

# Denominationalism, Religious Cults and World Religions

## Lesson 8

### The Baptist Church

#### Introduction:

Although many Baptists claim that Christ is the founder of their church and that they began in the days of John the Baptist, the predominant view of the origin of the Baptist church is that it was formed in the early 1600's during the rise of Protestant denominations throughout Europe.

During the Protestant Reformation Movement not all reformers were content with the achievements of the mainstream Reformation Movement, and even less satisfied with the direction taken by the Church of England. The group most vocal about the need for radical change within the Church of England were known as "Puritans," and became the leaders of the English Separatist Movement.

Baptists were originally called *Anabaptist*<sup>1</sup>, and were closely associated with (and even partly indoctrinated by) Menno Simons, founder of the Mennonites. Essentially both the Mennonites and Baptists came out of the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptists were considered unique during the Reformation because they believed that those who had been sprinkled or baptized as children needed to be re-baptized as adults. Early Anabaptists accepted sprinkling as a form of baptism but later contended that only baptism by immersion was true baptism. They were often opposed to capital punishment, serving in the armed forces, taking oaths, paying taxes, and believed in the separation of church and state in every way.

The earliest historical record of a Baptist church can be traced back to 1609 in Amsterdam. In 1606, John Smyth, a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, broke ties with the Church of England and became a "Puritan," then an English Separatist, and eventually a "Baptist Separatist." However, the threat of persecution against religious nonconformist in England forced Smythe to go into exile in Amsterdam with fellow Separatist from the congregation he had formed in England.

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<sup>1</sup> Anabaptists: The name *Anabaptist* is derived from the Greek term *anabaptista*, or "one who baptizes over again." This name was given them by their enemies in reference to the practice of "re-baptizing" converts who "already had been baptized" (or sprinkled) as infants.<sup>[4]</sup> Anabaptists required that baptismal candidates be able to make their own confessions of faith and so rejected baptism of infants. The early members of this movement abhorred the name "Anabaptist", claiming that since infant baptism was unscriptural and null and void, the baptizing of believers was not a "re-baptism" but in fact the first baptism for them. The Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Old Order Mennonites and Conservative Mennonites are direct descendants of the movement.

Smythe, along with a fellow supporter, Thomas Helwys, eventually broke fellowship with other English exiles because Smythe and Helwys were convinced all believers should be baptized, and those who had been sprinkled needed to be baptized again by immersion (At first, Smythe took bold steps toward Biblical truth by insisting that infants should not be baptized, and that all who are converted must be baptized to gain admission into the church. However, contrary to the Bible, Smythe believed one first became a saved believer upon a personal confession of faith, and that baptism by immersion was then necessary to admit the believer into the fellowship of other believers (also known as "believers baptism").

Convinced that he needed to be re-baptized, Smythe baptized himself, and then others who sought to join themselves with the Separatist Movement. Later, he became convinced that his self-baptism was not scriptural and applied to the Mennonites for admission into their church. Smythe died while waiting for membership into the Mennonite church and many of his followers became Mennonites. However, Thomas Helwys and others kept their baptism and their Baptist beliefs.

The modern Baptist denomination is an outgrowth of Smyth's movement. Baptists rejected the name *Anabaptist* when called that by opponents in derision. As late as the 18th century, many Baptists referred to themselves as "the Christians commonly – though *falsely* – called Anabaptists." However, there are strong ties between the origins of the Baptist Church and the Anabaptist movement. The Dutch Mennonites (Anabaptists) shared many similarities with those of early Baptists (believer's baptism, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and Arminian views of salvation, predestination and original sin<sup>2</sup>). However, over time significant differences developed between Anabaptists and Baptists. Most significant was Baptists accepting some of the more traditional Calvinist teachings of predestination, election and salvation.

The founding of the Baptist church in North America is generally credited to both Roger Williams and John Clarke. In 1639, Williams established a Baptist church in Providence, Rhode Island, and Clarke began a Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island. Over time, the Baptist movement in America experienced rapid growth, particularly in many southern states, and among the black population. However, in 1845, Baptist congregations in the US split over three main issues: slavery, missions, and doctrinal integrity. Northern congregations were opposed to members in the southern congregations owning slaves, and tried to prevent slaveholders from being missionaries. The southern congregations were concerned over what they perceived as liberalism in the north, accusing some missionaries of even denying virgin birth and divinity of Jesus. This split created the Southern Baptist Convention, while the northern

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<sup>2</sup> Arminianism is based on the theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609). His beliefs were similar to Calvin in some respects, but radically different in others. Concerning salvation he believed prior to being drawn to Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit, one is unable to believe and able only to resist. Having been drawn and enabled, but prior to regeneration, one is able to believe but is still able to resist. After one believes, God then regenerates. At that point one is able to continue believing but still able resist. However, upon resisting to the point of unbelief, one is unable again to believe again, able only to resist.

congregations, then known as Northern Baptists, formed their own organization now called the American Baptist Churches of the USA (ABC-USA).

