
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXXVII : THE LOCAL CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 2 (2: 11-22)

Background: The subject of Baptist Distinctives (or, “Why am I a Baptist?”) was brought up in class during one of these last few lessons. I thought it a good idea to add that to our discussion and if it was to be discussed, it would be proper to be taught by our Pastor. So this lesson is being taught by Bro. Darrell Messer, Pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Bellbrook OH. We are honored and thankful to have him bring today’s lesson.

Baptist Distinctives

Prepared by Pastor Darrell Messer

The general attitude of Christians is: “Oh, one *church* is as good as another; it does not matter to what *church* you belong; the *churches* are so imperfect and so full of hypocrites; why be concerned about the *churches*, we are all working for the same place;” or, “I do not want to be tied down to the demand of a *church*.” This general attitude has saturated Christianity so much that many Baptists have begun to voice it also.

People often choose a church based on the appearance of the building, the friendliness of the people, the programs that are offered, the kind of music they do, or the charisma of the Pastor.

While all of this may play into the decision of where to corporately worship the Lord they should by no means be the determining factors.

First and foremost, the church you choose should hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith: the inspiration and authority of the Bible the Virgin Birth of Jesus, His eternal deity, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and the anticipation of His literal return. Bible-teaching churches of all varieties hold these primary beliefs as essential truths.

But beyond these fundamentals, there are specific teachings that distinguish Baptist churches from the others.

“Baptists are distinguished from other Christian groups by specific Biblical distinctives. The name “Baptist” identifies people who hold those distinctives. These Baptist distinctives relate to questions of vital interest today. For example, Does absolute truth exist, or are all belief systems relative? Who controls the program, property, finances, staffing, and doctrinal position of a local church? How does being a representative of God on earth affect the believer’s marriage, work, or relationship to government and society? Does God dispense His grace through religious rituals? Should a free society “legislate righteousness”? Is it right to “judge” anything about another person? Is there a Biblical model for church leadership? What is the proper relationship between church and state?”¹

I feel it important to give four clarifiers in the beginning of this lesson.

No claim of originality is made for any portion of this lesson. I have entered much into the labors of others in putting it together.

While these distinctives collectively distinguish Baptist churches, that does not mean that other denominations do not hold some or many of these same truths. There are those who want to be “Baptistic” but not Baptist.’

Because of the Baptist distinctive of individual soul liberty (which we will discuss soon) you will find that some Baptist will take umbrage with what I state in this paper.

All that I am capable of doing in this lesson is giving a thumbnail of the distinctives presented.

B iblical Authority	C ongregational Rule
A utonomy of Church	H istorical Heritage
P riesthood of Believer	U nconditional Grace
T wo Ordinances	R egenerate Church Membership
I ndividual Soul Liberty	C hurch and State Separation
S ecurity of Believers	H ounded, Haunted and Hated
T wo offices	

¹ Online marbc.net/Baptist distinctives

Biblical Authority

The Bible is a Divine Revelation given of God to men, and is a complete and infallible guide and standard of authority in all matters of religion and morals. The Bible is our first, full and final authority for all that we believe and practice. Someone has said, "If it is in the Bible – it is Baptist – if it is Baptist, it is in the Bible". All other writings, creeds, or confessions are rejected as authoritative.

Baptists have been accused of worshipping the Bible because of our extraordinarily high regard for the Bible as our authority. That is not true, as Baptist we worship the God of the Bible as the ultimate authority. We believe, and follow the Bible as our total authority. In it God **communicates** His truth for our lives. Whatever it **commands** is to be obeyed; whatever it **commends** is to be accepted as both right and useful; whatever it **condemns** is to be avoided as both wrong and hurtful. Wherein Scripture is silent e must be silent and not impose anything on the conscience as of religious obligation other than thus says the Word of God.

Further let it be said that Baptist believe we have the Holy Spirit as our Divine Teacher. It is to him we look as we are "... *diligent to present (ourselves) approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV)

Human teachers can be helpful, but they can also be mistaken. The Scriptures stand alone as our authority. Even though we may disagree regarding our understanding of a particular passage, we do not lose sight of the fact that the Bible is always right and authoritative for us. Upon further study, our thinking regarding the meaning of a particular passage may be revised, but the Bible remains our authority. Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:1; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Timothy 4:1-4

Autonomy of Local Church

The word comes from two words – Self and Law. It means "Self Governing". Thus an autonomous church governs itself without any outside human director or control. Every Baptist church is granted the right to be self ruling or self directed. Each local church is independent of all other churches and bodies of men, as to the administration of its own affairs. Autonomy means that each Baptist church selects its pastoral leadership, determines its worship form, decides financial matters and directs other church related affairs without outside control or supervision. Being autonomous Baptists recognize no outside human control or authority over faith and religious practices whether spiritual or secular. Religious liberty that was fought for and to a large degree gained in America was because of the Baptist belief in autonomy and also that of individual soul liberty. . We recognize clearly the distinction Jesus gave when "... *He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*" (Matthew 22:21 NKJV)

Baptist believe that every local assembly is completely free to conduct ministry as it sees proper. That is as long as it follows the authority of the Bible.

