The Holy Spirit is referred to as God's presence in the world, enlightening and empowering believers (Colossians 1:28).

To minimize Christ to an angel or *just* the Son is to detract from what the Bible affirms (Hebrews 1:7-8). Jesus was God *and* man, but never relinquished the title of God while on earth (Acts 20:28, I Timothy 3:16). The Holy Spirit was sent as one like Jesus, similar to Himself in the description of the coming of the Comforter (John 16:7).[120]

Evolution: The Bible is opposed to evolution on the grounds it is a theory contradicting the direct creation account in the Bible. Genesis 1:27 describes how God created man in His own image. God did not evolve man from a lower life form in the act of His creation. The fact that Romans 5:12,14-19 and I Corinthians15:21-23, 45-49 compare Christ to Adam as a single individual also runs counter to evolution's claims.

The missing link in evolution is a lack of scientific evidence about how man evolved from an animal primate. Evolution does not explain how life begins. The direct creation account in Scripture provides the only explanation for how something came out of nothing in creation. (Hebrews 11:3)[121]

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

The virgin birth of Christ: If Jesus was born any other way, He would have inherited the sin nature that leads to death and judgment on sin (Romans 5:12). His nature, however, was miraculous and unique, unlike any other (Luke 1:35). This scriptural truth is in contrast to those who think the birth of Christ was like any other person's birth.

120. Vine, 200.
121. These views are also based on research evidencing arguments for intelligent design and creationism as the origin of life on earth.

The deity of Christ: Christ was fully God while on earth. *In Him dwelt the full nature of God* (Colossians 2:9) and He was declared as God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14, 18, Philippians 2:5, I John 5:20).

The cults want to rob Christ of His deity. They say He was lower than God the Father or He was only God's Son and not God. Jesus accepted worship as God (Matthew 2:11, John 20:28), acted as God to raise the dead, be raised, and forgive sin (Mark 2:7).

The substitutionary death of Christ: Christ's sacrifice was necessary as the payment for sin we all owe. We are given Christ as our Saviour who took our place, dying and suffering for sin (I Peter 2:24, 3:18, Hebrews 10:10-12, II Corinthians 5:21).

The essential truth of Christ's atonement for sin is in contrast to those who believe Christ's death was a mistake or, at best, an example of suffering. They will not accept His sacrifice as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The bodily resurrection of Christ: Jesus was raised bodily from the grave to live for evermore (Romans 6:10). He was raised to a glorified state and made appearances for a period of several weeks after His resurrection, proving He was indeed alive. He ascended into heaven and is enthroned as Lord and is our representative before the Father in Heaven (I John 2:1-2, Hebrews 7:25, 9:24). His resurrection gives assurance to all believers that we will live forever like Him (Romans 4:25, I Corinthians 15:20-23, Philippians 3:20-21).

The Lord's Day: We worship on Sunday, because it is a celebration of Christ's resurrection. This teaching is more descriptive than perspective. We find early Christians meeting on the first day of the week to worship and fellowship (Acts 20:7). They were instructed by Paul to set aside an offering on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:2). Pentecost and Jesus' appearance to John happened on the first day of the week, indicating the Lord's Day is

a time of worship for all believers on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-4, Revelation 1:10).

The Seventh-Day Adventists and a few other churches view worship only for Saturday, as opposed to the observance of Sunday worship.[122] The command to keep the Sabbath in like manner as Israel is not a command to all believers in the New Testament era, but a sign to Israel given to them for a special purpose (Exodus 31:16-17).

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God is revealed personally through the Holy Spirit, who is God and is eternal. He indwells the believer at salvation and is God's actual presence in the believer's life to guide and instruct them. He convicts people of their need for Christ and moves people to receive Christ as Saviour (John 6:44, 16: 8-11).

The Holy Spirit gifts believers for ministry and empowers the church in its ministry (I Corinthians 12:7, 11). The Holy Spirit enables us to be like Christ in our actions and attitudes as He leads and instructs us (John 16:13-15). He responds personally to people, as evidenced in the book of Acts (Acts 5:3-4, 13:3).

The Holy Spirit gifts the believer to witness and do God's work as the body of Christ, so His work will continue until Christ comes again. He assures the believer of their salvation and reveals truth in the Bible (John 14:16-18, Matthew 28:20).

The truth of the Holy Spirit is set against the thinking that we do not have to be personally related to God and that the Holy Spirit is not a person. It is also clear we receive all of the Holy Spirit at salvation and will not receive a more complete baptism of Him in a deeper experience later. The believer may be filled with the Holy

122. This distinctive belief has set the Seventh-Day Adventists apart from any other Protestant church group. The belief in the Sabbath ranges believing it is the mark of the beast to others who believe it is to be observed as the day of corporate worship.

Spirit by conditionally walking with the Lord in obedience to His Word (Romans 8:9).[123]

SIN AND ITS PUNISHMENT

Man was created in God's image; his innocence was defiled through sin in Adam's disobedience and passed on to succeeding generations (Romans 5:12). Sin is the breaking of God's moral law, which is found in the Bible and embodied in the Ten Commandments (I John 3:4). God is holy and just and must punish sin. Our sin separates us from God; we are in need of a personal relationship with God to overcome our sin and its penalty, which is death and judgment (Romans 6:23). However, God loves us and has provided for our sin through Christ's sacrifice. We have all broken God's moral law and need forgiveness of sin, which is offered by God through turning from our sin in repentance and accepting the full payment Christ made for our sin on the cross (Acts 20:21).

