

WHAT IS A BAPTIST CHURCH?

Many of us have friends and relatives who are Baptists, and our concern is for their souls' salvation. By considering what they have been taught and by being familiar with what the Bible teaches, we are better prepared to answer their questions and to present the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Please consider these things and perhaps and save them for future reference.

Some time ago, I received a tract which was published by the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. After reading it over carefully, I discovered that there were some major doctrinal errors that needed to be reviewed. I have decided to reproduce sections of this tract, and then point out the errors that exist in the light of God's Word. That which is quoted in this article, is the exact copy of the tract itself - so there is no room for misrepresentation.

What Is a Baptist Church?

A Baptist church is people. But not just any people. They are children of God.

Children of God?

Yes, according to the Bible, the highest authority which Baptists acknowledge. For instance, in John 1:11-12, the Bible records: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." God created all persons. But the distinction of being children of God is reserved for those who "received him" (Christ).

The members of a Baptist church have received Christ. They have repented to God of their sins, and have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 20:21; 1 John 4:15). They are children of God. God is their father. They are his heirs, jointly with Christ (Rom. 8:17). They are no longer lost, unrepentant creatures of God. They are saved, pardoned from sin, and born again as children of God (1 John 1:9; John 3:7).

They have the correct concept, seemingly, of the church as 'people,' and the 'people' being the 'children of God.' You will notice however that they have overlooked one important point in the final sentence of the second paragraph: *"But the distinction of being children of God is reserved for those who 'received him'."* John 1:11,12 says that the "power to become the sons of God" was given to those who received him. Having the "power" and exercising that power are two different things. You will see in the next paragraph that they build a doctrine on the idea of "receiving Christ," with no consideration given to the exercise of the power! Why do you suppose that in the list of passages they give there is not a mention of Galatians 3:26,27? Is it because it does not touch on this subject of being "children of God"? OR is it because it does not support their doctrine of repentance followed by faith?

Consider carefully Galatians 3:26,27: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." DOES this say that we are sons of God by **'repentance to God' and 'profession of faith in the Lord'**? Consider this definition of the word "FOR" as it appears in both verses 26 & 27 "conjunction, because; seeing that; more formal than because and used to introduce evidence or explanation for an immediately preceding statement." (WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE, COLLEGE EDITION, 1960 ed.) What is the "explanation" of the statement "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"? "YOU WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS!" Now I'm sure you can see why they did not want to talk about this Scripture. Also, in reference to being "born again as children of God," they gave 1 John 1:9 and John 3:7. Now, why do you suppose that on this subject, they failed to give us John 3:5: "Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Why do you suppose they left this one off? And why did they ignore such passages as 1 Peter 1:22,23: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, (23) having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, " ? They like 1 John 3:14, "...", but they DON'T like "purifying your souls through OBEYING THE TRUTH!" Also conspicuously missing is Romans 6:4: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

even so we also should walk in newness of life." The "newness of life", according to Paul FOLLOWS BAPTISM! Finally, there is an error apparent in the statement, "They have repented to God of their sins, and have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." This is evidence of a false conclusion they have drawn and developed into a cardinal doctrine. If you will consider Mark 1:15, where John is said to have been preaching "Repent and believe in the gospel", you will see that it was his purpose to 'change the minds'(i.e. repentance) of the Jews toward God so they would accept the gospel of Christ. So it is in Acts 20:21 - Paul said that he was calling the Jews and the Greeks to have a `change of mind' toward God, and to have faith in Christ Jesus. BUT- this does NOT teach that one must first repent, in order to BELIEVE! Consider Acts chapter 2 with me. In verse 36, after preaching Jesus as the Christ to those assembled, Peter said: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." What does it mean to "know assuredly"? The dictionary says that "faith" is "unquestioning belief". Is that "knowing assuredly"? Then in verse 38, when they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?," Peter said: "Acts 2:38 "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Peter told them WHAT to believe, and then told them to have a "change of heart", and be baptized FOR the remission of sins. Faith precedes the "repentance to salvation"(2 Corinthians 2:7) and baptism into Christ follows them.

Who is in charge of a Baptist church?

Baptists believe that Christ is "in charge."?

Christ ?

Yes. A church is somewhat like a human body. It has many parts. Each part has a particular contribution to make to the whole body (Eph. 4:16). But in order for the body to have unity, direction, balance, and control, it must have a head.

And that's where Christ stands in a Baptist church?

Exactly! "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18) (See also Eph. 1:22; 4:11,15.)

Where does this put the pastor?