Today, 46 million Baptists belong to churches cooperating with the Baptist World Alliance. Many Baptist groups, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist Bible Fellowship do not cooperate with the Alliance. Their number can add up to a total of close to 100 million adherents in the world through 211 denominations, making Baptists the largest Protestant denomination in the world. According to the Barna Group researchers, Baptists are the largest denominational grouping of "born again Christians" in the US. A 2009 ABCNEWS/Beliefnet phone poll of 1,022 adults suggests that fifteen percent of Americans identify themselves as Baptists. A large percentage of Baptists in North America are found in five bodies – the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC); National Baptist Convention (NBC); National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.; (NBCA); American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABC); and Baptist Bible Fellowship International (BBFI).

In recent years Baptist Conventions have adopted a number of doctrinal positions that make Baptists distinctly different from other mainstream Protestant denominations.

- In 1982, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a resolution rejecting the theory of evolution and stating that creation science "can be presented solely in terms of scientific evidence without any religious doctrines or concepts." Some Southern Baptist leaders have spoken out in favor of the intelligent design movement.
- In a 1996 resolution on partial-birth abortion, the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed its opposition to abortion, stating that "all human life is a sacred gift from our sovereign God and therefore... all abortions, except in those very rare cases where the life of the mother is clearly in danger, are wrong." Recognizing the different views on abortion among its members, the American Baptist Churches' General Board encourages women and couples considering the procedure "to seek spiritual counsel as they prayerfully and conscientiously consider their decision." Though the board opposes abortion "as a primary means of birth control," it does not condemn abortion outright.
- In 2003, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a statement reaffirming its opposition to gay marriage. It called on "Southern Baptists not only to stand against same-sex unions but to demonstrate our love for those practicing homosexuality by sharing with them the forgiving and transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)."
- In 2005, the governing body of the American Baptist Churches USA affirmed that "God's design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman" and that "homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical teaching." However, in 2006, the church's Pacific Southwest regional board (which includes churches in California, Hawaii, Nevada and

Arizona) split from the denomination because the denomination's national leadership declined to penalize congregations that welcomed openly gay members.

## II. Truths They Hold:

- A. Baptists hold to many Biblical truths:
1. Generally, they hold a very high view of the inspiration of the Bible; while having creed books, they claim the Bible is their only authority.
  2. Most believe in the virgin birth of Christ and His bodily resurrection.
  3. *Primitive Baptists*<sup>3</sup> oppose instrumental music in worship and observe the Lord's Supper weekly.
  4. All Baptists believe that baptism is only by immersion and oppose infant baptism.
  5. Most Baptists strongly oppose immorality and emphasize Godly living.

## III. Baptist Doctrine vs. Bible Doctrine

- A. Some Baptists teach that the church was founded in the days of John the Baptist.
1. However, the Lord's church did not exist in the days of John the Baptist.
    - a. John's mission was to prepare the way for the Lord (John 1:19-27).
    - b. John was beheaded before the kingdom (church) was established (Mark 6:14-29; 9:1; Acts 1:4-8; Col 1:13).
    - c. It was following the death of John that Jesus promised, "I will build my church" (Matt 14:10; 16:18).
    - d. The church (kingdom) began on Pentecost (Isa 2; Joel 2; Dan 2; Acts 2).
- B. Baptists teach a plan of salvation not found in the Bible.

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<sup>3</sup> *Primitive Baptists*, also known as *Hard Shell Baptists*, *Anti-Mission Baptists*, or *Old School Baptists* are conservative, Calvinist Baptists adhering to beliefs that formed out of the controversy among Baptists in the early 1800s. This controversy was over whether churches or members should participate in mission boards, bible tract societies, and temperance societies. It led the Primitive Baptists to separate from other general Baptist groups that supported such organizations. Primitive Baptist churches arose in the mountainous regions of the southeastern United States, where they are found in their greatest numbers. However, since first arising in the 19th century, the influence of Primitive Baptists has waned as *Missionary Baptists* became the mainstream.