The fact we are sinners by nature and choice is opposed to the teaching against the reality of sin. Many believe we are basically good and not sinful. However, the Bible teaches we are sinners needing forgiveness (Romans 3:23). Ignoring this essential need in our lives leads to living in an unforgiven and unresponsive state. God has given us the gift of salvation in Christ, if we will accept it.

SALVATION'S TRUE ESSENCE

Salvation by grace through faith: The Scripture declares we cannot become a Christian through good works. It teaches salvation is a gift not earned through works (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5). Although we cannot be saved by what we do, we are saved to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). We show evidence of our salvation experience by the fruits of conversion in our lives (Matthew 7:20-22).

123. The view of receiving more of the Holy Spirit in subsequent experiences is basically that of several charismatic groups. In some cases, speaking in tongues is perceived as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The history of religion in the world is seen in what a person does to go to heaven and be accepted by God. Many groups teach you have to do something to earn your salvation. The cults thrive on teaching a work's salvation that ignores Christ's sacrificial death for our salvation. The purpose of the cross must be brought into clear focus here. The Scripture is clear on what Christ did for those who will trust in Him as Saviour. We refer to the work Jesus accomplished as the *finished work of Christ.* The book of Hebrews expresses this teaching completely in Hebrews 10:10-12. This book shows the types of Old Testament sacrifices. Christ's sacrifice was accomplished once and for all people and is what the Old Testament sacrifices pre-figured. To add to the finished work of Christ on the cross not only diminishes this perfect work of Christ, but also defeats the purpose of what Christ came to do (Galatians 2:21). Diminishing Christ's finished work makes His coming unnecessary, as if there is any way we could save ourselves.[124]

Eternal security: Once a person is truly saved, they cannot lose their salvation given to them by God and through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14, II Timothy 1:12, Ephesians 4:30).

The new life in Christ will usher forth good works and a changed life (II Corinthians 5:17). A person who is truly saved is kept by God and will never lose their salvation (John 10: 27-29).[125]

The eternal security of the believer is against the concept of a line Christians can cross over, rendering them once again unsaved. We are saved by grace and kept by God's grace toward us as undeserving sinners (Philippians 1:6, Jude 24-25).

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124. The belief is an outright denial of the finished work of Christ on the cross in his atonement for our sin. Paul said it defeats the purpose of Christ coming to die for us in payment of our sins (Galatians 2:21). Paul said it is either salvation by works or of faith; it cannot be both (Romans 11:6).
125. Observers see outright evidence that one is not a Christian revealing just that. It is evidence that someone never belonged to Christ (I John 2:19). There is no magical line one crosses over that makes them a non-Christian again.

MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

The exclusivity of the Gospel and Christ: The very message and purpose for Jesus' coming is seen in our need for a Saviour and proves there is no other way to redeem us from the penalty of our sin (I Peter 1:18-21, Isaiah 53:6, II Corinthians 5:14-21, John 8:24). Jesus' and the early church's claim was that He was the only one to give us access to God and to be rightly related to Him (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 5:1-2).

This thoroughly biblical perspective is in contrast to those who believe other religions are right in their own way of approaching God and should not be told their views are wrong if they are sincere. Religious diversity that denies the need for faith in Christ's atoning work has all kinds of negative ramifications for world evangelism.[126]

Worldwide missions: God has one plan of salvation through Christ's sacrifice for our sins and we are under obligation to take the message of the Gospel to everyone (Matthew 28:19-20). People are destroyed by sin and its penalty because of a lack of knowledge and not knowing how to be saved from their sin (Hosea 4:6). People from all cultures need the light of the Gospel (Romans 10:14-15), for they will perish outside of a saving knowledge of Christ and trusting Him as Lord and Saviour. We are under obligation to send and support missionaries to all countries in the world, so unbelievers might find Christ as their Saviour.

The need for everyone to hear the Gospel is opposed by the view that people have their own religions and do not need Christ to be saved or to worship God. Those who believe people that have never heard the Gospel are not responsible to its truths also dismiss the necessity of world missions. People are not lost because they have not heard the Gospel. People are lost because they are sinners

126. Our faith and trust in Christ's sacrifice for our sins is the only way our sins can be forgiven and we can have a personal relationship with God assuring us of a home in heaven when we die.

and need to hear the Gospel in order to be saved (Romans 1:14-16, 3:10-12, 20-26).[127]

Stewardship: Believers should support the work of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel through the church. The tithe of our income is assumed in Scripture and is a prescribed way of supporting God's work through the church in both the Old and New Testaments (Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 23:23). Anything over this amount is an offering given beyond the tithe. This teaching is set against those who believe we can give whatever we can afford to give, and we can support other groups outside the church with the tithe of our income.

The storehouse they brought the tithe to in the Old Testament was the temple foreshadowing the church, with the church fulfilling its function on a much larger scale. Beyond the tithe, we may use the offering in whatever manner one feels led, realizing the support of the church is still paramount above all other groups.[128]

LAST THINGS AND OUR EVENTUALITIES

The return of Christ and subsequent events: Jesus Christ will return to earth in glory and power and will be in fulfillment of the promise He made about His return (Matthew 24:30-31). The Second Coming of Christ is the blessed hope that should excite all believers (Acts 1:11, Titus 2:13).

