



A Brief Survey of Independent Fundamental Baptist Churches Their Beliefs and History

WHAT IS AN INDEPENDENT FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST CHURCH?

The name Independent Fundamental Baptist Church is used traditionally by churches which pattern themselves strictly after the example of the early church, as found in the New Testament. Today the name Baptist is used by many churches that are not following the teachings of the New Testament. Thus the words "Independent" and "Fundamental" have been added by many Baptist churches to further identify themselves as true Bible believing churches and to show a distinction between themselves and Baptist churches that were not following God's word. Most Baptist churches were in the past founded on the sound doctrinal teachings of the New Testament; however, many of them have in varying degrees drifted away from many of the teachings of the Scriptures. Some of these churches have gone so far to even deny the fundamental teachings of the Bible, such as the deity of Christ, the virgin birth and salvation by the Grace of God, through faith. Others have to a lesser degree compromised the Word of God by their teaching, practices and church polity trying to conform to popular religious trends. These worldly churches still call themselves "Baptists," but in fact they do not believe or practice what true Baptists have historically believed and more importantly what the Word of God says. The true Independent Fundamental Baptists have no association or fellowship with these churches because they teach or practice things contrary to the New Testament.

The name Independent Fundamental Baptist is of recent origin and came into being because many modern day Baptist churches have compromised the Word of God and are teaching and practicing false doctrines. There were however, many Baptists who have loved the Word of God and held true to its teachings. These churches have refused to abandon the teaching the New Testament and have found it necessary, to distinguish themselves from the doctrinally unsound churches. To make this distinction, true Baptists added the adjectives Independent and Fundamental their name. This name change identified them as separate and distinct from unsound groups.

The word "Independent" means the church is not a member of any council, convention or is a part of any hierarchy outside the local congregation. A true Independent Baptist church governs itself apart from any outside agency and would not be apart of a national or international denomination that would exercise authority over the local church. Thus, the name "independent" means the church patterns itself after the New Testament example and stands alone under the authority of the scriptures. Independent churches are autonomous assemblies having no organization over them in authority. Free from outside interference, they direct their own affairs under the authority of the New Testament Scriptures.

The organization of a New Testament church is simple. Christ is the head of the church, (Eph. 5:23) and its Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). The local pastor is the under-shepherd (bishop), overseer, or leader of the congregation. (Heb. 13:17, Acts 20:28, Eph. 4:11) The Independent Baptist church has a congregational form of government with each member equally having the right of to vote on all the affairs of the church. The pastor and members of the New Testament church directs and rules its actions following the guidelines of the New Testament.

Independent Fundamental Baptist churches have fellowship one with the other and often cooperate in such endeavors as evangelism. They will not participate, as a church, in any outside function with churches which do not also strictly base their faith and practice on the New Testament. They will not engage in joint meetings, or evangelistic endeavors, with Protestants, Catholics, or other doctrinally unsound church groups, who do not hold to the fundamental teachings of the New Testament. Fundamental Independent Baptists churches will remain separate from unsound churches, as well as other Baptists groups who join in with the unscriptural churches. They practice the biblical teachings of separation as taught in Ephesians 5:11, which state, *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Independent Baptists believe that to join with churches that teach and practice false doctrine is to tolerate and approve of errors. True, New Testament churches strongly believe that all doctrinal error is sin as the New Testament teaches.

The church government of many Independent Baptist churches is to have pastors and deacons as officers of the local church. (1 Tim. 3:1-16) However, some Independent Baptist churches do not accept the word "officer" as the proper biblical term to be applied to deacons.

The pastor of the church is called by majority vote of the congregation. Men meeting the biblical qualification of deacons (servants) are appointed from the local congregation and approved by the majority vote (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Many Baptist churches have trustees, but their position was established in order to have legal "signatories" to sign legal documents of the church. Biblically neither deacons nor trustees are a governing body, or a "board," but titles of special appointed servants who serve at the will of the pastor and congregation. In a biblical church the pastor(s) is the "overseers" or leader of the congregation. (See Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:7)

The word "Fundamental" means the Baptist church uses the New Testament strictly as its authority for faith (doctrine) and practice. In recent years the news media has called doctrinally unsound churches such as the Charismatics and Pentecostals "fundamentalists." Even some TV evangelists have referred to themselves as being "fundamentalist." But they should not be confused with Fundamental Baptists. They are worlds apart. Many of the TV evangelists and all the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches promote teachings which are not biblical. Fundamental Baptists use the name in its strictest sense as meaning to hold soundly the fundamentals of the New Testament teachings without error. True Independent Fundamental Baptist Churches uphold the purest teachings of the early church as revealed in the New Testament.

BAPTISTS ARE NOT PROTESTANTS

Baptists are not Protestants. The name Protestant was given to those churches which came out of Roman Catholicism during the Reformation which began in the 1500s. It originally applied in the 1700s to Lutherans in Germany, the Presbyterians in Switzerland, and Anglicans or Church of England. Later such as Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Methodists were added to the lists of Protestants denominations. Though many people including Webster's Dictionary refer to Baptists as being Protestants, it is not historically correct to refer to them as such or to lump all non-catholic denominations in one group and label them Protestant. Historically, Baptists were never a part of the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Reformation. They cannot be correctly called "protesters" or Protestants who left the Roman Church.