The reasoning for autonomy is simple we answer to one head the Lord Jesus Christ Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23-24

But let us be clear; autonomy does not mean isolation. There is nothing unscriptural for two or more churches cooperation in fellowship, but one church is not to exercise authority over another, nor is an association or fellowship. Each local assembly is to stand before God as an independent entity and is responsible for its own actions.

Priesthood of Believer

Priest is defined as "one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion, especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God." Every believer today is a priest of God and may enter into His presence in prayer directly through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. No other mediator is needed between God and people. As priests, we can study God's Word, pray for others, and offer spiritual worship to God. We all have equal access to God whether we are a preacher or not. 1Peter 2:5

The High Priest, the head priest, was the only one, however, allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple. This especially sacred place was separated from the rest of the temple and from the other priests and worshippers by a great curtain or veil.

With the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, all of this changed. He "... *has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him [be] glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*" (Revelation 1:6 NKJV) And we can have "...*boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,*" (Hebrews 10:19 NKJV)

No longer were priests of the Old Testament variety needed. Indeed, all who believe in Jesus become priests with direct access to God. Human mediators are no longer needed. Mediator? "*For [there is] one God and one Mediator between God and men, [the] Man Christ Jesus,*" (1 Timothy 2:5 NKJV)

We don't need a man with a white robe, and a stiff collar with a bonnet on his head to be our mediator - we can go directly to God in prayer, confession, praise and worship. What an opportunity!

Two ordinances

First let's make a distinction between an ordinance and a sacrament.

The contemporary definition of "sacrament" originated with Augustine in the 400's. He said a sacrament is "the visible form of an invisible grace." The Council of Trent in 1547 changed the definition to say that "visible forms were sacraments only when they represented an invisible grace and became its channels" (I.S.B.E. p.2636). In other words, a sacrament is something man can do to obtain the grace of God. The grace he acquires through these activities is not merely enablement for victorious living, but is the grace of salvation, adding to a "believer's" hope of being saved.²

The term "ordinance" is not a synonym of "sacrament." Ordinances offer nothing efficacious to man. They are merely activities ordered by God as the duties of man. When performed, they evidence the genuineness of one's faith by virtue of his willingness to obey God. They are not the substance of one's faith through which he obtains additional favor with God. In the Old Testament, ordinance is synonymous with statute. (Both words have the same number in Strong's Concordance.) Ordinances and statutes are ceremonial and religious regulations decreed by God. For example, regarding the Passover, God said, "*This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever*" (Exodus 12:14). As a ceremonial ordinance, the Passover served merely as a reminder of the deliverance God provided in the original event. There was no repetition of deliverance in each observance. ... They understand them to be memorials only and nothing more. They observe them as testimonies to the grace of God already bestowed upon the believer in his act of faith at the moment of his conversation. Neither by being baptized nor by participating in the Lord's Table, is anything added to one's salvation. By failing to participate, nothing is subtracted from one's salvation. By obeying the Ordinances of Christ, one offers a sacrifice of praise to the Father for His benevolence to us. By failing to obey, the child of God misses the blessing of knowing he has done what his Savior has asked him to do.³

Baptists acknowledge only two ordinances. Baptism and The Lord's Supper. Some Baptists wash feet but not as an ordinance but rather a sign of humility and love to each other.

BAPTISM ...

While we cannot cover all that is involved in biblical Baptist allow me to point out three things Baptists insist on.

First, they insist on baptism by immersion as the only form of baptism taught in the New Testament, or practiced by the Apostles and first Christians. Consequently the form is essential to the ordinance, and nothing but immersion can be scriptural baptism. Therefore sprinkling, pouring, and whatever other use of water may be resorted to, are not baptism at all, but substitutes for it. On the contrary, Pedobaptists hold that sprinkling and pouring are equally valid baptism with immersion, and because more convenient, are to be preferred. Almost without exception Greek scholars agree that the proper meaning of the word "*Baptizo*" is to dip, immerse, or sink. Many Protestant theologians when pressed admit that the word signifies to dip or immerse. The symbolism demands immersion in that Scripture alludes to baptism as a burial. (Rom. 5:4; Col. 2:12) The very wording of Scripture demands it. Mark 1:5 John baptized in Jordan. John 3:23 John baptized in Enon because there was much water. Acts 8:38-39 Philip took the Eunuch into the water for baptism.

Second, Baptists assert that the only proper subjects for baptism are regenerated persons; those who have exercised and professed a saving faith in Christ, and give evidence of the same. The only ones in Scripture who were ever baptized were those who had professed personal faith in Jesus Christ. John demanded repentance and Faith before baptism. (Acts 19:4; Matt. 3:7-8) The Scripture records of Jesus that He MADE AND BAPTIZED...DISCIPLES. (John 4:1) Belief and then baptism was the order on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:41) Philip demanded faith before baptism. (Acts 8:37) Shown to be the proper order in Acts 19:1-4. Finally the very order of the Commission demands that baptism be only for believers. (Matt. 28:19-20)

On the contrary, some hold and teach that unregenerated persons may be baptized as a means of grace; while all Pedobaptists claim that unconscious infants, unregenerate and incapable of faith, should receive baptism on the faith of parents, or sponsors. All of which Baptists declare to be plainly contrary to the Word of God and the economy of grace.