Christians will be raised bodily from the grave and believers will be caught up to meet Christ (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). We shall be changed and forever be with the Lord (I Corinthians 15:50-57).

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127. Such a view that people who never heard the Gospel are safe from being judged for their sins is counter to the Great Commission and our obligation to tell others about Christ.
128. Sincere believers differ on giving the tithe or just giving sacrificially, as well as storehouse giving, being only the church and supporting other groups with the tithe. The belief so defined, however, has been the traditional Baptist belief and the typical view of the majority of Southern Baptist churches.

How Christ will rule and reign is subject to interpretation. Some believe He will reign on earth for literally 1,000 years, put down a satanic rebellion, and the final judgment will take place. Others believe He will come and judge the world immediately (Revelation 19:11-16).

The visible return of Christ contradicts the belief that Christ will not return bodily and references in the Bible are spiritual and not literally true.[129] The important truth about the return of Christ is He will come visibly and bodily.

The final judgment: There will be a final judgment in which all non-believers will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer eternally in a placed called Hell (Revelation 20:15). All believers, rewarded with an eternal inheritance in heaven, will live in a perfected state forever. Believers will be proven for their life of service and will be given rewards by God (II Corinthians 3:11-13, II Corinthians 5:10).

This biblical view of judgment opposes universalism, which says there is no judgment for unbelievers and all people will be saved eventually.[130]

Hell: There is a Hell and all unbelievers will go there, if they do not know Christ. Jesus said dying in our sins would result in destruction (John 8:24). Anyone going to Hell will do so as a result of not trusting in Christ as Saviour (John 3:17-18). The story of the rich man and Lazarus proves immediately after death there is conscious existence and separation from God in torment (Luke 16:19-31).

When those whose names are not found in the Book of Life are cast into the lake of fire, they will experience he final judgment on their sin (Revelation 20:10-15). Eternal judgment is denied by

129. The Scripture is very clear in the New Testament about a literal return of Christ to earth.
130. Universalism says all will be saved eventually or that none would go to what is described in the Bible as Hell.

liberalism and dismissed by the cults.[131] Nonetheless, judgment is a scriptural teaching, which motivated Paul and all believers to bring people to Christ before it is eternally too late (II Corinthians 5:9, II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Heaven: Heaven is a place of rest and reward for all believers who know Christ. At death, the believer's soul goes to be with God (II Corinthians 5:1-11) and will be in God's presence, glorified through a resurrected body at the return of Christ (Philippians 3:20-21, I John 3:1-2). Believers will reign with Christ throughout all eternity; their sin nature and all the sorrows of earthly life will be removed (Revelation 21:1-7).

The future estate of all believers of Christ in heaven refutes reincarnation, which teaches that all people, except the extremely holy, will come back into the next life. The belief in purgatory also teaches a person can be prayed for and released from imprisonment there to eventually go to heaven.

The Scripture teaches Heaven is the place a believer goes to at death (Hebrews 9:27).[132] The Bible also reveals the New Jerusalem and the eventual reward of all who have trusted Christ as Saviour (Revelation 22:10).

SOCIAL ISSUES

Traditional Marriage: Marriage is between male and female only (Matthew 19:4-6) and is acknowledged by the state and Jesus (John 4:25). Any sexual relationship outside of the bond of marriage is sin (Hebrews 13:4). Homosexuality is a sign of perversion and a lost world in need of repentance and redemption, not endorsement

131. Hell is believed to be too inconceivable to be true or it is spiritualized away by certain religious groups.
132. Catholicism invented teaching on purgatory and accepted it as tradition through the ages. The selling of indulgences to get people out pushed Luther toward the Reformation. Reincarnation is common in eastern and spirit religions but denied in Scripture.

(Romans 1:25-28). With the growing endorsement of homosexuality and gay marriage, we must ask, *why would God acknowledge something he condemns?*

Any other definition of marriage is not only anti-biblical, but also immoral. Religious groups that endorse homosexuality, support homosexual marriage, and ordain those known to be practicing the lifestyle are in opposition to what the Scripture says.

Abortion: The taking of life through abortion is directly opposed to the teachings about when life begins. The Scripture teaches that life begins at *conception* (Psalms 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:9, Luke 1:41) and Christ's virgin birth illustrates, beginning at conception, God values life.

To take a human life is not only against Scripture, but is an act of violence against a human life that is innocent in the matter. Belief in the sanctity of human life is against the view that it is a woman's right to choose whether to have a baby after conception or not. No instance of abortion being advocated is mentioned in Scripture. There is an abundance of support for life beginning at conception.[133]

All of these beliefs are just brief statements of what we believe found abundantly in the Scripture and are not just popular notions. These teachings are direct truths about what the Bible clearly reveals. The importance of trusting what the Bible says is crucial to an understanding of its message. We are grateful to the wisdom of God, revealed in the Scripture as our highest authority for belief and practice.

133. The heartbeat of the embryo and medical evidence all point to life beginning at conception. Pro-choice groups putting the emphasis on the women's right to choose an abortion divert from this reality..

