

# Baptist Heritage and Church History

A Brief Survey of Independent  
Fundamental Baptist Churches...  
What they are and what is their History  
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## 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. The words "Independent" and "Fundamental" have been added by Baptist churches after the use of the name Baptist failed to fully identify what they believed. The name Baptist is used by many churches who are not fundamental in their beliefs. Some "Baptist" churches were in the past founded on the doctrinal teachings of the New Testament, however, many of them have drifted away from many of the teachings of the Scriptures. Some of these churches have gone so far as to 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. These churches still call themselves "Baptist," but in fact they do not believe or practice what true Baptists have historically believed. 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 Fundamental Independent Baptist is of recent origin and came into being as a result of many modern day Baptist churches compromising the Word of God and teaching and practicing false doctrines. There were however, many Baptists who loved the Word of God and held true to it and refused to abandon the teaching of the New Testament. In order to distinguish between the doctrinally unsound Baptist churches and those that believed the Bible many Baptist churches changed their name. These true Baptists added the adjectives Fundamental and Independent to their name in order that they not be identified with the false practices and teaching of the doctrinally unsound churches using the Baptist name.

The word "Independent" means that the church is not a member of any council, convention or is a part of any hierarchy outside the local congregation. An Independent Baptist Church would not be apart of a national organization that would exercise authority over the local church. Thus, the name "independent" means that the church patterns itself after the New Testament example and stands alone under the authority of the Bible. Independent churches have no organized organization over them in authority. They direct their own affairs under the authority of the New Testament Scriptures, free from the outside interference. [Editor's note: Since the New Testament is not a replacement of the Old Testament, "the authority of the Bible" refers to the authority of both the Old and New Testaments. Bethel Baptist uses both testaments in our preaching and teaching, while it is in the New Testament that Christ founded His church.] The New Testament teaches that Christ is the head of the church, (Eph. 5:23) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) . The local pastor is the shepherd (Heb. 13:17 , Acts 20:28 , Eph. 4:11) or leader of the congregation. The Independent Baptist church has a congregational form of government with each member having the right of the vote and all the affairs of the churches are conducted by the local congregation following the guidelines of the New Testament.

Independent Fundamental Baptist churches have fellowship one with the other and often cooperate in such things as evangelism. They, however, will only fellowship or cooperate in joint meetings with churches of like belief. They will not participate, on a church basis, in any outside function with churches which do not also strictly base their faith and practice on the New Testament. They will not participate 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 (Examples: Billy Graham, Promise Keepers.) Fundamental Independent Baptist churches will remain separate from these churches as well as other Baptists groups who participate with the unscriptural churches. They practice the Biblical teachings of separation as stated in Ephesians 5:11 , which says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." The Independent Baptist believes that to join with churches who teach and practice false doctrine is to condone and even to show approval of Biblical error and that all doctrinal error is sin.

The officers of the local church are pastors and deacons. (I Tim. 3:1-16) The pastor of the church is called by majority vote of the congregation. Men meeting the Biblical qualification of deacons (I Tim. 3:8-13) are appointed from the local congregation and approved by the majority vote. Many Baptist churches have Trustees, but their position was established in order to have legal "signatories" to sign legal documents of the church. Neither Deacons nor Trustees are a governing body nor a "board," but titles of special appointed servants who service and are subject the will of the pastor and congregation.

The word "Fundamental" means that 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 church 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 in fact worlds apart. Many of the TV evangelists and all of the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches promote teachings which are not Biblical. Fundamental Baptist use the name in its strictest sense as meaning holding to 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.

#### WHAT BAPTISTS ARE NOT

Baptist are not Protestants! The name Protestant was given to those churches which came out of Roman Catholicism during the Reformation which began in the 1500's. It originally applied through the 1700's to Lutherans, and Anglicans. Later Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Methodist were added to the lists of Protestant denominations. Though many people including Webster's Dictionary refers Baptists as being Protestants, it is not 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 and therefore can not be correctly called "protestors" or Protestants.

It is true that many Baptists left the ranks of Protestant churches which were doctrinal unsound and apostate. 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. It is not historically correct to identify Baptists as Catholic "protestors" who left the Roman church. In the many books on church history which make up the bibliography for this paper, there is not one recorded incident of a Baptist church beginning 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 call a Baptist by the name of a group that has so hated and persecuted them down throughout history.