Third, there is no saving merit in baptism. Having already noted that only those who have believed are proper candidates for baptism, we now face the belief that baptism somehow complete the process of salvation. In refutation of that idea Baptists affirm the following. The Scriptures declare that salvation is not of works. (Rom. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5) Jesus declared baptism as an act of FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS (Matt. 3:15) thus establishing it as a work of righteousness. The gospel is the POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION (Rom. 1:16) and in Paul's declaration of the contents of the gospel (I Cor. 15:1-5) baptism is not mentioned. In I Cor. 1:14-16 Paul thanked God that he had baptized none at Corinth, noting a few exceptions. Certainly this would be a strange statement if in baptism they are finally saved. Since baptism is but one of two ordinances given the church if baptism is essential to salvation then must not we also say that somehow the observing of the Lord's Table is essential. The thief on the cross was promised an entrance into heaven by Christ yet he was never baptized. (Luke 23:43) What then is the purpose or aim of baptism? It shows forth one's death to sin, and resurrection to walk in righteousness. Rom. 6:1-6 It

² **ORDINANCES & SACRAMENTS** Are they the same thing? By David E. Moss

³ Ibid

is affirmed to be the response of a cleansed conscience to God. I Pet. 3:21 A public manifestation, as though putting on a uniform denoting your faith in Christ. Gal. 3:27 It is the means of becoming a member of the Lord's church. I Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is a visible representation of the price that was paid for our redemption: THE BODY AND BLOOD. Matthew 26:26-28 ; Luke 22:19,20. It is also a continuing reminder for believers of the great sacrifice that was given in our behalf. Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Appreciating the value of such a memorial comes from understanding man's bent toward forgetfulness. Testimonies abound of how the Israelites quickly forgot the goodness of God in delivering them from their foes. Even when those deliverances were profound and miraculous, it was not long until their faith waned and they sought solutions from within their own imaginations. As a safeguard against such a thing occurring within the Church, God provided this marvelous means of remembering how He provided His mercy in the sacrifice of His Son.

Baptist maintain that the only proper elements of the Lord's Table are those used by Jesus himself, namely unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. There is no Scripture that permits us to substitute any other items for these.

It is important to understand that the observance of Communion (The Lord's Supper) is not an act of salvation. As is stated in I Corinthians 11:26, it will, *...show the Lord's death till he come*. The belief that the fruit of the grape vine and the unleavened bread become the blood and body of Christ is a completely man-made doctrine and rejected by Baptists. It is not therefore a sacrament, as defined by the Roman Catholic Church, or any other denomination that holds to this view. It is a symbol of that which reminds us of what Christ gave in payment for our sins. It certainly should be viewed as a sacred ordinance, to be observed with reverence; but, not as a means or method of salvation.

Individual Soul Liberty

Because we believe in the priesthood of the believer, we believe in individual soul liberty. Acts 5:29 This belief is the unique gift of Baptists—along with their cousins, the Mennonites. But it is often a doctrine we misunderstand or underemphasize. Simply put, Soul liberty means Baptist believe that every believer answers only to God for his or her religious beliefs and behavior.

To expand a bit Baptist believe:

"Every man has the right to hold such religious opinions as he believes the Bible teaches, without harm or hindrance from any one on that account, so long as he does not intrude upon, or interfere with, the rights of others by doing so.

All men have the right, not only to believe, but also to profess and openly declare, whatever religious opinions they may entertain, providing they be not contrary to common morality, and do no injustice to others.

All men possess the common right to worship God according to the teachings of the Scriptures, as they understand them, without hindrance or molestation, so long as they do not injure or interfere with the rights of others by so doing".⁴

The individual, born again believer, has within himself the Holy Spirit, (John 14:17, Romans 8:9) which is fully capable to teach the truth of the Word of God to that individual (John 14:26). It is not that there is no need for teachers in the church, for God has certainly placed these in the body of Christ for that purpose (Ephesians 4:11-12); however, God ultimately imparts truth to the heart of the individual and that person is responsible as well as accountable for that truth.

So then Baptists believe that the power of persuasion rests in the exegesis of Scripture not individual or legal force.

Soul Liberty also means, for the Baptists, Individual accountability. I Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Romans 14:1-23 is a good study on the principle of soul liberty

Security of Believers

Baptists have been unjustly accused of believing that one who is born again can live in sin and still die and go to heaven. Please understand that the eternal security of a believer is not a license to sin. The Christian is regenerated. He is changed from within--being made a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit will war with their sin and not seek to abide in it. Those who declare that they are eternally secure and then go out and sin on purpose in any manner they so choose are probably not saved to begin with since this is contradictory to what Scripture teaches. (1 John 2:4).

