

A PRESERVED BAPTIST HERITAGE EDITION

THE UNIQUE BAPTISTS

BAPTISM, SCRIPTURE, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH



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Original text preserved intact

The Unique Baptists

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When people consider the Baptists many suppose that they are diverse simply in their baptism. And in this they are quite correct. However, they may not fully appreciate just how correct they are. Yes, Baptists are about baptism. They stand apart from every other religious body in the world, and this is due to their baptism. This difference is not just in the manner but in how it exhibits great and important principles. Their baptism is in stark contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, its daughters: the Pedobaptists Churches and Protestant Churches, which are still evolving. The doctrine of baptism affects nearly every principle of the New Testament. Moreover, the errors of baptism have stained many doctrines of the Gospel in general.

The baptism of the Baptists differs from others in its mode, candidates, authority, and purpose. The principle drive behind the doctrine of baptism for the Baptists is their love of truth and resolute desire to comply with the commands and precepts of the Word of God. Their practice of baptism exalts the Word of God. This is not just noble rhetoric, for they take their practice directly from God's Word and disdain the teachings of men and traditions. By their appeal to scripture only they express a reverence of it and give example for all others. The Bible only is the standard, it is the authority and reigns supreme. Because of this Baptists have been charged with "bible-idolatry," an unreasonable worshipping of the Word of God. This indictment came from one who could not sustain his beliefs from scripture, but rather from his life's experience.

Surely, this question about baptism is not insignificant, seeing it involves such great consequences! If the magnitude of a thing is to be judged by its results, it is certain that the question of baptism is one of vast importance.

From the time of the first heresies in the second century until the appearance of the first reformers, Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin, there have always existed dissenting churches from the state churches. Apart from Gnosticism, the first heresy of significance was the elevation of the office of bishop. Soon after this deviation came the error of baptismal regeneration, which led to the consequence of the development of infant baptism and sprinkling/pouring. Fundamental churches were notable for their opposition to ruined churches which had fallen into heresies. These churches baptized all who joined them, regardless of any past “baptism” by the established churches. (By established churches, it is meant the State-Churches; churches who rule with civil authority and power.) They rejected the right of apostate churches to baptize and the legitimacy of their baptism. Their adversaries nicknamed them “Anabaptist,” meaning re-baptizers. This name was considered a term of derision. The “Anabaptist” themselves never considered their baptism as any duplication of baptisms, but rather their baptism was fresh.

When the churches, called Catholic, in the fourth century began to baptize into their membership those without faith, not born of the Spirit, their spirituality was exchanged for worldliness. She introduced traitors into her body, which betrayed her into the hands of her enemies. In a very real sense they had made the Kingdom of God to be a kingdom of this world. They had fallen to the worst degree, so much so that they violently turned against what they had once been.

There could be no union between the Anabaptist and the rest, for from the first they were opposites and so they remain. Their actions condemned the authority of those fallen churches and a rejection of their right to administer the church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Hence, in the view of the Anabaptists, these irregular churches had long ceased to be churches of the New Testament.

The aberrations of baptismal errors.

It was a small step from the error of salvation by baptism to infant baptism. The result of infant baptism was a church now being filled with un-regenerated, carnal members. This has culminated in making those churches to be spiritually and morally corrupt and impure. It is a policy of these churches that they never dismiss any who have been baptized as infants no matter how immoral or criminal they may become in later life. They do at times anathematize for heresy, but rarely for immorality, which breaches policy. Nor do they acknowledge any right of these people to ever be baptized again. They universally condemn any second baptism and those who administer it, for they know that re-baptism is a condemnation of the first baptism.

Infant baptism involves no freedom of will by the subject. Infants express no sentiment about it. Infants are "christened" to belong to Christ and to the Church. They become property of that Church. This is a lifelong bondage to the hierarchy of men, being under their control and demand. This condition exists to this day.

To protect this departure from the scriptures two things are necessary. First is to keep the truth hidden from the people and second to substitute a lie for the truth. The first task was done by a policy that people were not to read God's

Word, and later condemning the printing and circulation of bibles in the common tongue of the people. It was at times criminal to have a personal possession of the Bible. (This was first implemented in the fourth century with the controversy with the Donatists.) The second step was the removal of the right of congregations to make decisions for themselves. Thus, a church hierarchy was established, and it ruled the church with absolute power. This body of men established themselves to be supreme authority over the church and have the last and only say in the affairs of the church.

These policies of denial of Scripture and obscuring the truth served to enslave men's conscience and eliminate freedom and the liberty of judgment and practice. It became an oppressive society, not only internally but also externally. Since these churches later established themselves as state churches to dissent from them and not to allow infants to be baptized were considered treasonous and punishable by the secular powers—which they controlled. The universal law of enforced baptism first came about with Charlemagne. All this was done in order to sustain an error and preserve their survival. Truth, when known, would tear down their mighty fortresses of heresies and iniquities.

