

WHY BE A BAPTIST?

By Rev. Norman Pipe

*Pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Simcoe, Ontario
and Moderator of Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches of Canada*

A recent incident in connection with my pastoral visitation prompted the writing of this article. I was calling on some persons who had attended our services on different occasions. We had a very fine time of spiritual fellowship together. The husband declared that they had really enjoyed coming to the church, but there was just one thing wrong...“It is Baptist. If it were undenominational it would suit us a lot better.” When I asked him what he meant by “undenominational” he was unable to clearly set forth what he meant. As I understand it, the word denomination comes from denominate, which means to give a name or epithet to; to name, call, style or designate. As a Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches we have no part nor lot with a blind denominationalism which exalts a Convention or Association above the word of God, crying loyalty to our denomination regardless of its Modernism and worldliness. We left the Baptist convention of Ontario and Quebec because of its departure from the faith, but we did not leave the Baptist denomination. We are Baptists by conviction not by Convention. As Baptists have historically recognized the sovereignty of the local church, therefore the name Baptist is not and cannot be bound up with any particular Convention or Association. A church does not need to be a member of any group or association to be a Baptist church. There were Baptist churches long before Conventions came into being. All Baptist associations and conventions are entirely voluntary. A Baptists church is recognized as such upon the basis of her doctrinal belief. Let me repeat therefore that true Baptist are Baptists by conviction not by convention or by any other coming together. We are called Baptists because of what we believe and stand for. I am not ashamed to be called, named, styled or designated according to my spiritual convictions.

Not Always a Baptist

I am not a Baptists by reason of family ties or by reason of any other human expediency. Practically all of my Sunday School years were

spent in non-Baptist Sunday Schools. My first step in the direction of becoming a Baptist was small indeed. (I am happy to insert this little bit of personal history to encourage Bible School and Junior workers and others. You never know how even an invitation to a children's meeting or Bible School may completely change the whole course of a life.) As a boy I was invited to a Junior meeting at Ossington Avenue Baptist Church in the city of Toronto. I liked it so well that I returned from week to week. Then I began to attend other services in the church. The more I attended and compared what I heard and saw, with what I read in the New Testament, the more convinced I became that Baptists did not need to defend their position, because the very word of God is their defense. I was satisfied then, and I am even more satisfied now after so many more years of personal study and observation that there is no church nearer to the New Testament position than a fundamental Baptist Church. Indeed their position IS the New Testament position. My answer to the question...Why Be A Baptist? will be practical rather than doctrinal, and for the sake of simplicity will be five-fold.

Sincere Conviction Necessitates It

I have before me an Encyclopedia which states—“Baptist are a denomination of Christians who regard the church as a completely spiritual institution, maintaining that baptism and membership should be confined to believers only. They maintain that immersion is the correct mode of administering baptism. Most of them hold to the doctrine of Calvinism in a modified form. The form of church government it congregational. They maintain that each church is a spiritual democracy, possessed of the power of self government under its exalted head, Jesus Christ. The only officers of a New Testament Church are pastors (otherwise called bishops and elders) and deacons.” Much more could be said here but space will not permit. The truth is that the fundamental platform of Baptist Churches is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Some suggest that it is

the independence of the local church, but that is wrong. It is the doctrine of the Lordship of Christ (Eph. 1:20-23). When this great truth is clearly recognized then all matters of faith and practice are viewed in their proper light. "Thus saith the Lord", is the position we take, rejecting "the traditions of men which make the Word of God of none effect." We appeal solely to the Scriptures in all matters both of faith and of practice.

Common Loyalty Requires It

We most certainly believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has always had His true and faithful followers throughout the church age as well as in all other ages, that He has been building His church, and that the gates of Hell have not prevailed and shall not prevail against it. We believe that there has been an unbroken line of New Testament churches from the day of Pentecost until now. Millions of loyal souls have defied the edicts of Roman emperors, the bulls of the Popes and the decisions of the councils. They have loved not their lives unto the death. Baptists have a glorious heritage, and the writer is happy indeed to identify himself with the people called Baptists because of what they have lived for, and because of what they have died for through centuries of testing and trial. It is not an empty boast but a statement of fact that no one can point with any reputable proof to a human founder, nor to any beginning of Baptist churches since the days recorded in the New Testament. No one claims perpetuity of the name Baptist from those early days, but it is evident that the beliefs and principles held by us have been propagated by faithful Christians since the days of Christ and His apostles. Sometimes these people were named with regard to geographical locations, or with reference to some particular leader who held tenaciously to the Scripture. They were never part of the Romanish system but stood loyal to God. The name Baptist was ultimately given as an epithet of contempt, but God honoured these people and their number reached into the millions. The name Baptist indicated what these people believed and stood for. I thank my God for the great testimony that Baptist Churches have had through the centuries, and for the great witness that so many of them still give to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. I count it an honour to be found in their company.