It is true that many who became Baptists left the ranks of apostate and doctrinally unsound Protestant churches. They left these churches because of their strong conviction that the Word of God should not be compromised. Some formed new churches and called themselves Baptists to make it clear that they believed and followed the New Testament. They used the name Baptists because they followed the New Testament teaching of immersion as the correct mode of baptism. A good example of this was reported by Benedict in which an elder named Cornell, in the early 1800s was establishing a former Protestant church on Baptist principles. He left for a short time on a trip to his farm and when he return found the church had put in a new minister who baptized infants. He with the others in the church that rejected paedobaptism left and formed a new congregation of Baptists on Pine Street, in Providence, RI.

The Protestant churches following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church practiced infant baptism, sprinkling instead of immersion and they baptized people into their church who had not made public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Although these issues were in the forefront, there were many other matters that caused true believers to separate themselves from these unscriptural churches.

In recorded church history there is not one recorded incident of a Baptist church being founded out of Roman Catholicism. Protestants for centuries, saw the Baptists as their "enemies" and murdered them by the thousands in the name of Protestantism. It is surely an affront to any historically informed Baptist identify to himself by the name of a group that has so hated and persecuted Baptists down throughout history. It is revealing that the reason the Protestants who hated the Baptists was that the Baptist would not compromised God's word or accept the Protestant false teachings and traditions.

There have always existed congregations, from the time of Christ, that were not a part of the Roman Church. In fact the Roman Catholic Church can only historically trace its history back to 313 AD when the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity a legal religion. In 395 AD, Emperor Constantius "Christianized" Rome and made the worship of idols punishable by death. By 400 AD, the Emperor Theodosius had declared Christianity the only state religion of the Roman Empire. There was no Roman Catholic church prior to that time in history. Many churches by this time had come under the domination of the Roman government and had ceased from being New Testament churches. When the Roman Emperor declared Christianity the religion of Rome, "converted" hordes of pagans which made up the Empire. Pagan temples became the meeting houses for "Christians." Rome, then hired unregenerate pagan priests as "Christian" ministers. The influx of these falsely converted pagans is one reason Roman Catholicism came to have so many idolatrous and pagan beliefs.

However, amid all this apostasy associated with the Roman Catholic Church, there were groups of Christians who were never a part of the "Christianization" of the Roman Empire. These New Testament believers rejected every attempt to include them in with the other churches that compromised and accepted the Roman government's money, rule and authority. Over the years the growth of so many false and idolatrous practices caused some within the Catholic Church such as Martin Luther to rebel, and to try to "reform" the Catholic Church. This was the birth of Protestant Reformation. Although, many Protestants returned in part to a belief in the Bible as their authority for their faith and practice, yet not one of them EVER completely left all the doctrinal errors and false teachings of the apostate Roman Catholic Church. There has never been even one Protestant church that is doctrinally pure following the example and polity of the New Testament. Protestant churches continue the unbiblical practice of infant baptism and a grace plus works salvation.

Protestants have never accepted the principle of separation of church and state. In Europe, Protestant churches are "state" churches and supported to some degree by government imposed taxes. For example, in Germany, the state church is Lutheran. In England, the Anglican or Church of England is the state church. France, Spain, and Italy, all have the Roman Catholic Church is their state church.

The idea the bread and wine (biblically grape juice) in the Lord's Supper being a sacrament and becoming the literal physical body of Christ which takes away sin, is a false Roman Catholic teaching. Protestants, although becoming separate from the Roman Church, only slightly changed this false practice. Martin Luther until his death held to this false sentiment and disputed with the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), over the matter. Still today, many Protestants see the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, having to some degree saving properties or giving some spiritual benefit. True New Testament Christians have always rejected such unbiblical ideas. New Testament churches follow the teaching of the New Testament that the Lord's Supper is a memorial or ordinance given to the local church to remember and show the Lord's death till he returns.(1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Protestants still practice some form of infant or paedobaptism. Many Protestant denominations still hold to the writings of their church fathers and their traditions as their source of church doctrine and polity. They following their Roman Catholic roots, and have never accepted the Bible as their sole source of teachings for their faith and practice, which is a foundational teaching of a New Testament congregation.

All Protestants hold to a system of hierarchy in church government and do not accept the autonomy the local church. The New Testament teaches the absolute autonomy of each individual local church and Baptists have never established a church hierarchy. True Baptists follow the New Testament example that each church is to govern itself as the Word of God teaches free from outside authority and control.

Baptists, basing their beliefs solely on the Bible, and the New Testament, have never held to these teachings and correctly identify them as false doctrine. Thus, history and the doctrines of Protestantism clearly show that Baptists are not Protestants. The Baptist churches which identify themselves as Protestants are sadly misinformed. Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches for centuries persecuted individuals and congregations who held to Baptist principles. Although the Baptists have never persecuted anyone, they were fair game for other unscriptural churches.

WHO WERE THE FIRST BAPTISTS?

In discovering who the first Baptists were, you must first identify to whom you are referring. You could mean those people or churches which held to the Baptists beliefs although they may not have called themselves Baptists. Or second, you could be referring to those who held to Baptist beliefs and were called by the name Baptist.