Chapter 7 Scripture References

II Peter 1:20-21; II Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 1:9; Deuteronomy 6:4; Colossians 1:15-17; I Timothy 3:16; Acts 5:3-4; Titus 2:13; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 1:7-8; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:16; John 16:7; Genesis 1:27; Romans 5:12,14-19; I Corinthians 15:21-23, 45-49; Hebrews 11:3; Romans 5:12; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-14,18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9; I John 5:20; Matthew 2:11; John 20:28; Mark 2:7; I Peter 2:24; I Peter 3:18; Hebrews 10:10-12; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 6:10; I John 2:1-2; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:24; Romans 4:25; I Corinthians 15:20-23; Philippians 3:20-21; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2; Acts 2:1-4; Revelation 1:10; Exodus 31:16-17; John 6:44; 16:8-11; I Corinthians12:7, 11; John 16:13-15; Acts 5:3-4; Acts 13:3; John 14:16-18; Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:9; Romans 5:12; I John 3:4; Romans 6:23; Acts 20:21; Romans 3:23; II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Matthew 7:20-22; Hebrews 10:10-12; Ephesians 1:13-14; II Timothy 1:12; Ephesians 4:30; John 10: 27-29; Philippians 1:6; Jude 24-25; I Peter 1:18-21; Isaiah 53: 6; II Corinthians 5:14-21; John 8:24; John 14:6; Romans 5:1-2; Matthew 28:19-20; Hosea 4:6; Romans 10:14-15; Romans 1:14-16; Romans 3:10-12; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 23:23; Matthew 24:30-31; Acts 1:11; Titus 2:13; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:50-57, Revelation 19:11-15; Revelation 20:15; II Corinthians 3:11-13; II Corinthians 5:10; John 8:24; John 3:17-18; Luke 16: 19-31; Revelation 20:10-15; II Corinthians 5:9; II Thessalonians 1:7-9; II Corinthians 5:1-11; Philippians 3:20-21; I John 3:1-2; Revelation 21:1-7; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 22:10; Hebrews 13:4; Romans 1:25-28; Psalms 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:9; Luke 1:41.

A Charge to Hold on to Truth

I have sought to express these Baptist beliefs clearly and distinctly, because they are in danger of slipping away**.** Hebrews 2:1-2 says we are to not let the things we have heard and seen slip away. We must cling to them tenaciously. My concern is aroused because of the denominations that used to believe certain distinctive doctrines, but have changed their beliefs. I do not believe there will be flat denial of Baptist principles in the coming decade. However, if we do not continue to declare our faith, it will eventually evaporate before our very eyes. It will dissipate into oblivion without notice.

It is encouraging to see successive Baptist confessional statements that have not wavered from basic orthodox Christian belief. There has been a decided shift in the belief about the nature of the church in the past century. While not being affected by liberalism, a more pragmatic approach to doing church can possibly cause biblical authority to gradually slip from us.

I am not endeavoring to form an exclusive club of people who call themselves Baptists. It will not do any good to withdraw into a bomb shelter and retreat from the mainstream of Christian thought. I am instead advocating an open policy toward all comers. I definitely believe what I have written is biblically tested and affirmed by Scripture. The real objective of this work is to help those who have taken Baptist beliefs so lightly and loosely. In doing so, I want them to know we not only have a biblical faith, but that we are very clear on why that faith is biblical.

Doctrine is not mundane or a needless waste of time and study. The Great Awakening and revivals worldwide centered on doctrinal beliefs and we are hard-pressed to see a mighty movement of God outside of articulating our faith. We must express our faith clearly and boldly, so others will be moved by our convictions and declarations.

I pray truth has captured you as it has me. When I get a hold of scriptural truth, it transforms my life and shakes me to my core—never do I consider it dull, dry, or just for the studious. It is, instead, that which we must share because it is too good to keep to ourselves. Despite the risks of being misunderstood, we must not let these truths be silent or keep them to ourselves. We must be as Peter and John when they were threatened by the council in Acts 4:20. They responded: *We cannot help but speak those things we have seen and heard.*

Baptists have been great as a denomination and have experienced tremendous numerical and spiritual growth, when we have strongly articulated our faith. My concern is for the Baptist identity going the way of other denominations and religious groups, which have taken their faith lightly.

I realize many will choose to devalue what I am saying by thinking it is not really that important. However, to fail to understand where we have come from and where we are going leads to a directionless existence that is more important to avoid than we realize.

The next generation of pastors, church leaders, and churches will be faced with serious doctrinal questions and challenges. Since we live in a pragmatic culture, the pressure is on us to use *whatever works* in church. We need to be *all things to all people that we might save some* (I Corinthians 9:22); but also we need to stand for something, so we affirm not only do we believe truth, but are transformed by it. We should be moved by our convictions and want future generations to see these truths have made us what we are.

Ultimately, the test of church growth will be what we give our attention to. It has not been my purpose to restrict a vision for reaching all people. Instead, I have a great aspiration for Baptist churches. That aspiration is to declare the distinctive truth we have to the world, Christian community, and those entrusted to our care. Then we can watch God work in wonderful power and there will be a Baptist revival. A revival of truth to our cherished beliefs binds us to God's Word and sets us free to practice biblical faith in a world that needs it desperately.