The Baptists have always insisted on only baptizing the repentant who, by their own volition, seek baptism. None are forced. This freedom is often called "Believers Baptism." Not only does this liberty apply to the practice of baptism, but also in every quarter of human conscience. Never will there be found a Baptist who would deny the word of God to others or their right to examine that word openly, freely and with freedom of conscience. This is the liberty of all men in their right to choose for themselves and act without coercion against conscience.

When it comes to the Baptists, every question, every debate is settled with the reply, "What sayeth the Word?" It is to the Bible they turn and not to priest, bishop, pope, tradition, synods, or ruling bodies. This is their stand on baptism, "What sayeth the Word." While others seek to obscure, deny, mistranslate, turn aside the Word of God, the Baptists welcome and encourage the purity of God's word, for they acknowledge it as the only authority in spiritual matters. When the Pedobaptists (baptizers of infants) are asked to justify their beliefs, they call upon tradition, the teachings and writings of the "Ancient Fathers," or the high authority of their denomination's head: Pope, President, Archbishop, etc. They substitute the commandments of men for those of God and make His word of none effect. The Baptist says, show us in the Word the doctrine of infant baptism and we will do it. The Baptist says, show us in the word where we are to sprinkle and we will do it. Show us in the word to receive and maintain the wicked and evil and the involuntary into the church and we will do it. Nay, far from any support in the Gospel all these things are spoken against. And that is why the Baptist does what he does.

The baptism of the Baptists also affects their practice of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. They will not allow any but their own members to the table. This is known as closed communion. For this they are accused of bigotry, narrow mindedness, and the cruelty of being loveless. But many of the Pedobaptists also have closed communion. In their articles they state that before any are elevated to the status of qualifying for communion they must pass certain tests. Some insist that they pass a catechism and be able to recite their creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and answer other questions as in their Short Catechism. Thus it is

perceived that all that is necessary is a good memory in order to be confirmed as a member of that church. Others add to this that they must have a good personal character. None of this stipulates a converted soul who has repented of sin and embraced the salvation of God. This is a kind of “closed communion” that the Baptists have never practiced. Baptists insist the individual be saved, baptized, and their conduct be moral and harmonious with the righteousness taught in the Bible. Only the local individual church can be the judge of these requirements. Thus they restrict communion to its members only.

Baptism for the Baptists bolsters the practice of discipline. Baptists’ baptism and discipline only involves the church internally. This discipline determines who may be initiated and maintained in their membership. This contrasts against the churches that practice no discipline and those who have married themselves to the state. It is a quirk of these State Churches that they go undisciplined internally and yet exact the harshest of discipline on those without. Corruption reigns in these churches to the highest level. Their priests, bishops, pastors are often found in the grossest of crimes. At the present day the Roman Catholic Church has been exposed of child molestation among her priests. None have been excommunicated; they are still kept within her ranks. Their officials hardly say a word of condemnation against those found guilty. The crime is condemned but the criminal is not.

Baptists find no redeeming quality of baptism for the unregenerated person, whether adult or infant. For them baptism does not save, extend grace, is not a sacrament, nor does it expunge any “original sin.” Baptist’s baptism is an outward mark of the willingness of the redeemed to submit to Christ and His authority. This submission indicates that they

have received Christ as savior and henceforth He is their Lord and Master. They have put on Christ and publicly identified with Him and His Church. This is a bold step for many, since it can put them in jeopardy of persecution, the loss of friends, worldly esteem and popularity.

Baptism for the Baptists also distinguishes their congregations as democratic. They are autonomous bodies of Christ; every assembly is independent. They have no head except Christ. They have no governing body over them or earthly master. They make the decision as to who is to receive their baptism and not by tradition or rulers of the church. Baptists are self-determining. They elect and dismiss their own pastors and deacons. The idea of one man presiding over the affairs of the church is absurd to them, for to recognize any man as head, such as pope, means a surrender of liberty and a capitulation of loyalty to that man. Others may follow some of the Baptists' doctrines but that does not make them Baptist, nor give them any heritage with the ancient apostolic church. The New Testament church government is not episcopal, hierarchy, Presbyterian, or conventionalism. One such example of fallacious church government is that of the Presbyterians*:

“Chapter XXX, Of Church Censures

I. The Lord Jesus, as king and head of His Church, has therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

II. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel; and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.”

*From the Presbyterian Westminster Confession chpt. XXX sec. 1 & 2.