It is difficult to trace churches that held to Baptist principles down through history. Some Baptist historians have made attempts at doing this, but in many cases refer to groups as early Baptists, who did not hold to pure New Testament beliefs held by Baptists today. Some have tried to establish that "according to history, Baptists have an unbroken line of churches since Christ." These historians, in a try to show an unbroken line of Baptists in history, have embraced groups which were clearly not doctrinally sound. However, it should be understood that the name Baptist refers to a local assembly strictly held to the teachings of the New Testament.

In the simplest of terms a true Baptist assembly is one which follows the New Testament as his sole authority for his faith and practice. Whether these groups of believers called themselves Baptists or not, if they were doctrinally pure, following the New Testament for their faith and practice they were New Testament churches and thus they can be called "baptistic." The point is the name Baptist was used to designate a true New Testament assembly that was biblically sound. Historically, many of these biblically sound churches were called by various names before the name Baptist became popular. The crucial point is not that they called themselves Baptists, but they followed the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice. The connection with churches back in history is not the name they used, but was rather their doctrine and practice.

Some Baptists such as the Landmark Baptist are often referred to as "Baptists Briders," claim they can trace their history back to John the Baptist who was the first Baptist. The modern Landmark churches purport that no church which is not in their line of succession back to the early church has any true authority and is not part of the Bride of Christ. However, John the Baptist was an Old Testament saint and the last Old Testament prophet (Matt. 3:3) and died before the Lord instituted the "ekklesia" or local church. John's ministry was in the Old Testament dispensation. He did not belong to, nor was part of the any "ekklesia" or New Testament church. Yes, he baptized, but His baptism was the baptism of repentance (Matt. 3:2) for Jews who were preparing for coming Messiah and Kingdom God had promised them.

The case for John the Baptist not being the "founder" of the Baptist movement is strengthened by the fact that John's baptism was not recognized as a valid New Testament baptism. In Acts 19:1-5, when Paul discovered that those at Ephesus were John's disciples and had received only John's baptism they were rebaptized in the name of Christ. Only then did John's disciples become New Testaments saints receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and become part of our present dispensation of the Church Age.

John was the forerunner, called by God to announce that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised to the Jews. John was beheaded by Herod (Matt. 14) before the Lord Jesus announced the coming

establishment of the "ekklesia." (Matt 16:18). John was God's true prophet and the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah, but he was not a part of the dispensation of the institution of the local church. John the Baptist did not found any churches and was never a member of one.

In examining many so-called early "Baptist" churches you find many doctrinal errors and false teaching. Surely, no church that practiced false doctrine, as many of these groups did, is a true Baptist church. It is my conviction from years of research, that it is not possible to "trace" an unbroken line of Baptist churches from Christ until today. However, let me strongly say there has always been an unbroken line of churches that have not erred from the faith, and been true to the Bible, God's Word. In fact Jesus emphatically stated in Matthew 16:18, concerning the perpetuity the institution of the local church that even *"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Doctrinally sound New Testament churches have always existed from the time of Christ and the Apostles until today. To call these people Baptists or baptistic, in the sense they believed the Bible and followed it as their sole authority for faith and practice is acceptable, although it serves no purpose. To say there is an unbroken line or succession of New Testament churches from the time of Christ until today it historically true.

It cannot be stated too often that the importance of these churches was not in their name, or their succession, but in what they believed and practiced. These churches patterned themselves strictly after the New Testament example, and this made them valid churches approved of God. This is the true heritage Fundamental Independent Baptists holds dear, that is there have always been assemblies which submitted themselves only to the sole authority of the Word of God. However, it is difficult to document these congregations because they were rarely in the spot light of history.

For an example there is Patrick of Ireland. Patrick was born in Scotland in 360 AD and sold into slavery at age sixteen and carried to Ireland. Later, he escaped and became a Christian missionary. Although the Roman Catholic Church claims him as one of their "saints," there is no evidence he even knew the Catholic Church existed. In his writings he appears ignorant of the practices of the Roman Church and never refers to church councils, creeds, traditions or even to the existence of a pope. There was no hierarchy in the churches he founded, which were patterned after the simple New Testament example. These churches were missions minded and formed schools to train preachers and missionaries. Later in history, around 600 AD, Austin, a Catholic monk, was sent to Britain by Pope Gregory the Great. King Ethelbert and his court, and many Britons were won over by the successful monk. Under the Roman Catholic influence these missionary centers diverged into monasticism. However, history is clear that in the beginning and into the 9th Century there were churches in Britain that rejected paedobaptism, popery and other false doctrines of the Catholics. These churches remained sound in doctrine and practicing the faith of the New Testament. These churches are good examples of Bible believing churches that existed independent of the Roman Catholic Church, and were for some time not corrupted by its influences. They were in fact churches founded on the same New Testament principles that modern day Baptists have founded their churches.

Some have pointed to the Anabaptists as the examples of early modern Baptist churches. This again cannot be proven from history. The Anabaptists were mostly a God-fearing group of people. They loved the Lord and many of them gave their lives and fortunes for the sake of Christ. In their beginnings mostly were doctrinally sound. However, history does not record even one Anabaptist group or church becoming or founding a Baptist church. Most of the Anabaptists successors became the Mennonites, Amish and Quakers. The historical record shows that not one modern Baptist church can trace its history as coming from the Anabaptists. Many Anabaptists churches were strong New Testament churches believing and following the Word of God. Other Anabaptists groups were in gross error and corrupted. As with any true New Testament church, its validity as a true church approved of God, does not, nor or has ever rested on its name or on a succession of churches. A true New Testament church must be solely discerned based on its adherence to the principles of God's Word.