Our own doctrinal statement is reflective of what Baptist have taught through the centuries on this matter. *We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.* John 8:31; 1 John 3:9; 5:18; Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; Jude 24-25;

⁴ Quoted from The New Directory for Baptist Churches Written by: Edward T. Hiscox (1894)

Baptists understand that the truth of eternal security is expressed in twin Bible doctrines- preservation and perseverance.

When we speak of preservation we mean that the child of God is eternally safe and secure through the power and will of Almighty God. (Jude 1:1, 24)

When we speak of perseverance we mean that the child of God will continue in the faith and that he will never with finality turn from the path of righteousness. (1 John 2:19)

Some have erred in presenting the preservation of the saved as if it were independent of perseverance. Such a presentation might well lead to some very wrong conclusions about what is commonly termed "eternal security." It teaches only a half truth and tends to make ready ammunition for those who would do violence to this precious doctrine. Baptists hold to this simple premise: Those who persevere in Christ are those who are being preserved in Christ and no *"...created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:39 NKJV)

Two offices

PASTORS

Baptists hold that there are two divinely sanctioned offices in the local church- pastors and deacons: They assert that bishop and elder in the primitive churches were identical in office and authority, being pastors when holding the superintendence of churches, and evangelists when preaching from place to place; and that ruling and teaching elders were not, and properly should not be, distinct and separate offices in the churches. Consequently bishops are not a superior order of clergy, nor ruling elders an order distinct from teaching elders.

The term pastor signifies a shepherd, and well indicates the nature of the relation he sustains to the Church; that of leading, feeding, guiding and guarding the flock committed to his care.

Qualifications for Pastor: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

The term Pastor is found only once in the New Testament...Ephesians 4:11

The term bishop is found in Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1,2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25 (1 Peter 2:25 refers to Jesus)

The term elder is found in many passages. Acts 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; (notice the interchangeable terms) James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1

DEACONS

Baptists believe that the office of Deacon which means servant in the Greek was created to give assistance to the Pastors. The title itself, is as descriptive as any job description could be. The Office of Deacon Was Created for the Purpose of Handling the Benevolence Ministry (Acts 6:1-3) The Biblical account is quite clear on the founding of the deaconship and nowhere does Scripture repeal the original purpose: The Office of Deacon was established to free the Apostles (who functioned as the first pastors.) The early deacons were selected for their spiritual qualities Acts 6:3. Additionally it can be seen that deacons are to be capable of serving the Lord in a variety of spiritual ways. The original seven deacons were people who were able to serve the Lord in ways which were more spiritual in nature than merely delivering food. Stephen was a man of spiritual power: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8 NJKV). Philip was not only a deacon, but also was gifted in evangelism (Acts 8:5-7). Their Spiritual Qualifications 1st Timothy 3 and Acts 6 expound the qualifications for the office of deacons; the later contains what could fairly be called the "core qualifications"

Congregational rule

Today, many Baptist churches are being swayed into an elder rule which is defined as government by a plurality of godly men who "care for and spiritually oversee the churches" of which they are a part. These men are "called elders because of their superior wisdom and experience" in Christian ministry and life.⁵ Yet, historically, congregational rule has been a distinguishing mark of Baptist churches. Before proceeding to show this distinctive to be biblical in nature it should be noted that elder rule is not to be confused with elder led. Elder led congregations still have the final decision being made by the congregations and that is in harmony with what both the Bible and N. T. principles teach.

The organization of a New Testament church as laid out in the Bible seems clear enough. Christ is the head of the local 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) While leadership has been provided by the deacons and pastor(s) the form of government has been congregational with each member equally having the right to vote on all the affairs of the church in accordance with what they believe the will of God to be and guided in those decisions by the principles set forth in the Bible. .

In congregational rule Baptists have historically held that God's will is objectively given through the vote of the local congregation. Whether it's His will for discipline, for officers, for how money should be spent—it is done by the vote of the

⁵ Terry L. Miethe, *The Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1988) 79.

congregation. That's God's way.

In Matthew 18 the sinning brother in refusing to hear the counsel of the church body was by that body to be disciplined

In Acts 6, when the church wanted to choose officers, what did the apostles do? Let the congregation select.

In Acts 15 when the question about whether Gentile Converts needed circumcision as part of being accepted in the family of God it was the whole church that entered into the proper decision

In 1 Corinthians 5 it is the church that is to deal with the immorality that was in its midst.

In 2 Corinthians 2 it is the church that was to restore a repentant one they had also been responsible for disciplining.

Historical Heritage

Though Baptist's are divided over the issue of origins it has been the view of many if not most of the Baptist of past generations that our heritage did not commence concurrent with the Protestant reformation. Charles Spurgeon states well the position of these Baptists among whom I place myself.

"We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a Government holding Baptist principles which persecuted others; nor I believe any body of Baptists ever held it to be right to put the consciences of others under the control of man. We have ever been ready to suffer, as our martyrologies will prove, but we are not ready to accept any help from the State, to prostitute the purity of the Bride of Christ to any alliance with the government, and we will never make the Church, although the Queen, the despot over the consciences of men" ⁶.

Allow me to add a few other quotes on Baptist History. Many not from Baptists and only a few of the many that could be cited.