A retired former mayor in my community heard me speak at a funeral service a few years ago. I sought to offer hope and encouragement, as well as share the Gospel. Afterwards he said, "I heard my grandfather (who was a Baptist preacher) speaking through you." He continued, "I'm not in a Bible-believing church now." He was discouraged at the lack of faith in the liberal church where he was a member. He came to our service the next Sunday and talked of how he appreciated the scriptural truths preached. However, he stayed with the liberal church he was with and expressed regret that this church used to believe scriptural truths, but does not anymore.

I pray we will never say, *We used to believe those truths, but don't anymore.* Biblical truth is eternal and has transformed people through the strength of Baptist churches. We must work to see these truths come to the forefront and not be silenced. When these truths are cherished and declared, then there can be a Baptist revival.

Charge to Hold on the Truth: Scripture References

Hebrews 2:1-2; Acts 4:20; I Corinthians 9:22

Appendix 1
False Assumptions People Make About Baptists
Acts 11:21-26, June 27, 2010

People, who saw how they conducted themselves, first called the disciples Christians at Antioch. The people assumed they were like Jesus by the way they lived. All of us have encountered people who think they know what Baptist beliefs and practices are. A lack of any positive association with Baptists usually leads to wrong assumptions.

Today, people have formed wrong assumptions about Baptists based on misinformation and wrong conclusions. What are these wrong assumptions?

1. The Church is a denomination. Acts 14:23.

Baptists believe every church is an independent autonomous body of baptized believers. We have no such thing as the Baptist church. We affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention for purposes of missions and fellowship, unlike other groups who refer to their group as a universal entity. Yet, the Bible makes that distinction in Acts 14:23, where Paul was assisting in the ordination of leaders in every church.

The correct definition of the church is important, because any cooperation Baptists have is not from the top down as in a denominational hierarchy, but from the local church on up. There is no control by other higher bodies, but

belief that the local church has the authority to decide in matters of faith and practice. Believers are not members in the church just by professing their faith in Christ. There is a universal fellowship of believers known as the kingdom of God, but the church is a local entity.

2. Believers baptism by immersion is another form of baptism.

The Bible does not teach infant or adult sprinkling. Instead, the word transliterated baptism: *baptizmo* always means to immerse or dunking in water.[134] Immersion is how Jesus received baptism (Matthew 3:15-17, Romans 6:4). This baptismal mode is how the early church baptized—not sprinkling.

We do not accept any form of so-called baptism as a New Testament baptism, even though it may have been meaningful. Immersion of a believer means to follow Christ by showing you believe in the Gospel, have died to life without Christ, raised to walk in Him, and to show our resurrection to come. No other method of baptism illustrates these realities.

3. We have mass chaos at business meetings.

Every church member has a say in our congregations. This practice must be a good way to structure meetings, because James Madison had it as a frame of reference in his model of representative government when he wrote the Constitution.[135] Thomas Jefferson was very cognizant of how Baptists operated, causing him to admire their spiritual democracy. He had attended some of their services and learned about them through Madison's mutual friend,

134. Steve Lemke, *Baptism celebrates new life* An article in *The Vision: A alumni publication of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary* vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010, New Orleans: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary),

135. Bruce Prescott, http://.mainstreambaptists.org/mbn/Patriots.htm.

John Leland, the famous Baptist preacher and leader for religious liberty in Virginia.[136]

We do not have a church hierarchy who decides for the people. Every member has a vote. Jesus told His disciples to bring matters to the church when they had a controversy (Matthew 18:15-17). The assumption is that we will operate under the Lordship of Christ and have mutual love and respect for believers. We will accept the will of the majority and go on with Christ's work, instead of holding grudges. This is not always the case, but it beats shutting people out of the process. It is worth the risk of controversy, instead of giving people no voice.

4. We are part of the Reformed movement.

This is a big controversy today, because there are many who want five-point Calvinism to be the rule of the day in all churches. We have churches now that call themselves Reformed Baptists.

The Reformed movement started under Luther, who broke away from Catholicism. John Calvin delineated the theology of the Protestant Reformation in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his other writings. These teachings feature adherence to five basic points: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints—all which are the core of Calvinistic doctrine.

Baptists did not believe the Reformed movement went far enough: sprinkling infants, having a Catholic Church structure, and oppressing those who did not agree with them. Baptists are not Protestants in the technical sense. Baptist churches existed before the Reformation and go back in practice to the early churches. Baptists allowed

136. Torbet, 241.

for separation from the corrupt church, when they called for religious liberty, not favoritism of one group. We call for individual conscience in matters of faith and practice, not sponsorship by the family or others, which falsely equates membership with salvation. We call for adherence to Scripture, not tradition. We call for the local church, not a universal group that gives false assurance or no accountability to a local body.

Jesus said He would be with churches that lead people to Him, baptize as He was, and do what He taught. Baptists do not identify with all of the reformed movement, taken in the light of these truths.

5. We are against political involvement of Christians.

This misassumption, hammered into the ground by moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention, always touts separation of church and state to avoid any kind of stand on moral issues as a church. This clarification is for their benefit, as well as all who deny church involvement in anything political. The problem is separation of church and state means something far different today because of the heavily unchurched population we live in. In the days of the Constitution adoption, it meant the government could not set up a state church that people had to subscribe to, if they lived there. Today, it means no voice at all in government or elections by many secularist and other Christians who wish to be passive. This is a false assumption, for we are to be *salt* and *light* to the world. We can stand against moral wrong and are obligated to do so, without believing in government control by religion.