Some Baptist churches believe in a succession of Baptist churches that passed down the authority to baptize and give the Lord's Supper. It is my conviction that this is contrary to the very foundation of what is a true New Testament church. A true New Testament church bases its faith, practice and authority solely in

the Word of God. To hold to the "secessionist" position takes the authority away from the New Testament and places it in the hands of man.

Secessionism is a gross error of Catholicism. God said He would preserve His church and that task was not left in the hands of fallible men or groups. God, deliberately used isolated groups in many different places during time to preserve His church and did not chose to use a line or chain of churches to past His Word or authority on to the next generation. He preserved His word and the Word preserved a true Gospel witness during every moment of history since Pentecost. What possible value is there in appealing to a supposed unbroken line of Baptist churches as a church's authority? However, there is every value in appealing to the adherence to the New Testament as one's sole authority for faith and practice.

The best illustration of this point can be made this way. Suppose an airplane flew over some isolated country that had no past or present contact with anyone else in the world. Further, suppose that a Bible somehow was to fall from the plane and the inhabitants of this isolated land were to be able to pick up that Bible and read the text for themselves. Suppose too that some of them on reading that Bible were to believe and repent of their sins and place their trust in God's Son and His redemption for personal sin. These new believers would then, following the New Testament example, submit to believer's baptism by immersion, and organize a local church. That local body of baptized believers would be as valid as any true New Testament church Christ ever founded. Why, because it was founded on God's Word and there is no necessity that it have contact with some other church which belongs to a succession of churches to give it legitimacy or authority. It is a historical fact the first Baptist church in America was not founded by another Baptist congregation. It was founded by Roger Williams, according to the teachings and example of the New Testament. The Gospel is to be preached throughout the world by believers empowered by the Holy Spirit as Acts 1:8 plainly states. When a congregation results from the preaching of the Gospel, authenticating that congregation as a New Testament church rests solely on its doctrine and practice....not in its affiliation or succession.

WHEN AND WHERE WAS THE FIRST RECORDED BAPTIST CHURCH IN HISTORY

The historian David Benedict states the Gospel was preached in Britain within sixty years of the Lord's return to heaven. These churches appear to have been baptistic and remained sound until Austin, the Catholic monk brought Catholicism to the Isles in 597 A.D. He states there were Baptists in England 1400 A.D., and mentions William Sawtre, who was identified as a Lollard and Baptist. He was the first person burned at the stake after Henry IV's 1400 A.D. decree to burn heretics. His "crime" was he refused infant baptism and rejected the Anglican church as being biblical. Benedict states that the English Roman Catholics in 1535 put to death twenty two Baptists for heresies. In 1539 thirty one more that had fled to Holland were apprehended and martyred there. He records that five hundred others who were identified as Anabaptists were also killed in England during this period. After Henry VII separated England from the Roman Catholic Church the Baptist fared no better. Many Baptists were executed by the newly formed Church of England during what is called the "Protestant inquisition."

The line of English churches that can be traced, who called themselves Baptists, began in 1610 in Holland. This is not to say there were no Baptists in Britain earlier, but that this began a line of churches whose history can be traced. It began with a man named John Smyth who was an ordained bishop in the Church of England. In 1606, after nine months of soul-searching and study of the New Testament he was convinced the doctrines and practices of the Church of England were not biblical, and thus he resigned as priest and left the church.

Because of prosecution by the Anglican Church of all who disagreed with it and who refused to agree to its authority, John Smyth had to flee England. In Amsterdam, he with Thomas Helwys and thirty six others formed the first Baptist church of English people known to have stood for baptism of believers only.

Smyth believed the only real apostolic succession is a succession of biblical New Testament truth, and not of outward ordinances and visible organization such as the Church of England or the Roman Church. He believed the only way to recover was to form a new church based on the Bible. He then baptized himself (which is not biblical) and then the others of his congregation. In only a few years however, the church had lost all but ten members to the Mennonites and other groups in Holland. Smyth died in 1612, and the church ended in Holland shortly after that with Helwys, Thomas and John Murton returned to England as persecution there lessened. History records the members of this Baptist church went back to England. Those who remained in Holland joined the Mennonites. Therefore the Baptist church in Holland did not produce a succession of other churches, but those who founded it went on to set up other Baptist churches in England.

Back in England these men, formed the first recorded Baptist church on English soil. By 1626, the churches had grown from one, to five churches and by 1644 there were forty congregations. Through preaching the New Testament, the Gospel went forth in power and the Baptist movement grew rapidly.

These first Baptist churches formed in England were Armenian in theology, which taught that all men could be saved. Another group of Baptists were the Calvinistic or Particular Baptists and they believed in limited atonement in which only the elect could be saved. Particular Baptist had their beginnings around 1616, when some "dissenters" left the Church of England and were lead by the Rev. Henry Jacob. By 1644, these congregations grew to seven churches.