Common Honesty Demands It

Christians should have deep settled convictions and be willing to show their colours. These are those who glory in undenominationalism so-called. The truth is that some so-called undenominational groups have more machinery than many Baptist churches would tolerate. I guess they are what you would call undenominational denominations! Sounds strange doesn't it? It is just as strange as it sounds! In these days of fad, fancy and fanaticism, (all parading under the name "undenominational") I thank my God that there is such a worthy appellation as the name Baptist. Years ago the writer subscribed to The Voice, the official publication of The Independent Fundamental Churches of America. It was interesting indeed to observe in the news of the churches, how many congregations which began as so-called undenominational congregations, eventually declared themselves Baptist churches in order to get away from association with some extreme fanatical movement holding forth in the same town or city in "undenominational" disguise. So far as I am concerned I want the lines to be very clearly drawn between the church of which I am the pastor, and certain fanatical churches and movements of today. There is a lot of difference between noise and power, between zeal and fanaticism, between light and lightning, between the fire of God and wild-fire. There is a world of difference between fake healing, faith healing, and Divine healing. I am a Baptist because of what the name stands for. I will not be known as a Baptist in Heaven, but I am not in Heaven yet, and while here below amid so much religious confusion, common honesty demands that I state my position, and that I do by declaring myself a fundamental Baptist. I have very happy fellowship with some undenominational churches and pastors. These churches are very close to our Baptist position. The open membership policy with regard to baptism is just about the last remaining difference. How I wish that space would permit me to enlarge upon this and to relate some matters of great significance. Sufficient is it for me to say that the common bond of fellowship is very precious, and we are practically one in faith and doctrine with many of these churches and pastors today. Many of them are Baptist churches in everything but name. I believe that the day will come when many of these congregations will be willing to adopt the

name "Baptist" in order to more clearly indicate their like precious faith with us. Many of them deplore the latitude and the confusion of the term undenominational. I don't blame them for that, and therefore I am happy to be called a Baptist.

The Importance of Doctrinal and Spiritual Unanimity Vindicate It

Many groups of people have been gathered together with a view to establishing a church. They have even organized as undenominational, nonsectarian churches. Their policy has been to suppress doctrinal discussion, and to ignore doctrinal differences. They have thought that doctrine was unimportant and that evangelism was the sum total of the great commission. Whether you practiced believers baptism or not was optional. It made little difference what you thought about the believers standing and security. The same attitude prevailed with regard to other great truths of the word of God. The serious mistake which these people made was in ignoring the New Testament foundation for fellowship, this foundation being not merely a salvation basis, but a doctrinal basis (Acts 2:40-42): "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles DOCTRINE and FELLOWSHIP, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The doctrine came first, the fellowship came second. Through ignoring this important fact resultant doctrinal dissension has occurred, and the eventual disintegration of the work has taken place. How much better it would have been if from the beginning they had recognized the Lordship of Christ, the authority of His word, and had taken their stand accordingly. Remember that believers baptism is not just anything you think it is...it is exactly what the Bible says it is. The same is true concerning all of the great doctrines of the Bible. To young men going out to establish churches I would say with all my heart and soul, don't hide your colours, don't parade under a false flag but go to work for God, build a Baptist church if you are a Baptist, then people will rally to the standard or go to their own company. Because of the importance of doctrinal truth and of spiritual

unanimity I believe in establishing Baptist churches.

Golden Opportunity Justifies It

I believe that God has set before us an open door. We have a golden opportunity. There are those in every town and city who declare themselves in favour of an undenominational cause. They declare: "If it were not a Baptist Church we would support it. We are tired of denominations." Don't be swayed by such empty talk. Look around you and see! Ask some undenominational pastors to declare the truth. When the real test comes, are these people really willing to take their stand against error? The experience of many clearly indicates that they are not. Therefore it behooves us as Baptists to see and to do the great work that God has entrusted to us in these days. There are people from at least eight different denominations in the membership of Bethel Baptist Church. Classified by previous church affiliation four denominations are represented in our deacons meetings. These people have all been baptized at Bethel. The more these believers become acquainted with our Baptist position, the more fully they appreciate it. It is the writer's firm conviction that there is no greater task, no more worthy endeavour than establishing and maintaining a Baptist testimony, which carries out the great commission in its entirety, and in the Divine order. As we honour God in so doing, God will honour us, and we shall make the most of the golden opportunity that God has given to us. Matt. 28:18-20 reads: "And Jesus came unto them and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, (1) And make disciples of all nations, (2) baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (3) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." That is exactly what we are doing, and for that reason there are people called Baptists. I am happy therefore to have a share in the honour that belongs to such worthy people, with such a glorious heritage, and with such a glorious future. Amen!