Paul told Timothy to encourage people to pray for government officials and rulers to make the right decisions (I Timothy 2: 1-2). This does not sound like a retreat from government, but rather an advance upon it. If Christians

do not stand against immorality and corruption, who will? It is perfectly okay to oppose wrong in government; we have the same rights to speak out in the church as anyone else does.

6. The Lord's Supper and baptism are sacraments.

A sacrament is a means of dispensing forgiving grace. Catholicism teaches that racking up enough points through keeping the sacraments can earn you entry into heaven when you die, but there is no assurance of salvation.

The Lord's Supper and baptism are actually ordinances that Christ has commanded us to observe in obedience to Him. The Lord's Supper helps us remember Christ's sacrifice for our sins on our behalf. Baptism publicly proclaims our faith in Christ and His work on our behalf. These ordinances are not necessary for salvation, but necessary to be an obedient Christian. The requirement to observe each ordinance is to indicate our faith and trust in Christ as Saviour, as Philip told the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:37-38 about baptism.

Paul assumed believers would have more reverence for the Lord's Table than what was going on in Corinth, as he mentions in I Corinthians 11:17-34. To trust in both these ordinances for salvation is to place faith in the wrong source of salvation; it is only in Christ's atoning work in our place that we are saved.

7. We are controlled by a hierarchy.

The Bible does not teach a hierarchy of religious officials over the church. Pastors lead the congregation as a spiritual leader, while the deacons assist him. We have already asserted the independence and authority of the local church. There are several groups we are a part of in our denomination, such as our local association, state

conventions, and the national convention. None of these could control us if they wanted to. The local church calls the pastor, sets the type of ministry we have, and the amount of money we will send to the denomination for their missions.

Baptists do not believe in human heads over churches. We did not begin like the Methodists through Wesley, or the Lutherans through Luther, or the Reformed that reverence Calvin's theology. Instead, we can say there was not a time in the Post-Apostolic age when Baptists began. We believe our teachings are in line with what churches in the book of Acts believed and what Christ commissioned them to do. Christ is our head; it is His church, according to Matthew 16:18.

8. We are enforced by certain positions as a denomination.

A denomination is a group of churches that have similar beliefs. Our church is not bound to amendments passed at the Southern Baptist Convention. They do not demand positions we must take to be Southern Baptist from a higher echelon of church structure, which does not exist. The debate over Calvinism is an example of this reality. There is enough latitude in our denomination to arrive at different interpretations in matters not regarding salvation or the person and work of Christ.

We do not subscribe to creeds or traditions as equal to Scripture. We have a common statement of faith that is a consensus of what fellow churches believe. To depart from these affirmations of Scripture causes churches to cease to identify as Baptist and they acknowledge themselves as such.

Paul did not have the final authority to decide for the church in Corinth in the matter of the immoral man still

serving the church in I Corinthians 5:1-13. Instead, he *urged* them to act as a body to correct the error, but *they* needed to do it.

9. We are more committed to Baptists than to Christ.

Baptists never chose the name *Baptist*. Instead, enemies chose the name out of derision for the immersion baptism of the believer. This is why I am not overly concerned about the name going back to the time of Christ, as much as the practice of baptism. When a person is immersed as a believer, it identifies with Christ pictorially, according to Galatians 3:27, as they were following Christ willing to live as He lived.

Baptists have rescued believer's baptism by immersion from the ash heap. They correctly assert it is important as the only mode in demonstrating our faith in Christ and being a part of the church. You can say all you want that you do not want to be called Baptist, but there are certain Baptist distinctives, just as there are distinctives of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Catholicism. We can introduce people to Jesus, but if they read the Bible honestly, they will clearly see the scriptural positions of the Baptists.

Many have taken the name Baptist off the church name, saying it is a turn-off to the non-churched coming in the front door. Others just say they do not want to be Baptist. If you were Baptist and now do not want to be, I cannot understand why. I choose to identify this church with timeless principles that have made a difference in people's lives through the centuries—Baptist principles.

10. We promote antinomianism through eternal security.

A minority of churches, called Free Will Baptist, believe you can lose your salvation. Most Baptists believe once

you have salvation, you always have salvation. The problem comes with those who profess falsely to believe in Christ and have never trusted Him as Saviour.

The term *antinomianism* refers to proclaiming with your mouth you are a Christian and then living any immoral way you want, without any regard for your supposed faith in Christ.[137] If you have true faith in Christ, it will truly change you to depart from the sin in your life that is destructive (Titus 2:11-12). The governance of the Holy Spirit becomes a restraint against wrong, instead of being like a dove that flies away if we dishonor the name of Christ.

I believe a true Christian will wear the name honorably, demonstrating Christ-likeness by their lifestyle. Free grace and your acceptance of Christ now obligates you to live under His authority in your life.

11. We promote a doctrinal statement over the Bible.

We covered this topic some when I mentioned we are not under any church hierarchy. However, this is a common argument that comes up when defending our new doctrinal statement in the *Baptist Faith and Message2000*, which only clarifies our previous confessional statement, bringing it up to date. Some moderates say we worship the Bible over Christ. The Bible is clear, in that we have everything in it for spiritual edification, nourishment, and the equipping us in the word of God (II Timothy 3:15-4:2). *The Baptist Faith and Message* is only an expression of faith that reflects the major teachings of the Bible, unlike the *Apostle's Creed* that teaches belief in the Holy

137. This teaching was first associated with some of the Gnostics who believed since the body is corrupt it cannot ever do well and it really does not matter. As long as you believe certain things you can live like you want, free from moral restraint.