The pastor, and any other ministers a church may have, are to equip God's children for the work of service (Eph. 4:11-12). The minister works in a variety of ways, such as preaching and teaching, in order to equip the members to serve. He watches over the members like a shepherd (Acts 20:28). He is God's servant for this purpose.

It is commendable that they recognize that Christ is to be the "head of the church." But what about "the pastor?" It would seem that they equate "the pastor" with "the minister" in this paragraph. They tell us that "the minister" preaches, teaches and "watches over the members like a shepherd (Acts 20:28)." Who is it that is to "tend the flock of God?" Peter says "Elders" in 1 Peter 5:1-4, and Paul says "Elders" or "Overseers" in Acts 20:17,28. Paul addressed the letter of Philippians to the saints with "the bishops (lit. overseers) and deacons:"(Philippians 1:1). The word "shepherd" which Paul used to describe the work of "Elders" or "Bishops" in Acts 20:28, and the word used by Peter in I Peter 5:1-4, come from the same root word translated "Pastor" in Ephesians 4:11. In that context, you will see that "Pastor," is mentioned separate from "evangelists...and teachers?" If the "pastor" must be the "preacher and teacher," why the distinction? Also, what did Paul mean in 1 Timothy 5:17? "*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*" Elders MAY be preachers, but not ALL preachers are ELDERS! For one thing, not ALL preachers meet the DIVINE qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9.

To the right, we have another segment of the tract reproduced, just as it appears in the original. In reality, the first statement is fairly accurate. When obedient believers in Christ, who have been added to the church in the universal sense, voluntarily band together, they form a local congregation or church. But, you will notice that they use I John 1:7 to prove that it is a "fellowship of believers." Please carefully consider the pronouns used in this verse. The first "we" has reference to John and those to whom he was writing. But then the reference is made to "he." This "he" is the one who is "in the light." It is the same "he" whose Son shed His blood, and cleansed "us" from all sin! WHO do we have fellowship with when WE walk in the light as HE is in the light? GOD! This does NOT have any reference to the fellowship which obedient believers share in Christ. While they have correctly used Acts 2:42 in this regard, the citing of Philippians 1:3,5 is in error. Their premise is that "early Christians valued this fellowship (i.e. local congregational) highly" and this passage has to do with sending financial aid to Paul as he went about preaching the Gospel of Christ!

This next statement is interesting. "A Baptist church is not a mere man-made institution (Matt. 16:17-18; I Tim. 3:15); it belongs to God." At this point, I would like to introduce an excerpt from another tract which comes from the same source. Read this carefully, and take note of the way the Baptist Church looks at its beginning. They "do not attribute their origin to a man as do other denominations." First, we have the admission that they consider themselves "a denomination." According to the dictionary, a "denomination" is "a religious sect: as, a Protestant denomination." The word "sect" refers to "a religious denomination, especially a small group that has broken away from an established church." What "established church" did they break away from? By their own admission, again, they had their beginnings with "reformers," who were a part of the "Protestant Reformation." First of all, that which they "protested" was Roman Catholicism. And what they sought to "reform" was Catholic Doctrine (i.e. "infant baptism"). Now, what is meant by "Reformation?" Again, the dictionary says: "to make better by removing faults and defects...to put a stop to abuses." The goal of the reformers was NOT to restore the New Testament church as it existed in the time of the apostles! They were merely making changes in a corrupt church which was then in existence, in accordance with their own preferences! While they proclaim that their church does NOT have its

Children of God become a church when they voluntarily band together to form a fellowship of believers in Christ.

A fellowship of believers?

Right. I John 1:7 states in this way: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another."

The early Christians valued this fellowship highly (Acts 2:42). Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil. 1:3,5).

A Baptist church is not a mere man-made institution (Matt. 16:17-18; 1 Tim. 3:15); it belongs to God. It is a spiritual fellowship of children of God and is characterized by love for one another (Gal 4:6; I John 3:14.)

Baptists love one another. They love God. They assemble themselves together to worship God. They encourage one another to love God and man. They encourage one another to do good works. (Heb. 10:24-25.)

Baptist Beginnings

Baptists do not attribute their origin to a man as do other denominations. The Lutherans started with Martin Luther, the Presbyterians with John Calvin, the Methodists with John Wesley, the Disciples with Alexander Campbell, and so on. Although the name "Baptists" was not used until a few centuries ago, the principles which Baptists hold have lived from New Testament times.