1. John baptized "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4), so did Peter (Acts 2:38), so did Ananias (Acts 22:16). But modern Baptists baptize "because their sins have been remitted."
  2. They generally teach that one is saved by faith only<sup>4</sup>, but the Bible says we are saved by "works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24).
  3. Based on Mark 1:15, Baptists teach that repentance comes before faith.
    - a. What they fail to realize is that Jesus was specifically commanding Jews to repent and turn back to God by believing the gospel He was preaching
    - b. Furthermore, expressions are used without regard to chronology as in Acts 5:3. Ananias kept back part of the land and then lied to the Holy Spirit.
    - c. If a person repents before he believes the gospel, repentance could not be a part of the gospel because it comes before one even hears the gospel (Rom 10:17).
    - d. How can one know he must repent if he does not know or believe that God commands him to repent?
- C. They teach that baptism is not essential to salvation, the very opposite of that which the Bible teaches:
1. "It is most likely that in the Apostolic Age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, 'baptism was the door into the church.' Now it is different. . . ."<sup>5</sup>
  2. "Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of 'baptismal regeneration'<sup>6</sup>; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, 1951, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA, p. 62

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p. 22

<sup>6</sup> Baptismal regeneration: although the term is defined differently by various denominations, the basic belief is that one is born again (regenerated) by the waters of baptism at the moment of baptism as if there were some mystical

3. What does the Bible say? (Note: The Scriptures do not teach the idea of "baptismal regeneration," – that there is some "mystical power" in the water itself that effects salvation.)
  - a. Baptism saves us (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet 3:21).
  - b. Baptism is for remission of sins (Acts 2:38; cf. Matt 26:28).
  - c. Baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16).
  - d. Baptism puts us into Christ where all spiritual blessings are (Gal 3:27; Eph 1:3).
  - e. One never reads of being saved before or without baptism in the New Testament from Pentecost onward.
  - f. The Bible teaches we are to bury "dead" persons – dead to sin (Rom. 6:3-4); Baptists "bury" live persons.
- D. Baptists believe that in order to be saved, one must “pray to ask Jesus to come into his heart.”
  1. One of the best-known Baptist preachers, Billy Graham, speaks for the majority of Baptists on salvation when he says:
    - a. "Here is how you can receive Christ: 1. Admit your need (I am a sinner). 2. Be willing to turn from your sins (repent). 3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the Cross and rose from the grave. 4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit (receive Him as Lord and Savior)."<sup>8</sup>
  2. The person seeking salvation is then invited to pray this prayer:
    - a. "Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen."<sup>9</sup>
  3. Therefore, Baptists teach a wrong confession – "I believe that God for Christ's sake has pardoned my sins."

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power in the water itself.

<sup>7</sup> *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, 1951, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA., p. 20-21

<sup>8</sup> Quoted directly from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, [http://www.billygraham.org/SH\\_StepsToPeace.asp](http://www.billygraham.org/SH_StepsToPeace.asp).

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

- a. This confession is not found in the Bible. It expresses a false doctrine – that one is saved before and without baptism because this confession is made prior to baptism.
- b. It is not the simple confession of faith in Christ as God's Son found in the Bible (Acts 8:37)
4. Baptist teaching on salvation is in conflict with the New Testament, which teaches that one must do *more* than most Baptists teach.
  - a. For example, the Bible teaches a person must hear the word (Rom 10:17), believe in Jesus (John 8:24), repent of past sin (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Rom 10:10), be baptized for the forgiveness of one's sins (Acts 2:38) and live a faithful Christian life (Rev 2:10).
- E. Baptists offer misguided examples of salvation (such as the thief on the cross).
  1. "Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that baptism is important but not necessary for salvation. For example, the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)... experienced salvation without the necessity of baptism."<sup>10</sup>
  2. A thorough study of the Scriptures shows that the thief on the cross is not a good example of salvation for several reasons:
    - a. The argument is based on an unproved assumption that the thief was never baptized (cf. Matt 3:5).
    - b. The thief lived and died under the Old Testament (Heb 9:15-17).
    - c. Jesus had power while on earth to forgive sins any way He chose (Mark 2:10).
    - d. The thief on the cross could not have been buried with Christ in baptism before Jesus died on the cross, was buried and was raised from the dead (Rom 6:3-11).
- F. Baptists teach a modified version of Calvinism – "once saved, always saved."
  1. But the Bible teaches:
    - a. One can believe and fall away (Luke 8:13).