Catholic Church. There is no contest between the Bible and the *Baptist Faith and Message*.

12. We are unloving and not compassionate.

This is a recent accusation against Southern Baptists, because of our belief in traditional values. So the easiest cop-out is to believe we are hate mongers, because we believe certain lifestyles are wrong. The most compassionate thing someone can do for you is to tell you the truth if you are deathly sick and they know the cure.

We are to be a light to those in darkness, but many in darkness do not want the light (John 3:19-21). We are to hold out the light as a standard for others to follow (Philippians 2:15). We are sinners saved by grace and people should find the love of Christ here, even though they may disagree with us.

Much of our Baptist legacy today is disappearing like a ship on the horizon. Many are content to let it drift out of sight. Just because you cannot see it, however, does not mean it does not exist. Instead of lagging behind today, I think we ought to catch up with it and bring it back safely to harbor. Will you join me in this quest? I think it is needed today more than ever, for these are the truths that clarify misassumptions about Baptists.

Appendix 2
The Philadelphia Baptist Confession 1742 Explained

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession was the first written expression of the Baptist faith in America, coming on the heels of their early struggle for religious liberty. After their establishment as legitimate believers and churches in the American colonies, Baptists were able to declare their faith with a certain measure of freedom. This affirmation was through the first Baptist Association in America, which began in 1707 in Philadelphia.[138] The confession is identical to the *London Baptist Confession* in 1689. It has a reformed influence regarding the use of the term *elect* and the *doctrines of grace* clarified. Free will is not denied, but is minimized over God's work in salvation.[139]

Two articles are added to the confession regarding singing hymns and the laying on of hands. More attention and information describes the Lord's Supper than baptism. Baptism is affirmed for believers, only by immersion through the church.[140]

Some have felt the confession teaches a universal church on earth. However, closer examination shows it is referring to believers

138. Christian, vol.2, 148.
139. Phil Johnson, *The London Baptist Confession 1689*, (accessed January 29, 2016), http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bcof.htm, The Spurgeon Archive: The Hall of Church History, 2009.
140. Sam Hughey, *The Philadelphia Baptist Confession 1742*, (accessed January 29, 2016), http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/pctoc.htm, The Reformed Reader, 1999.

of all ages as those redeemed of all ages and who will be together in heaven. The church is seen, as Baptists have primarily interpreted it, as a local gathered assembly of visible believers in Christ, who have identified with Him through believer's baptism by immersion for their public profession of faith in Christ and fellowship with that body of believers.[141]

The expression of faith was nothing new to the churches and pastors. They were familiar with the *London Baptist Confession* of 1642. The need to distinguish a particular American Baptist confession of faith was probably what drove this confession with the minor additions.

The confession has similar understandings of salvation being a work of God, in which He calls and provides grace for salvation. It is orthodox in its Christology and Eschatology. It also differentiates between pedobaptism and New Testament baptism by believers.[142]

The feeling that the universal church is an actual active institution in the world is not taught in this confession. The confession refers to the church as the *redeemed of all ages* that follows in subsequent Baptist confessions of the Southern Baptist Convention, first appearing in 1963.[143]

T. T. Eaton, in explaining the difference between the church being the redeemed of the ages and a local body of believers explains an important point that most Baptists would agree with. He says,

> *It takes all the elect of all ages to make "the catholic or universal church." Of course, then, the little fraction of them alive at any given time cannot be called the church.*

141. Hughey, Ibid., http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/pctoc.htm.
142. Hughey, http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/pctoc.htm.
143. Executive Committee Southern Baptist Convention *Comparison of the 1925, 1963, 2000 Baptist Faith and Message* (accessed, January 29, 2016), http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp, About Us Southern Baptist Convention, on SBC Net.

> *Of course, then, this church cannot exist in every age, because its material, except a part of it, and perhaps a very small part, had not come into existence when our Baptist fathers adopted that language. If the world shall continue ten thousand years longer, the last man saved will be part of the "universal church," which this document declares to be composed of "the whole number of the elect that have been, are, shall be gathered into one,…"*[144]

This definition gives an important distinction, since it really is hard to call the church universal if all the believers of all ages not realized yet are still to come to Christ for salvation. Baptists have never wrested the authority of the local church from the grip of the local congregation, who they believe to be the functioning body of Christ on earth.

The more modern Baptist confessions of faith have similarly been more accommodating to the traditional Baptist view of free will, general atonement, and personal response to Christ. The early confessions were more Calvinistic because of the predominance of the reformed writers and pastors influencing the early Baptist movement. Although Baptist oppressors were some of the reformed movement, such as the Puritans, Baptists were under the influence of their theology. Remember people like Roger Williams, Benjamin Keach, and others came out of the Puritan movement and retained their heavily influenced theology of Calvinism. It is only natural, since the reformed movement heavily influenced the English Baptists, that the American Baptists would initially be influenced in this way.[145]

Later, as the Separate Baptist took root through the Sandy Creek movement, the emphasis changed somewhat through the efforts of

144. T.T. Eaton, Defense of the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession* (accessed, January 29, 2016), http://baptisthistoryhomepage.com/eaton.phila.confession.html, Baptist History, October, 2002.