There have always existed, from the time of Christ, New Testament churches which were not a part of the Roman Church. In fact, the Roman Church can only 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. Many churches by this time had come under the domination of the Rome government and had ceased from being New Testament churches. When the Roman Emperor declared Christianity the religion of Rome, he in mass "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 false and pagan beliefs.

However, in the midst of all this apostasy, that was the foundation of 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 who 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 attempt to "reform" the Catholic church. This was the birth of Protestant churches. Although many Protestants returned in part to a belief in the Bible as their authority for their faith and practice, not one of them EVER completely left all the doctrinal errors and false teachings of the apostate Roman Catholic church.

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. In Germany, the state church is Lutheran and in England, the Anglican church, France, the Roman Catholic Church, etc.

The idea that the bread and wine (grape juice) in the Lord's Supper actually becoming the physical body of Christ when taken is a Roman Catholic teaching that Protestants only modified

slightly. Still today, many Protestants see the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, having to some degree saving properties or imparting some spiritual benefit. True New Testament Christians have always rejected such unbiblical ideas.

Protestants still practice infant baptism which absolutely is not taught in the Word of God. Many Protestant denominations still hold to the writings of their church fathers as a source of church doctrine and have never accepted the Bible as their sole source of teachings for their faith and practice. They all hold on to a system of hierarchy in church government and do not accept the autonomy the local church. Autonomy means each local church governs itself free from outside authority and control.

Baptists, basing their beliefs solely on the Bible, have never held to these teachings and see them as heresy. Thus, history and the doctrines of Protestantism clearly show that Baptists are not Protestants.

#### WHO WERE THE FIRST BAPTISTS?

In determining who were the first Baptists, you must first identify to whom you are referring. You could mean those persons or churches which held to the Baptist 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.

The first group those who held Baptist beliefs (which means the teachings of the New Testament), yet were not called Baptists, are difficult to trace in history. Some Baptist historians have made attempts at doing this, but in many cases those groups they refer to as early Baptists did not in fact hold to pure Baptist beliefs as held today. They try to establish that "according to history, Baptists have an unbroken line of churches since Christ". (Quote from Dr. J.M. Carroll's booklet "The Trail of Blood") These historians, in an attempt to show an unbroken line of Baptists in history, have embraced groups which were clearly not doctrinally sound. In the simplest of terms a true Baptist 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 polity and doctrine they were New Testament churches and thus they can be called Baptist.

In examining many so-called early "Baptist" churches you find many doctrinal errors and false teaching. Surely, no church that practiced the false doctrine as many of these groups did can in truth be called a Baptist church. It is my conviction 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 existed an unbroken line of churches who have not erred from the faith, and been true to the Bible, God's Word. In fact, Jesus emphatically stated in Matt. 16:18, concerning the church, that even "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." These churches have always existed from the time of Christ and the Apostles until today. To call these people Baptists, in the sense that they believed the Bible and followed it as their sole authority for faith and practice, in the way some Baptist churches do today, is acceptable, although it serves no purpose. To go so far as to say there is an unbroken line or succession of Baptist churches from the time of Christ until today cannot be shown from history.

The importance of these churches was not in their name, 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 that the Fundamental Baptist holds dear, that there have always been churches which submitted themselves only to the sole authority of the Word of God.

There were always groups and sects which held to the truth. However, as earlier stated, these groups 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 totally 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 very missions-minded and formed schools to train preachers and missionaries. Later in history, under Roman Catholic influence these missionary centers digressed into monasticism. However, history is clear that in the beginning and also into the 9th Century these churches were 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 traditionally founded their churches.

Some have pointed to the Anabaptists as the examples of early Baptist churches. This again can not 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. 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. Not one Baptist church can show in its history a direct succession 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 now, nor ever did rest on its name or upon a succession of churches, but on its adherence to the principles of God's Word.

Some Baptist churches believe in a succession of Baptist churches who 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 the 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, I believe deliberately used isolated groups in many different places during time to preserve His church and did not choose to use a line or chain of churches to pass His Word and 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. There is every value in appealing only to present 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 completely 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 upon 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 and organize a local church. That local body of baptized believers would be as valid a true New Testament church as any church Christ ever founded. Why, because it was founded on God's Word.