"I have no question in my own mind that there has been a historical succession of Baptists from the days of Christ to the present." *John T. Christian, college professor, historian, author*

"Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1200 years they would swarm in greater numbers than all the reformers." *Roman Catholic Cardinal Hosius*

"The institution of Anabaptism is no novelty, but for 1300 years has caused great disturbance in the church..." *Ulrich Zwingli, Swiss Reformer (1484-1531)*

"Baptists maintain that they existed before the Catholic apostasy took place; that they existed alongside Catholicism after her formation; and that they existed apart from Catholicism." *Sir Isaac Newton, English scientist, historian*

"The true origin of that sect which acquired the denomination of the Anabaptists...is hid in the remote depths of antiquity..." *John von Mosheim, Lutheran historian*

"Christian history, in the first century, was strictly and properly Baptist history." "Every age brought to view champions for the true and right: and we Baptists are the Novatians, the Donatists, the Paulicians, the Petrobrussians of the nineteenth century." *John Cramp, (Canada, 1844), Baptist college president and historian*

"We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times, Mennonites, were the original Waldenses... On this account, the Baptists may be considered as the only religious community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all ages." *Ypeij and Dermout, (1819) royal historians to the king of Holland*

Now the question that needs to be answered is what does this have to do with the Bible? Jesus said : "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18 ^{NKJV}). This promise, spoken by Jesus himself, must be fulfilled. I cannot believe that this promise was carried out in the increasingly corrupt dogma of Roman Catholicism. So it would appear that it was fulfilled in those churches that that were noted ,almost unanimously by the Roman church, as heretics and who had a history concurrent with that of Rome. To these churches the first Protestants did not rise with the reformation but with Roman Catholicism who protested against the truth beginning with baptismal regeneration, followed logically by infant baptism⁷

J. M. Carroll wrote:

"Another vital change which seems from history to have had its beginning before the close of the second century was on the great

⁶ The New Park Street Pulpit, Vol.VII, Page 225)

⁷ The time frame between the development of these two doctrines is believed by some historians to be relatively short other s more than a century.

doctrine of Salvation itself. The Jews as well as the Pagans, had for many generations, been trained to lay great stress on Ceremonials. They had come to look upon types as anti-types, shadows as real substances, and ceremonials as real saving agencies. How easy to come thus to look upon baptism. They reasoned thus: The Bible has much to say concerning baptism. Much stress is laid upon the ordinance and one's duty concerning it. Surely it must have something to do with one's salvation. So that it was in this period that the idea of "Baptismal Regeneration" began to get a fixed hold in some of the churches. (Shackelford, page 57; Camp p. 47; Benedict, p. 286; Mosheim, vol. 1, p. 134; Christian, p. 28.)

The next serious error to begin creeping in, and which seems from some historians (not all) to have begun in this same century and which may be said to have been an inevitable consequence of the "baptismal regeneration" idea, was a change in the subjects of baptism. Since baptism has been declared to be an agency or means to salvation by some erring churches, then the sooner baptism takes place the better. Hence arose "infant baptism." Prior to this "believers" and "believers" only, were regarded as proper subjects for baptism. "Sprinkling" and "pouring" are not now referred to. These came in much later. For several centuries, infants, like others, were immersed."⁸

Unconditional Grace

Baptists believe that the grace God has provided in giving His Son as a ransom for our sins was and is indeed unconditional grace. God did not wait until the human race was good enough to deserve a Savior. He did not say, "They are good enough, now I can send a Redeemer." He did not even list a number of conditions to be met before the Christ would come, but rather He chose a time when Jesus would be rejected, not accepted, so that the Father's purposes for us would be accomplished in the death of the Son.

Further, when Baptists speak of unconditional grace we mean that salvation is by grace and grace alone. That this is so is affirmed by Romans 3:24 *"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,"* This has always been a hallmark of the Baptist. It is the foundation for believing in eternal security. Paul in writing to the Romans reminds us of this distinction. Romans 11:6 *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.* It should have been clear from reading Ephesians 2:1-7 that the Lord owes us nothing but justice and wrath. (Moreover, this is taught throughout the Bible: Gen. 6:5-7; Deut. 7:6-11; Ps. 51:4; Rom. 1:18-3:20; James 2:10-11). But in case we missed it, Paul in Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us one more time that we bring nothing with us to our redemption, and that any good works we perform are not the ground of our status before God but result from us having been chosen and gifted with salvation: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God," (Ephesians 2:8 NKJV)* The grace whereby we are converted is the grace whereby we continue in the faith. The Bible is very clear that it is *"not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5 NKJV)* *"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20 NKJV)* *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:28 NKJV)*

The man-made religions of this world prove that without the work of the Holy Spirit, people think that they are basically good and can contribute something to their salvation. This strips glory from God and gives it to us, for if we can do even one thing to merit salvation, then we deserve some credit. All belief systems except biblical Christianity encourage us to believe that we contribute to our salvation, even if they deceitfully assert otherwise.

