

WHY “BAPTIST” DISTINCTIVES?

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A pastor of a Baptist Church stated to one of our graduates, to this effect, “We can teach in our church about ‘New Testament Distinctives’ but not ‘Baptist Distinctives.’ If it is ‘New Testament’ doctrine then it is not to be called ‘Baptist’ doctrine. We are only concerned with ‘New Testament’ distinctives.”

Two general assessments can quickly be made of such an answer. First, the one who uttered it is actually an interdenominationalist (an informal denomination in itself). Secondly, the logic used is very faulty and the argumentation erroneous.

Such an attitude as illustrated is not uncommon and displays an inadequate understanding of both church history and especially Baptist history. It would assume that Baptists have not been any different than any other denomination throughout their history and that they had no valid reason for being Baptists as over against Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterian, etc.

Along the same vein, such an attitude would assume that Baptists were wrong in resolutely holding and emphasizing certain truths in opposition to much of the mass of Christianity or at least that Baptists should not be acknowledged as having both championed these in the past and as doing so now. It is almost the position of apologizing for bearing the name “Baptists”.

A true Baptist does not think of the name Baptist in any sectarian sense and as having some merit in itself but rather equates it with New Testament truth, with a New Testament position. Why should we believe like we do in opposition to other church denominations? Why are we “Baptists” rather than being of some other band of Christianity? Any young person, any mature individual is going to ask those questions. To answer simply, “I believe the New Testament,” is not a full answer. Many others start with the same premise but end up with a vastly different doctrinal position.

Looking at the questions from another point of view it may be noted that any doctrine assertedly obtained from the New Testament doctrine is distinctively New Testament doctrine. In other words, to call New Testament doctrine is in that sense distinctively New Testament. It is different important doctrinal interpretations within the framework of the New Testament that

are emphasized as either Baptist distinctives or Methodist, Lutheran, etc.

Let us illustrate. Saying there are only New Testament distinctives not Baptist distinctives is like saying that there are only political distinctives, not distinctives of the Republican and Democrat parties. It is obvious that the statement is inaccurate. Basic political views by all political parties are not distinctives. Both parties accept the Constitution as normative and authoritative for government. Both parties campaign for election. Those are not political distinctives but rather political common denominators.

What are some of the things that traditionally in the past made a distinction between the parties? The Republicans have been more politically conservative while the Democrats were more liberal. The Republicans were for protective tariffs while the Democrats opposed. The Republicans were backed by business and management while more of labor rank and file were Democrat. The Republicans introduced Prohibition while the Democrats repealed it. These were a few distinctives that gave individual differences to each party. Both felt that they represented the truest and best Americanism.

So likewise many contesting Christian faiths have some common denominators but disagree on vital points of New Testament interpretation. We believe as New Testament Baptists that there are certain major, vital and determining viewpoints that have marked out Baptists doctrinally from other professed Christian viewpoints down through the ages. What are they? The answer is not “New Testament distinctives” unless we are comparing our faith with Judaism, Mohammadanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., and this is not what we are doing when we speak of Baptist Distinctives. We are speaking of vital differences which mark us off from other representations of New Testament Christian faith. The Baptist distinctives are an outgrowth of a conflict within the general framework of Christianity not in the competition of Christianity with other religions of the world.

There is a final consideration that most superficial rejections of the validity of Baptist Distinctives overlooks. It is the historical aspect. There is a lamentable ignorance of people going under the title of Baptist (let alone among non-Baptists) concerning Baptist history. They have

little or no comprehension why they are Baptist in contrast to some other denomination or title nor why and how their history has been distinguished and marked by their beliefs. They are unaware Baptists have suffered for their distinctive beliefs down through the centuries. The enemies of the Baptists have recognized the distinctives of the Baptists by their terrible physical persecutions of Baptists and their mental torture and various other forms of community ostracization and subtle pressures to try to make them conform or feel miserable.

It is the enemies of the Baptists who have highlighted the distinctives of the Baptists by their opposition to those distinctives and to those who advocated those distinctives. Therefore, if the enemies of the Baptists for hundreds of years violently excoriated the Baptists for their positions on New Testament truth while yet claiming to be New Testament believers themselves, it is those same enemies who attest that the distinctives of the Baptists are properly identified as Baptist Distinctives *not New Testament distinctives*.

To be sure, we as Bible-believing Baptists, hold that our distinctives are vitally and basically important truths and that we did not originate them as truths but that they are solidly based on clear New Testament teaching. Yet in Satan's deceptive counterfeit of versions and perversions of Christianity, these are most vital areas where the true New Testament faith and practice has run directly counter to the power establishments of the predominating forces of organized Christianity. Our forefathers enunciated them regardless of hatred and persecution incurred and we can do no less today especially as we see the monstrous perverted form

of ecumenical Christianity taking shape. We do not apologize for our forefathers declaration of those truths which were designated Baptist distinctives and we proudly and courageously declare them now by the grace of God to the glory of God.

Yes, true Baptists are different! We are different because of certain important beliefs and certain important doctrinal emphases. We glory primarily in the Cross—the redemptive work of Christ, but there is more to a true proclamation of the Gospel than that. There is a necessary presentation of the “whole counsel of God”, or heresy easily creeps in in other areas. Thus we affirm the so-called Baptist Distinctives without apology. Their advocacy has exposed the fallacies of others masquerading as New Testament Christians and has permitted the presentation of a complete Gospel that is the true full-fledged Bible Christianity.

The eight Baptist distinctives as carefully and accurately expounded by this writer are designated by the acrostic BRAPSIS—a coined word, and are as follows:

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| 1. | B | Bible, only rule of faith and practice |
| 2. | R | Regenerate, immersed church membership |
| 3. | A | Autonomy of the local church |
| 4. | P | Priesthood of the believer |
| 5. | S | Soul Liberty |
| 6. | I | Immersion of believers and the Lord's Supper the only two New Testament Ordinances |
| 7. | S ₂ | Separation of church and state |
| 8. | | Separation ecclesiastical and ethical |