Early in the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation, a few rugged reformers arose in Europe who urged that the Christian faith, as then practiced, needed to return to the doctrinal purity of its beginnings. But the leaders of the Reformation declined to go as far in purifying the church as these other reformers wished, so this intrepid group attempted it on their own. They renounced infant baptism as being unscriptural, insisting that a baby was incompetent to make religious decisions, and they urged that no one be baptized except he first repent of his sins and accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

Because they baptized by immersion those who already had been sprinkled with water, they were called "Anabaptists," which meant "re-baptizers." The name came to them in derision, but it stuck in its shortened form, "Baptists." Through these people, New Testament truths had their best chance to influence the world.

origin with some man, history will not confirm this claim. In Benedict's HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS, page 304 we read: *"The first regularly organized church among them known as such in England dates from 1607, and was formed in England by a Mr. Smyth, previously a clergyman in the church of England."* Then in Vedder's SHORT HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS, pp. 204,205 we read: *"Smyth died in 1612, but before that the church he had been instrumental in founding, now reduced to some ten members, had disappeared from Holland."* Prior to this, the name Baptist, as a religious sect, was unknown among Protestants. If the Baptists had their beginning in England, under the direction of Mr. Smyth, are they not a human organization, like other denominations? Yes, they admit that the name "Baptists" cannot be found in the Bible, but they contend that "the principles which Baptists hold have lived from New Testament times." If we called ourselves Paulists, and held principles that have lived from New Testament times, would we be pleasing in the sight of God? If you don't know, please read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Is Christ divided? Baptists seem to think so!

Regarding their statement concerning 1 John 3:14 - IS it possible for a group of people to have LOVE for each other, and NOT be the children of God? The lesson in 1 John 3:14 is brought out in verse 15, where hatred is shown to be the same as murder! Then the contrast is seen between hatred and sacrificial love for the brethren. And finally, the point is made that REAL love must be "in deed and in truth!" John was NOT saying that "If a group of folks LOVE each other, they are the children of God!" Again there is the admission of their denominational status, but their reference to "autonomy under the Lord Jesus Christ" as a mark of distinction is curious. If the local churches are indeed "autonomous," what is the Southern Baptist Convention? While both J.M. Pendleton's CHURCH MANUAL DESIGNED FOR THE USE OF BAPTIST CHURCHES and THE STANDARD MANUAL FOR BAPTIST CHURCHES by Hiscox spend a good deal of effort in stressing the fact that membership in such conventions is VOLUNTARY, Hiscox says on pages 131,132 *"No church or individual is obliged to unite with them; and if so united, can leave them when they wish. But while they remain connected with them, they must submit to be governed by their regulations."* So Baptist churches are "self governing" but they are free to decide to "submit to be governed" by the regulations of a convention! Dear readers, the church which the Lord built practices congregational autonomy, and it does NOT have the right to relinquish ANY of that autonomy to any convention OR to any other congregation! When elders are overseeing anything MORE than the "flock which is among them," whether it be by "assumed oversight" of some other congregation, or the "loose alliance" of several congregations through some "sponsoring church," they have violated the Scriptural plan for congregational autonomy.

This final segment to the right is more evidence of the denominational status of the Baptists. The word "ordinance" did NOT come from the Bible with respect to baptism and the Lord's Supper! It came from the Roman Catholics! But notice how they present the plan of salvation! "Repent...profess faith in Christ..." "...Then he attests his salvation by being baptized..." Did they mean by citing Matt. 3:13-17 that Jesus was "attesting to His salvation?" Then where is the passage that teaches such? Peter said in Acts 2:38, *"be baptized...FOR the remission of sins."* What was baptism FOR or UNTO? The remission of

But isn't much of this true of some churches other than Baptists? How do you tell a Baptist church from any other fellowship of the children of God?

There are several things which distinguish a Baptist church from churches of other denominations. One is its autonomy under the Lord Jesus Christ. Another is its observances of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Ordinances ?

Ordinances. Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 22:14-20).

A person must repent of his sin and profess faith in Christ as his Saviour in order to become a child of God. Then he attests his salvation by being baptized--immersed in water--by one who is authorized by a church to baptize him. This establishes initially his identity with a fellowship of children of God. Should he seek to join another Baptist church the church which initially authorized his baptism verifies to the receiving church that the person has professed faith in Christ, and been baptized. Subsequently, each Baptist church which one might seek to join receives verification to its satisfaction from the church where the person was a member just previously.

sins! Why was Saul baptized? To "*wash away his sins*"(*Acts 22:16*). Who do we believe? A self professed "denomination," or GOD?

What is the Baptist Church? It is not the church Christ built, and does not teach the plan of salvation for which He died!

-Gailen E. Evans-