Many Christian denominations teach that salvation is granted, at least in some small measure, through the works of the individual. There are dozens of Scriptures to refute this I give just one. *"and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which [is] from the law, but that which [is] through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;" (Philippians 3:9 NKJV)*

Let us never get the idea that we deserved a Savior. We needed one; indeed we had to have one. There was no other way! Likewise for God to provide salvation whereby He might be just and still justify the sinner who believes on Jesus He had to provide a grace way based on nothing in the sinner and everything in the Savior. (c.f. Romans 3:23-28) Grace, by definition, excludes the slightest hint that human merit contributes to our righteous standing before the most holy and perfect Creator, and faith, which admits our inability to help ourselves and rests wholly on another for salvation, confirms that our works have no power to atone for our wickedness.

That Salvation is unconditionally by grace is indeed a pillar in the distinctives of the people called Baptist.

Regenerate Church Membership

Baptists believe that membership in a local church is restricted to individuals who give a believable testimony of personal faith in Christ and have publically identified themselves with Him in believer's baptism. . These may include children, even comparatively young children, for God be thanked that these do often give credible evidence of faith in Christ! But in the very nature of the case they cannot include infants.

Baptists also believe that all saved persons ought to be members of a local church. While becoming a Christian is an individual response of faith, growing as a Christian is enhanced by fellowship with other Christians.

⁸ J.M. Carroll, Trail of Blood, Lecture one.

Although Baptists believe that church membership should include only the redeemed in Christ, they encourage and welcome all persons to attend various activities of the church. Worship services, Bible studies and ministry events are open to all persons.

Our "Articles of Faith" in defining a gospel church declares this truth in stating: "We believe that a Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel."

Biblical Support for a Regenerate church membership

To receive unconverted persons, whether infants or adults, destroys the spiritual character of the body, and forms an unholy alliance with the world, instead of maintaining a broad and distinctive separation between believers and unbelievers as demanded by 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

This was the pattern in the New Testament "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added [to them].*" Acts 2:41^{NKJV} (C.f. Acts 2:41-47) The general tenor of the New Testament epistles, which are largely addressed to local churches, obviously speak to the people of the churches as believers. (C.f. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2Cor 1:2; Gal. 1:3-4; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 @ 2 Thes 1:1.

The meaning of the Greek word translated "church" (*ekklesia*) is basically that of a group of citizens that have been called out from among other citizens and called together for a particular purpose. So the church of Jesus Christ is a group who have been effectually called by God and brought together to accomplish the purpose of God.

Unity within a church is based on a common salvation experience. When the members of a local church are believers, a oneness in Christ exists, and the members can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 4:3.

The congregational form of church government requires a regenerate church membership. The participation of unregenerate people in church business is inappropriate and dangerous.

Church and State Separation

Baptists believe that God has established both the church and the civil government, giving each its own distinct jurisdiction. No church or government should control each other, nor should there be any alliance between them. Believer's can and should promote righteousness in all areas of living, government included. (Romans 13:1-7, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 5:29, Proverbs 14:35, 29:2)

Further we believe that Civil governments, and rulers are to be respected, and in all temporal matters, not contrary to the word of God, to be obeyed. But they have no jurisdiction in spiritual concerns, and have no right to dictate to, exercise control over, or to interfere in, matters of religion. Rather they are to protect all good citizens in the peaceable enjoyment of their religious rights and privileges.

"We believe the Scriptures teach that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interest and good order of human society; and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed, except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. But that civil rulers have no rights of control over, or of interference with, religious matters".⁹

What The Scripture teaches the United States Constitution affirms: AMENDMENT I (Constitution of the United States of America)

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

"We have the first amendment, in large part, due to the efforts of American Baptists such as Isaac Backus and John Leland. Leland, a prominent Baptist preacher at the turn of the 19th century, had petitioned his Virginia legislator, James Madison, directly regarding his concern that more needed to be done to ensure religious liberty in the new country than the "Religious Test" clause of Article VI, paragraph 3 of the Constitution. Since Baptists represented a significant portion of the vote in Madison's district, Leland's threat to run for Madison's seat in the House of Representatives resulted in a visit by Madison to his home. Coming out of that meeting was a compromise that included Leland agreeing not to run for Madison's seat and Madison agreeing to champion Leland's and his fellow Baptists' concern for religious liberty. Madison kept his word and pushed for the Bill of Rights. Without Baptist involvement in the political process, it is at least possible that the protection of religious liberty from Congress would not exist."¹⁰

Two quotes from Baptists in America

"Religious matters are to be separated from the jurisdiction of the state, not because they are beneath the interests of the state but,

⁹ Quoted from The New Directory for Baptist Churches, Written by: Edward T. Hiscox (1859)

¹⁰ The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission or the Southern Baptist Convention <http://erlc.com/article/john-leland-how-a-baptist-preacher-helped-ensure-religious-liberty>.

quite to the contrary, because they are too high and holy and thus are beyond the competence of the state."

"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government." Isaac Backus, colonial Baptist from New England, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*

"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever. ... Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence, whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians." John Leland, "A Chronicle of His Time in Virginia," *The Writings of the Later Elder John Leland*, published in 1845.