About this time the Puritans were also becoming strong in England. The Puritans were dissenters from the Church of England. They wanted to bring reform to the Church of England. Although they were a great deal more pious than the Church of England, they still practiced most of its beliefs including infant baptism. Anyone who differed from the practices of the State church was subject to great persecution. Puritans and Baptists alike, to escape persecution, migrated to the New World.

One man Hanserd Knolleys is an example of dissenter of the Church of England who had to flee to America. He was a presbyter and former deacon in the Anglican Church. Knolleys was under deep conviction of the need to preach the New Testament and follow its example as one's rule of faith. He refused to wear the robes of his church office, and refused to let unsaved people take the Lord's Supper. Further, he ignored the reading of the "order of service" and simply preached instead the Scriptures. To preach the Bible without the rituals of the Church of England was against the civil law. Knolleys joined with other dissenters and left England. In 1638, he landed in Boston and settled for a short time in Piscataway (now Dover) in New Hampshire. There he became the pastor of the Puritan church. The Puritans were in control of the colonies and in fact had set up an unbiblical theocracy in which the Puritan church governed both secular and religious affairs. Because Knolleys refused to baptize infants and preached against it he was banned from the colony by the famous Puritan governor Cotton Mather. Knolleys after two years returned to England at the request of his father. He became an outspoken "Separatist" or dissenter of the Anglican or state church. In 1645, he formed a Baptist church in London. Shortly after, the Church of England fell from grace when the English monarch was overthrown and the Presbyterians became the favored church of the state. The Presbyterians, who are Calvinists, then took up the persecution of biblical believers and forbade Knolleys from preaching in parish churches. He, however, continued to preach by holding services in his own home. One of the last acts of the Presbyterians, before the Long Parliament in England fell, was to pass a law passing the death penalty on anyone who was caught holding to what they called "Eight Errors in Doctrine." These "doctrines" included infant baptism. Knolleys was imprisoned many times and suffered at the hands of the "State Church." He is only one of many such godly men who would not compromise the God's truth. The "crime" of these men was that they believed the Bible was God's Truth, and rejected dictates of false churches and men. It is revealing that the Calvinistic Protestant Presbyterians persecuted those who followed the Bible and rejected their hierarchy and false teachings which included Calvinism.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BAPTISTS IN AMERICA.

It is well to note the Pilgrims were also Puritans, and Puritans were dissenting Protestants who had left the Church of England. These people were called "Separatists." They were not seeking doctrinal purity or adherence to the teachings of the New Testament, but rather wanted to "reform" the English church. They were never the friends of Baptists. The Puritans should not be confused with true Bible believing churches, because their beliefs and practices were much like the Church of England. Although, they were not as corrupt as the Church of England, they still practiced a strict ritual of church service, a state church, sprinkling, and among other things, infant baptism. They were intolerant to anyone who did not agree to the authority of the Puritan church, which was supported by a governmental church tax of all the people. One may admire their piety, but a true believer in the New Testament would have a great problem with their doctrines, church polity, and especially their persecution of Baptists and driving them from their colonies. The Puritans practiced a grace plus works salvation. One must correctly understand that when they preached piety, they were preaching salvation by works. Everyone in the colony was automatically a member of the state church and was taxed to support it. Failure to pay the tax brought the wrath of the civic and church leaders. People were publicly beaten, placed in stocks, fined, imprisoned, and banished from the colony by the civil authorities under the direction of the Puritan church officials. Puritan churches persecuted the Baptists in America until the U. S. Constitution was made law 1787. The first Baptist church on American soil was a direct result of the Puritan persecution of true New Testament believers.

Roger Williams is credited with founding the first Baptist church on American soil. Williams graduated from Cambridge University in 1627, and was apparently ordained in the Church of England. He soon embraced "Separatists" ideas and decided to leave England. In 1631, he arrived in Boston. He was much displeased with the Puritan theocracy. He strongly believed in separation of church and state and upheld the principles of soul liberty. "Soul liberty" is a belief that everyone is responsible to God individually. It bases its belief in the New Testament teaching that every believer is a priest to himself, having full access to God without the need to go through a church, church leader or priest. (Hebrews 4:15-16; 10:19-22) Despite his views he was made the pastor of the church in Salem. Shortly after that, because of his doctrinal preaching, he was forced to leave Salem and went for a short time to Plymouth. He returned to Salem where he was summoned before the court in Boston because of his outspoken beliefs and was banished from the colony. The charge recorded against him was that "he broached and divulged new and dangerous opinions against the authority of the magistrates." Clearly, he was banished because he believed in religious freedom and believed and taught the New Testament was a believer's sole source for his faith and practice. His "crime" was that he rejected the unbiblical ideas of the state church such as infant baptism and other false teachings of the Puritans. The Puritans drove him from their colony in the dead of winter.

In 1638, Williams made his way to what is now Providence, Rhode Island, and there bought some land from the Indians. Some of his former congregation in Salem joined him and they set up a colony. Its beginning charter reads as follows:

"We whose names are hereunder written, being desirous to inhabit ourselves in active and passive obedience to all such orders or agencies as shall be made for the public good of the body in an orderly way, by the major consent of the present inhabitants, masters of families, incorporated together into the same, only in civil things."