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.baptistdistinctives.org/textonly8.html>.

- b. One can fall from grace (Gal 5:4).
  - c. Paul took steps to ensure he would never fall (1 Cor 9:27).
  - d. We are warned to "take heed lest we fall" (1 Cor 10:12-13).
  - e. Willful sin causes one to fall (Heb 10:26-31).
  - f. Simon obeyed, and then fell away (Acts 8:13, 18-22).
  - g. James taught that one could err from the truth, be converted, and saved from death (Jas 5:19-20).
  - h. Paul taught that "some shall depart from the faith" (1 Tim 4:1).
  - i. Peter taught that if one is "enlightened" and then falls away, the "last state is worse than the first" (2 Pet 2:20-22).
  - j. The doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy was first taught by the Devil in Eden (Gen 3:4).
- G. Baptists teach that the church is not essential to salvation.
- 1. They believe that one is saved and then joins the church.
  - 2. One can be saved and not be a member of the Baptist Church by their admission; therefore, the Baptist Church is not necessary to salvation.
  - 3. The Bible teaches that the church is a part of God's eternal purpose, that it was purchased by His blood, and that He saves it (Eph 3:8-11; Acts 20:28; Eph 5:23).
  - 4. The Bible teaches that to be in Christ where all spiritual blessings are is to be in His church; that which puts one into Christ puts one into the church (Eph 1:3; 2:14-16; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27).
- H. They "vote" on whether one has been saved and can be accepted as a member, a practice completely foreign to the Word of God.
- 1. For example the *Standard Baptist Manual* claims, it is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism," and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, "baptism was the door into the church." Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are



wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their "experience" and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. And while they cannot become members without baptism, yet it is the vote of the body which admits them to its fellowship on receiving baptism."<sup>11</sup>

2. Where did Peter call for a "vote" on the day of Pentecost? Where is there any New Testament example of conversion where a "vote" is found? It is nothing more than the "doctrines and commandments of men." (Matt 15:9)
  - I. Baptists believe that a church can omit certain requirements of the Gospel and yet still be pleasing to God.
    1. The *Baptist Manual* says, "A body of Christian disciples may fail to meet some of the requirements of the gospel, and still be a true church of Christ..."<sup>12</sup>
    2. The Scriptures teach if we leave out any of the requirements of the Gospel, then we are no longer pleasing to God (Rev 2-3; Matt 7:21; John 14:15; 2 John 9; 1 Cor 4:6; Rev 22:18-19).
  - J. Concerning the Lord's Supper, Baptists believe that this is a command of which the time and frequency have been left up to man.
    1. "As to the time, place, and frequency of the ordinances, no Scriptural directions are given. These are left optional with the churches. They are usually observed on Sundays, but not necessarily. As to the Supper, our churches have generally come to observe it on the first Sunday of each month."<sup>13</sup>
    2. However, an approved example of the day and frequency of the Lord's Supper is found among first-century Christians (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Cor 16:1-2).
  - K. Baptists use instrumental music in their worship to God.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, 1951, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA, p. 22

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 12

1. Justification for such a practice cannot be found within the New Testament. Every reference to singing in the New Testament is a *cappella* (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).
  2. The well-known Baptist preacher of the last generation, Charles Spurgeon, wrote in his commentary on Psalm 42, "David appears to have had a peculiarly tender remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it. . ."
- L. Baptists also celebrate holidays such as Christmas and Easter.
1. The celebration of such holidays as Christmas and Easter is not founded upon the Scriptures.
  2. The only memorial concerning Jesus Christ observed by Christians in Bible times was the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26).
- M. Many Baptists also teach the doctrine of Premillennialism (the belief that Jesus will return in the future to establish a kingdom on earth).
1. This false doctrinal teaching will be covered in detail in a future lesson.
  2. However, the Bible teaches that those who are in the church are also in the kingdom (Col 1:1-2, 13-18; Heb 12:28; Rev 1:9).

## **Conclusion:**

### **I. How to Convert a Baptist**

- A. It is not difficult to lead a Baptist with an open and honest heart to a proper understanding of the truth. Consider doing the following:
1. Remind them of the importance of having God's authority for *everything* we do in worship and life (Matt 28:18; Col 3:17; 1 Cor 4:6).
  2. Ask them, "If a person were to take the Bible only, would he or she become a Baptist?" If not, why not?