#### WHEN AND WHERE WAS THE FIRST RECORDED BAPTIST CHURCH IN HISTORY

The line of churches, which called themselves Baptist, began in 1610 in Holland. It began with a man named John Smyth who was a bishop in the Church of England. In 1606, after nine months of soul searching and study of the New Testament he was convinced that the doctrines and

practices of the Church of England were not Biblical, and thus he resigned his position as priest and left the church.

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

Smyth, believed that 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 thereafter with Helwy, Thomas and John Murton returning to England as persecution there had lessened. History records that the members of this Baptist church went back to England or remained in Holland and joined Mennonites. It did not produce a succession of other churches, but those who founded it went on to establish other Baptist churches in England.

Back in England these men formed the first Baptist church on English soil. By 1626, the church had grown from one, to five churches and by 1644 there were forty congregations. Through the preaching of 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. The Calvinistic or Particular Baptists were a different group and 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 piteous 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 were subject to great persecution. Puritans and Baptists alike, in order 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. 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 persons take the Lord's Supper. Further, he ignored the reading of the "order of service" and simply preached the Scriptures. The preaching of the Bible without the rituals of the Church of England was against the law. 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 a 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 out spoken "Separatist" or dissenter of the State church. In 1645, he formed a Baptist church in London. Shortly thereafter the Church of England fell from grace when the English monarch was overthrow and the Presbyterians became the favored church of the state. The Presbyterians took over the job of persecution 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 enacting 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 greatly at the hands of the "State Church". He is only one of many such godly men who would not compromise the truth. The "crime" of these men was that they believed the Bible was God's Truth, and not the dictates of men.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BAPTISTS IN AMERICA.

It is well to note that the Pilgrims were also Puritans, and Puritans were Protestants who had left the Church of England. They should not be confused 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 and among other things, infant baptism. They were intolerant to anyone who did not submit to the Puritan church, which was supported by a governmental church tax of all the people. You may admire their piety, but a true believer in the New Testament would have a great problem with many of their doctrines and especially why they persecuted the Baptists and drove them from their colonies. Everyone in the colony was automatically a member of the State church and were taxed to support it. Failure to pay the tax brought the wrath of the church leaders and people were publicly beaten, fined, imprisoned, and banished from the colony by the civil authorities under the direction of the Puritan church. Puritan churches which were called Congregational churches and they greatly persecuted the Baptists in America until the U.S. Constitution was made the law of the land in 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 every man is responsible to God individually. It bases its belief in the New Testament teaching that every believer is a priest unto himself, having full excess to God without the need of a church, church leader or priest. ( Hebrews 4:15-16 and 10:19-22 ) In spite of his views he was made the pastor of the church in Salem. Shortly thereafter, because of his doctrinal preaching, he was forced to leave Salem and went for a short time to Plymouth. He again returned to Salem where he was summoned before the court in Boston because of his out spoken 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 that the New Testament was a believer's sole source for his faith and practice. The Puritans did not believe in such things and they drove him from their colony.

In 1638, Williams made his way to what is now Providence, Rhode Island, and there purchased some land from the Indians. Some of his former congregation in Salem joined him and they established 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 corner stone of American religious freedom! Up to this time Williams was not a Baptist. He continued to read the New Testament, and became fully aware that infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, and allowing unsaved persons 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 thereafter, 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. It should be noted that this presented 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 as a result of a line of Baptist churches down through history. It was founded because some saved men believed the Bible and wanted to follow the New Testament example of what a true church should be. Even after Williams left it continued to follow the New Testament and was not adversely effected. It was not the man who founded the church that was important, but the New Testament principles on which he founded this church. They called themselves Baptists because that was the best name they could choose to describe what they believed and the name identified them a 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 church 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 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 or called itself by a particular name.

However, let no one think little of the name of Baptist for it is the name that most has identified those individuals and churches who have uncompromisingly stood on the Word of God. They 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 quite clear that 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 can not 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 Baptist preached what the Puritans called "damnable errors." Most of the members of the church were fined or imprisoned or both, at one time or another. Thomas Gould, died in 1675 an untimely death, partly due to his having his health broken by several long imprisonments.

In 1678, shortly after the church had constructed a new building, the 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 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 Wichendon, in 1656. He was heavily fined and then imprisoned. 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 in the area of Philadelphia, "the city of brotherly love." In 1684, Thomas Dungan started a church at Cold Springs which lasted until 1702. In 1688 a Baptist church was organized at Pennepeck, Pa., with twelve members. It helped start the first Baptist church in the city of 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 in 1688, in Middletown and 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 at Perquimans, in Chowan County in 1727.