In 1663, Charles II gave the colony a royal charter and it read:

"Our royal will and pleasure is, that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished disquieted, or called in question, for any differences of opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of the said colony."

This was the first time in the history of the world that a government was established which granted religious freedom! This charter was the very cornerstone of American religious freedom and that it was Baptists who first established religious and civil freedom in America! At first Williams did not identify

himself as a Baptist. However, he continued to read the New Testament, and became fully aware that infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, and allowing unsaved people to be members of the church was not scriptural. Thus, resolving to follow the Lord's commands in truth, in March, 1639 he formed the first Baptist church on American soil. He began by baptizing himself and then baptizing ten other members.

Shortly afterward, Williams withdrew from the church and became what he called a "seeker." History does not record why he would not identify himself as a Baptist although he set up a Baptist church. Please note that this presents no problem for this first Baptist church in America. This church was not founded on a man, but on the Bible. It was not founded on a line of Baptist churches down through history. It was founded because saved men believed the Bible and wanted to follow the New Testament's teachings and the example of what a true church should be. Even after Williams left, this Baptist church continued to follow the New Testament and was not adversely affected. It was not the man who founded the church that was important, but the New Testament principles on which was established. They called themselves Baptists because that was the best name they could choose to describe what they believed and a name that identified them as Bible believing people. This church had no ties to anyone or any other church, yet this was a Baptist church as much as any Baptist church ever was. They were a New Testament church, not because of a succession of churches or men, but because they formed their assembly on the principles of the New Testament. That made them in the eyes of God as legitimate a church as any Paul founded. The sole authority for any true church is God's Word and not its human founder, or its heritage. Not once in the New Testament do you find even a hint that a church was legitimate because it was founded by Paul, was established by the church at Jerusalem or Antioch, or called itself by a particular name.

However, no one should think little of the name of Baptist for it is the name that most has identified those individuals and churches that have uncompromisingly stood on the Word of God. Historically, Baptists are the only group into modern times whose churches were founded on the Scriptures alone and not on the traditions or works of some man. Baptists have always been the champions of the Word of God and preaching of the Gospel. History is clear there is no other denomination that has so loved and been faithful to God's Word as has the Baptists. Even the enemies of the Baptists openly recognize their zeal for the Word of God.

After Roger Williams stepped down, Thomas Olney took over as the pastor of the church in Rhode Island. Although, this was the first Baptist church to be founded on American soil there is no recorded offspring from this church and modern American Baptist churches cannot trace their history directly to it. Other churches founded in New England and in the Middle colonies were the actual mother churches of modern Baptist churches as these churches were responsible for starting other churches.

On May 28, 1665, a Baptist church was founded in Boston, by Thomas Gould, who refused to accept infant baptism. There were nine original members of the church which included two women. A storm of persecution broke out because these Baptists preached what the Puritans called "damnable errors." Most of the members of this Baptist church, at one time or another, were fined or imprisoned or both. Thomas Gould died in 1675 an untimely death, partly because of his having his health broken by Puritans persecutions which included several long imprisonments.

In 1678, shortly after the church erected a new building and the Puritan controlled government nailed its doors shut and forbade anyone under penalty of the law to enter or worship there. This lasted only one Sunday however, and the following Sunday the doors were opened and services held in defiance of the order. The magistrates found their order was becoming unpopular and impossible to enforce so the church in the future was left unmolested. In 1684, a Baptist church in Maine seeking greater religious liberty was relocated to Charleston, South Carolina.

The Dutch colony of New York for a time persecuted Baptists within its territories. The first Baptist church in New York was started by William Winchendon, in 1656. He was heavily fined and then imprisoned. Being too poor to pay the fines he was banished from the colony. Later, the Dutch issued new orders and allowed religious liberty.

In 1700, a Baptist minister, William Rhodes began to hold meetings on Long Island and in 1724 organized the first Baptist church there. The most important center of early Baptist churches was around Philadelphia, "the city of brotherly love." In 1684, Thomas Dungan started a church at Cold Springs, New York which lasted until 1702. In 1688 a Baptist church was organized at Pennepeck, Pennsylvania with twelve members. It helped start the first Baptist church in Philadelphia the following year. It became an independent church in 1746. Offers of religious liberty drew many Baptists to settle in New Jersey. The first church was founded there in 1688, in Middletown and was made up of many who had fled persecution in the other colonies. Many churches were organized in the following years.

In other areas Baptist churches were being formed about this same time. In North Carolina the first Baptist church was started in the northeastern coastal region at Perquimans, in Chowan County in 1727.

In Virginia, Baptists were not welcome. Before America won its independence and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights became law, the Episcopal Church, which was the American branch of the Church of England, was the only legal church in Virginia. There was a fine of 2000 pounds of tobacco for failure to have one's infant children baptized. One Baptist church, however, did begin after 1714, in Surry County, and another at Burleigh, Virginia. Virginia was especially harsh in religious persecutions and anyone not holding Episcopal ordination was forbidden to preach or hold services. Baptists with other citizens were taxed to support the Episcopal Church. It is well to note that not all Virginians felt this way. Two champions of religious liberty were the Virginians Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry. Thomas Jefferson is believed to have been deeply influenced to press for religious freedom in American, by the plight of several Baptist preachers he knew. For example in Isle of Wight county in southeastern Virginia, Baptist preachers were taken to Nansamond River, nearly drowned by Episcopalians to show their contempt for Baptist's beliefs in immersion and their rejection of infant Baptism. They were then tarred and feathered and ran out of the county.