Hunted , Hounded, And Hated

This may seem like a strange distinctive but for these past 2000 years no group has been hunted, hounded and hated like the people called Baptist. While existing in bygone generation under a variety of names they have been identifiable by what they held in common. Their key doctrine being their view of Baptism.

Dr. Clarence Walker gives us some snapshots of this persecution in His introduction to "The Trail of Blood. By Dr. J.M Carroll.

Their history is written in the legal documents and papers of those ages. It is through these records that the "TRAIL OF BLOOD" winds its way as you find such statements--

"At Zurich, after many disputations between Zuinglius and the Ana-Baptists, the Senate made an Act, that if any presume to re-baptize those who were baptized before (i.e. as infants) they should be drowned. At Vienna many Ana-Baptists were tied together in chains that one drew the other after him into the river, wherein they were all suffocated (drowned)." (Vida Supra, p. 61)

"In the year of our Lord 1539 two Ana-Baptists were burned beyond Southwark, and a little before them Dutch Ana-Baptists were burned in Smithfield," (Fuller, Church History.)

"In 1160 a company of Paulicians (Baptists) entered Oxford. Henry II ordered them to be branded on the forehead with hot irons, publicly whipped them through the streets of the city, to have their garments cut short at the girdles, and be turned into the open country. The villages were not to afford them any shelter or food and they perished a lingering death from cold and hunger." (Moore, Earlier and Later Nonconformity in Oxford, p. 12.)

The old Chronicler Stowe, A.D. 1533, relates:

"The 25th of May--in St. Paul's Church, London--examined 19 men and 6 women. Fourteen of them were condemned; a man and a woman were burned at Smithfield, the other twelve of them were sent to towns there to be burned."

Froude, the English historian, says of these Ana-Baptist martyrs--

"The details are all gone, their names are gone. Scarcely the facts seem worth mentioning. For them no Europe was agitated, no court was ordered in mourning, no papal hearts trembled with indignation. At their death the world looked on complacent, indifferent or exulting. Yet here, out of 25 poor men and women were found 14, who by no terror of stake or torture could be tempted to say they believed what they did not believe. History has for them no word of praise, yet they, too, were not giving their blood in vain. Their lives might have been as useless as the lives of most of us. In their death they assisted to pay the purchase of English freedom."

And the persecution continued in the early days of America.

The following quotations are taken from Church/ State Separation a Historical Primer.¹¹

"The generations of Baptists in America who followed Roger Williams continued fighting for the separation of church and state. Christian government officials in both the northern and southern colonies persecuted the heretical sect. Baptists, who refused to pay taxes to the state church and refused to baptize their infants (as the law required), were beaten, whipped, jailed, stoned, shot, waterboarded, and had their lands confiscated. In some cases, church state officials accused Baptist parents of child abuse for not baptizing their infants into the state religion, and in punishment took their children away from them.

The persecution of Baptists was not isolated. Between 1768 and 1776, roughly one-half of all Virginia Baptist preachers served time in jail for preaching in public, refusing to pay taxes, or otherwise defying the theocratic Anglican government in Virginia"

In the 1770s, as America rebelled against Great Britain, most colonies were yet ruled by church states. Even as colonial governments and politicians proclaimed political freedom from England, they denied religious

Yet, Baptist patriots proved valuable in the fight against Great Britain, and soon Baptists in Virginia were able to acquire new, powerful allies in the fight to separate church and state. Among their allies were Virginians James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Virginia Baptists, most visibly represented by the popular evangelist John Leland, worked alongside the efforts of Madison and Jefferson to secure Jefferson's 1786 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which separated church and state in

¹¹ <http://www.wallofseparation.us/the-origins-of-wall-of-separation/>

colonial Virginia and secured religious liberty for citizens.

Five years later, in 1791, American Baptists' nearly two centuries-old campaign for church state separation was finally realized in the enactment of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution. Stating that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," the United States became the world's first secular nation by enacting the Baptist vision of a "wall of separation" between church and state. As Baptists had long advocated, the First Amendment forbade government from interfering with religious expression (free exercise clause) and forbade the government from establishing or incorporating religion into government (establishment clause).

By 1833, thanks to the still tireless efforts of Baptists, the last vestiges of church state union at the state level were finally eradicated (Massachusetts was the last state to do so).

I close with the words of George W. Truett, famed pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, who declared a century ago:
"Every Baptist ought to know why he is a Baptist, and to know it from the specific commands of God's Word. Not to have such knowledge is for our churches to be harmed in every way."

By Pastor Russell P. Baker

In March of 1789, the Baptists of Virginia, always in the forefront of those opposing tyranny in any form, addressed a letter to newly elected President George Washington. In it they expressed their unanimous concern that the recently adopted United States Constitution did not contain the absolute guarantee of freedom of religion that they desired. The first amendment had yet to be adopted. "Liberty of conscience," they wrote, "dearer to us than property and life, (is) not sufficiently secured" in the present document. They confided to Washington, their fellow Virginian, their fears that without a specific constitutional provision relating to this freedom of conscience, one religious group in America might gain a position of power over another and religious oppression be the result.