In the area of discipleship the Baptists also set themselves apart. Their baptism defines the nature of a disciple of Christ, as one who follows Christ and not simply one who has been brought to Christ. The true disciple has denied himself (Luke 14:25-33). The Church is made of disciples, and yet infants baptized into the Pedobaptists Churches are declared as disciples. The Pedobaptists say by the virtue of baptism only, disciples are made, no acknowledgement of commitment is given. They say that whether they (the baptized) put their name down or another has put it down for them; their names are forever in the record of the church. This membership, this discipleship, has no bearing on regeneration or conduct. Scriptures describe church members as disciples—a spiritual seed, lively stones, saints, sincere believers; they have passed from death unto life. Baptists receive none but the professed converts, and if these walk disorderly, they simply withdraw themselves from them. No persecution is practiced.

Baptists have never forced baptism on any. In this they stand for religious liberty. They use no carnal weapons in their cause but merely adhere to the Word of God, and urge all others to do the same. And in this they stood alone for nearly sixteen centuries.

The Baptist hold that the authority to baptize was given exclusively to the church and not to individuals. They believe that the local church, as a body, determines the qualifications and approves the baptismal process. This is done by vote of the church membership at large. As mentioned, this feature

reveals the form of ecclesiastical government of the Baptist church; it is democratic. It can be seen that to them the nature of the church is local, for no invisible, never assembled, universal church could ever conduct business by election of vote. In her democracy it makes obvious that each and every member, including her officers (pastor and/or deacons) has an equal standing in the affairs of the church (there is no hierarchy). Coincidentally, as the church by vote receives members so also by vote they remove members. Christ has designated the church as the supreme and final judge (Matt. 18:15-17). It is the church as a whole and not a council of bishops or elders who judge (I Cor 5).

By the manner and method of Baptist baptism they hold to the principle of plain biblical translations. The amazing practice of so many translators and translations of the bible demonstrate a certain dishonesty in their work. There are only rare translations in *any* language where the Greek word "*baptzio*" has been translated. Universally the protestant and catholic translators have not translated the word but merely transliterated the word, as in the case of English "baptize." This is not an English word. Moreover, when non-English speaking people read their bible in their native tongue they do not understand the word and need someone to explain it, and a person may explain it to suit his own views. Why is this? For the simple reason to shroud the plain truth. It is an attempt to keep the "sprinklers" error believable. To propagate a human dogma they have violated the word of God. This has also been done with the word "Church," which should be translated "assembly," or such like. In the Spanish bible produced by the American Bible Society in the 1800's the original Greek word "repentance" had been translated as "to do penance." If it is thought that only the Catholics and the Established Reformed Churches are guilty of this, I refer the

reader to I Cor. 12:13. Here the Greek word “*en*” is translated “by,” whereas the correct English preposition is “in.” This one verse is used as the proof text of the Protestants who believe in the universal church, for they say all have been baptized into one body *by* the Holy Spirit. The correct translation is: “For in one spirit we all into one body have been immersed.” Scarcely will they expose this mistranslation but rather consistently insist that the word may be properly be translated “by.” In this one word they have devastated both the meaning of the text and the doctrine of the nature of the church.

Where are they who stand with the Baptists? Who is it that does not find fault with them or offers no criticism against them? Some may agree on some points but with the whole they find fault. Not even all who are called Baptist are united or in agreement with the above points. Some Baptists claim they are protestant, others deny this of themselves. The Reformed Churches unashamedly reject Scripture for the sake of tradition; the “faith of the fathers.” Protestants shout “Scripture Alone,” only to refute it when it denies their cause. They love the Word of God until it embarrasses them, then they deal deceitfully with it.

When we speak of Baptists, we are not speaking of the protestant Baptists of seventeenth century origin (The General and Particular Baptist of London). Nor do we speak of “reformed” Baptists of today who have adopted a protestant position. No, it is the Baptists with a heritage and lineage before all other denominations, which we speak. A heritage and succession extending back to Christ Himself before Pentecost. These unique Baptists reject any notion that they are protestant. Additionally, they reject the doctrinal sentiment that all the redeemed are in the Church. They maintain that the nature of the Church is exclusively a local

body of Christ, not universal or invisible. Only such a church is able to govern itself and administer the ordinances.

The true Baptist inquiry is, “What saith the Word?” This makes the Baptists unique. For centuries prior to the Reformation the Lord’s Church has stood alone in this battle for the truth. Mostly, they suffered horribly for it. Are there any others who can claim this heritage? No, most have been the persecutors. To this day every stance of the Baptists is assailed. From the beginning Baptists have differed from all others and remain so. There can be no union between the Baptists and the rest, for from the first they were opposites and so they remain. They are unique among all the ecclesiastical bodies of the world.

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THE UNIQUE BAPTISTS

What makes a Baptist church truly Baptist?

In this concise study, Wm. F. Bekgaard examines the convictions that have distinguished Baptists through the centuries: the authority of Scripture, believers' baptism, the autonomy of the local church, congregational government, church discipline, the Lord's Supper, and religious liberty.

The discussion also considers Baptist identity and historical continuity, calling churches to retain the biblical principles for which faithful believers have long contended.

This preserved edition presents the original study without alteration.



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