The center of Baptist activity in the colonies was in the Philadelphia area, and Baptists held regular "general meetings" of the churches for devotional and evangelistic purposes there. It can be historically determined that forty seven Baptist churches were in existence before the Great Awakening. All but seven were above the Mason-Dixon Line. Baptist continued to grow in numbers through the period of the Great Awakening and up to the time of the Revolutionary War. Baptists as a whole were patriots and many Baptist pastors served as chaplains in the Revolutionary Army. Baptist churches and pastors contributed large sums of money to support George Washington and the army. The Great Awakening stirred religious interests in the colonies and a reported great revival took place. The Revolutionary War for some time slowed the growth of Baptist churches. However, after independence was won and the Constitutional and Bill of Rights was written which gave all Americans religious freedom, the Baptist again began to grow until today they are the largest denominational group in the United States.

It should be noted that the American Revolution is directly responsible for the establishing the first nation on earth to grant religious freedom. The Revolution ended the Protestant civil rule in the colonies which stopped the persecution of Bible believing Baptists.

WHAT MAKES A TRUE BAPTIST?

Today there are at least a hundred different groups which all themselves "Baptist." Many of these churches have conflicting beliefs and practices. The natural question then to ask is, "What makes a person a true Baptist?" In examining the history of Baptists and determining what makes a genuine Baptist, five distinctives should be noted. These five distinctive beliefs separate the true Baptists from other groups who have mistakenly taken the name Baptist, and from all Protestants. Examine any church in light of these five distinctive it will be shown if they are a true historic Baptist congregation.

It is well also to note that these five distinctives are traits also of the true New Testament church! These distinctives are the distinctives taught in the Bible which form a true New Testament church. The one thing that makes one a Baptist is that they historically have followed the New Testament alone as their

sole rule for faith and practice. Baptists strongly insist that God's Word is not up for arbitration or subject to the individual's, group's, denomination's or church's "private interpretation." (2 Peter 1:20) Baptists believe you do not have to be a Baptist in order to be saved and have eternal life, but a person must believe the Gospel and follow the teachings revealed in the New Testament. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) Further, if a person is truly saved and strictly follows the principles of the New Testament he will in a true sense be a Baptist whether he uses the name or not. Baptists interpret the Bible literally within its historic, cultural and grammatical context. True Baptists believe, as the New Testament teaches, that Christ is the only head of the church.

Fundamental Independent Baptists are strict in interpreting the Bible in a "literal" sense. In other words, when the Bible speaks, the words have a literal meaning and that is the meaning God intended. To interpret God's word one must apply sound hermeneutical principles of interpretation which considers the grammatical use of the words, the culture and historical situation in which they were written.

True Baptists reject the Apocryphal Books as being inspired of God and use them only for historical reference. Further, they reject the efforts of the many who "spiritually" interpret the Scriptures, using allegory and placing hidden or specially revealed meanings to the words of the Bible. Baptists refuse to accept the so-called "scriptures" or revelation of modern day prophets. They believe that when the Book of Revelation was completed by the Apostle John about 90-95 AD, the Word of God was complete and He has given no further revelation. It is believed that God meant what He said in Revelation 22:18, that the Scriptures were not to added to or taken from. (See also Gal. 1:6-10, 1 Tim. 6:30, Titus 1:9-11, 2 Tim. 4:1-5, 1 Cor. 13:8-10)

Ask these five questions of any church, and if they can answer all five in truth with a yes, then you will have a true Baptist church. All others misuse the name.

THE FIVE BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

1. WE ACCEPT ONLY THE NEW TESTAMENT AS OUR AUTHORITY IN ALL MATTERS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.

This means that Baptists do not accept any authority except the New Testament Scriptures in regard to church polity, practice and doctrine. The institution of the local church (ekklesia - assembly) is not found in the Old Testament. The institution of the local "ekklesia" was not instituted until Pentecost after the Lord ascended into heaven. Christ is head of the local church, and it is His bride. We believe the Word of God, the Bible is complete and it solely, ". . . Is given of by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished (equipped) unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) We reject that God is giving supposed "new" Revelation, believing that God forbids any adding to or taking away of the canon of Scriptures. (Rev. 22:18-19) We do not accept any authority over the New Testament Church, but Christ Himself, including any hierarchy to include popes, modern day prophets, or councils of churches. We believe the sixty six books of the Bible are the inspired, inerrant and infallible word of God.