Washington, after acknowledging the nation's debt to Baptist support during the American Revolution, assured them that no one was more zealous than himself in wanting to establish effective barriers against "horrors of spiritual tyranny and ..religious persecution." "I have often expressed my sentiments," he said, "that every man...being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping (God) according to the dictates of his own conscience."

Encouraged by Washington's promise of aid, the Baptists of America continued a struggle for religious freedom begun over a century and a quarter before. They had vivid memories of government endorsed and sponsored ill-treatment at the hands of established churches in New England and in the Southern Colonies. "Our lot," they recalled, "has ever been mobs, arrests, bonds, fines, and the whipping posts." The Baptists of Virginia and elsewhere could not stop until they had insured that their new country would enjoy a complete separation between church and state.

A brief review of some of the events of Baptist history in early America will serve to explain our spiritual forefathers' devotion to liberty in all of its forms. The first and most brutal of a long series of injustices directed against our people occurred in the Puritan Colony of Massachusetts. It centered around Dr. John Clarke and Elder Obadiah Holmes, pastors of the Baptist Church at Newport, R.I., founded in 1638. These two brethren and several others were arrested at Lynn, Mass., in 1651 and charged with conducting an "unlawful" and "unauthorized" religious assembly in a private home. They were taken to Boston, thrown into prison, and sentenced to be publicly flogged on the Boston Common. Just as Dr. Clarke, "a scholar, a gentleman, and a reverend divine," was about to be "well-whipped", a sympathizer interceded and paid his fine. Bro. Holmes, however, went to the public whipping post and was given thirty lashes, a treatment that left him completely incapacitated for many days. To this brave brother belongs the honor of being the first Baptist in America to suffer such punishment for freedom of conscience. He also has one further claim to fame: he was the great-great grandfather of President Abraham Lincoln.

During this same period, a small Baptist congregation of Pepperel near Boston met to immerse six candidates in a local river. A mob of ruffians gathered and demonstrated their contempt and scorn for these brave people of God by "baptizing" a number of dogs at the same place. No wonder that our Baptist forefathers often had to worship in secret. Isaac Backus, the pioneer New England Baptist historian, tells of seeing his own mother Elizabeth, being taken to prison, where she was kept for two weeks. Her crime, being a Baptist!

As early as 1653, the Anglican Church, the established church in the South, began to regulate religious dissenters. During the decade before the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Baptists of Virginia were subject to what came to be called the "great persecution." During these ten years, over thirty Baptist preachers were thrown into jail, whipped by constables, or assaulted by mobs. They were usually charged with being "disrupters of the peace," callers of unlawful assemblies, or perverters of good social order. John Ireland, a Baptist preacher from Virginia, was one of those arrested for preaching without an Episcopal license. He was brought before eleven magistrates for trial. "They browbeat me," he later recalled, "(and) would admit of no defense I could make, but ordered me to hold my tongue and let them hear no more of my vile, pernicious, abhorrible, detestable, abominable, diabolical doctrines, for they were nauseous to the whole court." Further degradation awaited him in foul prison. However, during his five months in this jail, he refused to accept defeat and often preached through his prison bars with much good effect.

An even more graphic account of this time has come down to us from the pen of Elder John Waller written from the Middlesex County jail in August of 1771. Six Baptist preachers were arrested for unlawful preaching and charged with "carrying on a mutiny against the authority of the land." One of the men "was severely scourged," and another received "one lash, from one of the persecutors.." "I have also to inform you," Bro. Waller wrote, "that six (more) of our brethren are confined to Caroline jail. The most dreadful threatenings are arised in the neighboring counties against the Lord's faithful and humble followers." Yet, even in such a desperate situation, these Baptists found large crowds gathered often under the windows of their cell to hear them preach. "We cannot tell how long we shall be kept in bonds," he continued, "we therefore beseech you, dear brother, that you and the church supplicate night and day for us."

However, with the break from England came relief. In 1776, the Baptist General Association of Virginia petitioned the state assembly that they, as well as all other nonconformists, be allowed to worship God in their own way without interruption. "The New Testament Church," they said, "is ...established by the legislature of Heaven not by earthly powers." They exercised their newly won rights to vote by electing men favorable to religious liberty and freedom of conscience to local and state offices. They also enlisted the aid of such champions of person liberty as James Madison, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson. Their efforts were rewarded in 1786 with the passage of Jefferson's precedent setting "Act for Establishing Religious Freedom" in Virginia. It was revolutionary in concept. It set into law the principle that the state could not compel its citizens to "profess" or not to profess

in any religious matter.

However, the Baptists of the New World knew that one victory did not win the war. As we have seen, they could not rest until they saw their beloved principle of religious freedom written into the organic law of the new nation. Their work and prayers paid off in June of 1789 with the adoption of the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. Its passage was largely due to the efforts of freedom loving Baptists. For the first time there was a nation where all people truly could enjoy freedom of conscience. "Congress," the First Amendment reads, "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This is one of the debts that our nation owes to the people called Baptists.