In Virginia, Baptists were not welcome. Before America won its independence and the Constitution became law, the Episcopal church, which was the American branch of the Church of England, was the only lawful 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. Anyone not holding Episcopal ordination was forbade to hold services. Baptists along 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. In Isle of Wight county, for example, 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 was in the Philadelphia area, and Baptists held regular "general meetings" of the churches for devotional and evangelistic purposes.

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. Baptists 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. 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 Constitution written giving all Americans religious freedom, the Baptists again began to grow until today they are the largest denomination in the United States.

#### 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 Baptist?" In examining the history of Baptists and determining what constitutes a genuine and true 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 all non New

Testament churches such as the Protestants. Examine any church in light of these five distinctive it will be shown if they are in fact true historical 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 Bible which constitute a true New Testament church. The one thing that makes one a Baptist is that historically they have followed the New Testament alone as its 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". (II 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 as revealed in the New Testament. (I Corinthians 15:1-4) Further, if a person is truly saved and uncompromisingly follows the principles of the New Testament he will in a true sense be a Baptist whether he uses the name or not. Baptists also believe the Bible interprets itself, and that Christ is the one and only head of the church.

Fundamental 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. They reject the efforts of the many who "spiritually" interpret the Scriptures, placing hidden or specially revealed meanings to the words of the Bible. Further, they reject so-called "scriptures" of modern day so called 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. It is believed that God meant what he said in Revelation 22:18, that the Scriptures were not to be added to or taken from. (See also Gal. 1:6-10, 1 Tim. 6:30, Titus 1:9-11, II Tim. 4:1-5, I 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 miss-use 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 we do not accept any authority except the New Testament Scriptures. Christ is head of the 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." (II 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.

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

Baptists reject the baptism of infants flatly! The church is made up of Baptized believers only. (Acts 2:41-42) An infant is not capable of believing, and is protected by the Grace of God until the age of accountability. Further, only those who have made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ and trusted in Him as their Savior is a member of the body of Christ, and thus can be a member of the body of Christ on earth, the local New Testament church.

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

Jesus said to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Further the Scripture says "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion that light with darkness?" No power on earth is higher than God's Word,

and the church should not be in any way yoked with the state, or controlled by it. We support the rightly appointed authority of government over us and pray for them that we live our lives in peace.

#### 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. (I John 1:19) No church 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 give no higher authority than the local congregation of born again, baptized believers. We believe that the local church is to be governed by the Word of God, and the local church does not need, or does the Scripture teach that the local body rests under the authority of any earthly 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 Rev. 2:6, Rev. 2:15, that he "hated" the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. The group of heretics in the early church along with other doctrinal errors promoted a clerical hierarchy in the church.

A church which cannot answer yes to all of these questions can not historically call itself a Baptist church. These are the distinctives which separate Baptists from Protestants, or any organized church or "Christian" cult.

A person can rightly take pride in truthfully bearing the name Baptist. Many men have suffered greatly and given their fortunes and their lives to hold the name in truth. It stands for devotion and an uncompromising 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 its unbroken history cannot prove an unbroken line of churches earlier than the Third Century, and what Catholicism teaches today in no way resembles what the early New Testament church believed.

We must agree with John Smyth, that 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 founds itself strictly on the New Testament teachings, 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.

As stated earlier, if a Bible were to be dropped from a plane over a remote area, and the natives were to take the Scriptures and believe them, then they would be saved and made a part of the Body of Christ. If they then took the New Testament as their guide, and organized a local congregation of believers it would be a church fully acceptable to God and as valid as church as even the early church of Bible times!

It is the Word of God, the Bible, that constitutes what is a real and true church! The Bible and only the Bible reveals to men how to have their sins forgiven and have eternal life and heaven. That is

what truly saved believers have always believed, because that is what the New Testament which is God's very Word to man says.

The Baptist bases his authority solely on the Bible itself. They do not accept that authority was given to any particular man, group or church on earth to be the means of the salvation of men. 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 truly Biblical one, 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. All systems of hierarchy established by man over the authority of the local church has lead to doctrinal errors and corruption without exception.

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