145. Most early Baptist leaders in England and the American colonies were Puritan before they were Baptist. In Roger William's case, he did not stay a Baptist.

Shubal Sterns and Daniel Marshall. They were more concerned with preaching the Gospel, winning people to Christ, and starting new churches so they would forego enunciating theology as accurately as the early Baptist confessions.[146] Whatever the emphasis, it was good that associations, churches, and pastors cared enough to declare their faith and use it as a guide for their ministry and purpose for existence.

146. Tom Nettles, *The Baptists:* vol. 2, (Cromwell Press: Wilshire, U.K., 2005), 167-168, 172.

Appendix 3

Subsequent Baptist Statements of Faith in America that give special attention to the church.

Since the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession* in 1742, other major confessions have reflected certain emphasis. Because of the time they were written and the issues being confronted during this time, they reflect certain emphasis.

The next major confession, and the most popular still today, was the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession* in 1833.

J. Newton Brown, editorial secretary of the America Baptist Society, published *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*.[147] It has had widespread distribution because of its appeal to Northern and Southern Baptists. It reflects a more modified Calvinism than the Philadelphia Confession, stating, *We believe the blessings of salvation are free to all…nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own inherent depravity and his refusal to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, which will subject him to aggravated condemnation.*[148]

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession focused on the church as a local visible institution, remaining silent on anything that gives

147. John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present,* A revised edition. (John Knox: Atlanta, 1963) 334.

148. Jeff Wright, *Comparing Confessions* (accessed January 29, 2016), http://jeffwright.exaltchrist.com/comparing-the-new-hampshire-confession-and-bfm-1925/, Servant and Herald, August, 9.2010.

an interpretation of a universal church. The landmark controversy at the time reflected this influence, acknowledging the only church the Bible speaks of as local. It states, *The visible church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel…*[149] This definition of the church has been the most popular definition among Baptists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the beginning decades of the 21st century, it is doubtful this definition would be prominent among the new generation of pastors.

The earliest convention sponsored statement in the Southern Baptist Convention, adopted in 1925, continued the emphasis of the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession*. It depends heavily on the *New Hampshire Confession* and does not have a radical departure from its articles.

In the article on salvation, the most significant change is the exclusion in the *Baptist Faith and Message, 1925* of the New Hampshire phrase on salvation as, *…which rejection [of the Gospel] involves him [the sinner] in an aggravated condemnation.* [150] In the article on the person of Christ, the most significant difference is the inclusion in the *Baptist Faith and Message, 1925* of the phrase describing Jesus birth, *who by the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary*. This phrase, alien to the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession,* might possibly represent an intentional doctrinal emphasis for Baptists in the days of the framing of *Baptist Faith and Message 1925*, in which many of the traditional doctrines of Christianity challenged by modern biblical scholarship demanded a response.[151] The confession is also unique in its explanation of the role of a confession among Baptists and is a reaction to the pressures of the evolution and modernist controversies.

149. Leith, 334.
150. Wright, http://jeffwright.exaltchrist.com/comparing-the-new-hampshire-confession-and-bfm-1925/.
151. Ibid., http://jeffwright.exaltchrist.com/comparing-the-new-hampshire-confession-and-bfm-1925/.

Similarly, the articles addressing the doctrines of repentance and faith express a unified understanding of these linked doctrines as both *duties* and *graces*, accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. God draws men to Christ through the Holy Spirit and man responds to Christ's saving work on the cross, asking for forgiveness from sin and its punishment. We see here a mutual commitment between the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession* and the *Baptist Faith and Message, 1925* to the balance between God's activity and man's response, as well as a clear expression of Christ's three offices.[152]

The 1963 revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message* remained the same in content and approach to the articles carrying the same intent of the prior confessions. It was felt the confession needed a revision of the 1925 statement and reaffirmation of biblical authority. This was due to theological liberalism affecting the mainline Protestant denominations and making encroachments in the convention, primarily in the seminaries and other educational institutions.[153]

The statement on the church remains the same in the 1963 revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*. It only switched the wording from the 1925 version from *Christ's church* to *a New Testament church.* However, an extension was added to the article that did not appear in the New Hampshire Confession or 1925 confession. A sentence about the *redeemed of all ages* comprising the church is included to clarify what Appendix 2 says about the *redeemed of all ages.* The statement reads, *The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ, which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.* The 2000 version of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, viewed as the crowning achievement of those leading the convention toward a more conservative stance theologically, remained the same about the statement on the church describing it also as being the *redeemed of all*

152. Ibid., http://jeffwright.exaltchrist.com/comparing-the-new-hampshire-confession-and-bfm-1925/.

153. This was an understood purpose for adopting a revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message 1925* through several convention resolutions and order of business.

ages. It did add this phrase, *...believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.* This makes the statement more futuristic, since it is a direct reference to the redeemed in heaven described in Revelation 5:9.[154]

It is clear all confessions describe the functional church on earth as local and visible, comprised of baptized believers. This emphasis may not be unique to Baptists, but certainly is most prominent among them.

154. Executive Committee Southern Baptist Convention *Comparison of the 1925, 1963, 2000 Baptist Faith and Message* (accessed, January 29, 2016), http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp, About Us Southern Baptist Convention, on SBC Net.

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