2. WE BELIEVE THE CHURCH IS TO BE MADE UP OF SAVED BAPTIZED BELIEVERS.

Baptists reject the baptism of infants (paedobaptism) and baptismal regeneration. A local church is made up only of those who have by faith trusting in Jesus Christ's shed blood alone for their salvation and who have made a public professions of faith and been scripturally baptized. (Acts 2:41-42) An infant is not capable of believing, and is protected by the Grace of God until the age of accountability, and baptism is not necessary for salvation and has no saving properties. Further, only those who have believed and trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior are members of the body of Christ. Therefore a true New Testament church only accepts those who have been saved and who have publicly professed salvation can be a member of a local New Testament Baptist church. (Acts 2:41)

3. WE BELIEVE IN STRICT SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.

No power on earth is higher than God's Word, and a church should not be in any way yoked or controlled by the state, or and any civil authority in religious matters. We support the rightly appointed civil authority of government over us and pray for them that we live our lives in peace.(2 Peter 2:13-15) Jesus said to "*render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.*" (Mark 12:17) Further the Scripture says "*what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion that light with darkness?*" (2 Cor. 6:14)

However, we do not believe that the state should restrict or interfere in the normal practices of a Christian in following the principles of God's word in his daily life. That means we do not accept that the state has the right to forbid public prayer, Bible reading, Bible study class, or any other biblical activity. Separation of church and state does not mean the abolishment of religious practices in public and recognized that each person should have the right to exercise his religious beliefs without interference by any civil authority.

4. WE BELIEVE IN THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER.

The Scripture teaches that every believer can without the aid of priests or churchmen go, "*boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in the time of need*". (Hebrews 4:16) The Scripture states further in Hebrews 10:19, "*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.*" The believer does not need a priest or a church to intercede on their behalf to God. The believer can boldly, by the fact of being washed in the blood of Christ, instantly be in contact with God by simple prayer, and further can bring his petitions or requests for forgiveness of sins directly to God himself. (1 John 1:9) God says, "*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*" (1 John 2:1) No church or individual has the authority to forgive sins or grant intercession to God.

5. WE BELIEVE IN THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

Simply stated, the Scriptures gives no higher authority than the local congregation of born again, baptized believers. We believe the local church is to be governed by the Word of God, and the local church does not need, or does the Scriptures teach that the local body rests under the authority of any earthy group. It is a group unto itself, under the authority of God, and solely responsible unto Him for its conduct, direction and affairs. Jesus in Revelation 2:6, 15, stated that He "hated" the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. This group of heretics in the early church, along with other doctrinal errors, promoted a clerical hierarchy in the church. Thus their is no universal "church" and no universal earthly head over a local congregation. It is by Jesus Christ constituted to be autonomous and self governing.

Though, not a historic distinctive of a Baptist church, one other characteristic is necessary for an assembly to call its self a true New Testament church. This distinctive is based on the truth that God will not, nor can He bless or be a party to doctrinal error. A true New Testament church will believe and follow the correct and proper instructions of God's word. There are many churches that believe and practice false doctrines such as modern tongues speaking, do not practice biblical separation from worldliness and hold to other unbiblical views. A true New Testament church's doctrine and practice will correctly follow the word of God, thus churches that put themselves at odds with the Lord. The New Testament stresses purity in faith and practice as Revelation 2-3 clearly teach. Jesus strongly warned five of the seven churches of Asia saying he had things against them. He warned them believe the Word of God and to correct their failures or He would take action against them or have not part with them. A true church that has the blessings of the Lord will diligently seek purity in faith and practice. Those who refuse to repent of their errors will not have the approval or the blessings of God.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A church which cannot answer yes to all of these questions cannot historically call itself a Baptist church, nor can it legitimately call itself a New Testament church. These are the distinctives that separate true Baptists and from all Protestants, any organized church, doctrinally unsound church, or "Christian" cults.

A person can rightly take godly pride in truthfully bearing the name Baptist. Many men have suffered and given their fortunes and their lives to hold the name in truth. It stands for devotion and a strict obedience to God and his commandments. It holds high the saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament and an unwavering commitment to carrying out the Great Commission, that is, to teach everywhere the truth of God's Word.

The validity of a church as being a true biblical New Testament church does not rest in its ability to show an unbroken line of succession from the time of Christ. In fact, no church on earth can make that claim. Even the Roman Catholic Church which boasts of his unbroken history cannot prove an unbroken line of churches no earlier than the Fourth Century, and what Catholicism teaches today in no way resembles New Testament faith or practice, or what the early churches believed and practiced.

We must agree with John Smyth, the true New Testament church is founded on its belief and practice of the Scriptures, and not on any outward succession of a visible or invisible organization. In this sense, any church which bases its faith and practice strictly on the teaching of the New Testament is a true and Biblical church, even if it existed in time, only yesterday. It is not the name or the organization that makes a biblical church, but its practice of the faith as revealed in the New Testament.

It is the Word of God, the Bible, and in particular the New Testament that tells us what is a real and true church! The Bible and only the Bible reveals to men how to have their sins forgiven and have everlasting life and heaven. That is what saved believers have always believed, because that is what the New Testament, which is what God's Word says.

The Baptist bases his authority solely on the Bible itself. They do not accept that authority was given to any particular man, pope, prophet, group, or church on earth to be the means of the salvation of men. A church is not God's instrument of salvation, but an institution of believers joined together to preach and teach God's word and present the Gospel to a lost and dying world. God has not entrusted that authority to impart salvation to any man or church. God alone has that authority and He, in the person of the Holy Spirit, brings conviction and salvation to those who in simple faith believe.

A church that is a true biblical assembly, patterns its self-after the example in the New Testament. It is one made up of baptized believers organized in a local congregation for fellowship, teaching and evangelism. Every system of hierarchy set up by man over the authority of the local church is unbiblical and has led to doctrinal errors and corruption without exception and God has no party with them.

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