

WHY I AM A BAPTIST

Compiled by Joe T. Odle

Why I am a Baptist

by Noel Smith

(Dr. Noel Smith is editor, Baptist Bible Tribune, Springfield, Missouri, publication of the Bible Baptist Fellowship, International.)

Here are a few of the reasons why, in the midst of the dissolution of the basic institutions of civilization, being a Baptist increasingly gives me a feeling of spiritual and intellectual anchorage.

Baptists are a people. They have an historical identity. They have an historical image. Their continuity is the longest of any Christian group on earth. Their doctrines, principles, and practices are rooted in the apostolic age.

I am not a Pharisaical sectarian. But I don't confuse Baptists with the Reformation, with the Reformers. The Reformers wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church; the Baptists were against the church. Because it was not a New Testament church, Protestantism originated in the Reformation. Protestantism is protest-ism. That's negative. Negativism has within it the seed of its own disintegration.

The Baptists were not reformers. They were not protestors. They were positive.

- Freedom of conscience is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- The separation of church and state is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- Religious liberty is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- Believer's baptism is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- Baptism of the believer by immersion in water, symbolizing the believer's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- The local, visible, autonomous assembly, with Christ as its only head and the Bible as its sole rule of faith and practice, is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine.
- Worldwide missions is not a Reformation doctrine; it is a Baptist doctrine. The Reformers had no missionary vision and no missionary spirit. For almost two hundred years after the Reformers, the Reformation churches felt no burden to implement the Great Commission.

What kind of a world would the Western world have been had Protestantism become its master? Who

but the Baptists kept Protestantism from becoming its master?

The general attitude today is that truth is determined by the passing of time; that there are no eternal abiding truths. "You can't turn the clock back. Time invalidates all truths. Time invalidates one set of truths and fastens another set upon us."

Baptist history repudiates this philosophy of fatalism. Baptists today are believing, teaching, preaching, and practicing the truths that were believed, taught, preached, and practiced two thousand years ago.

It gives me a feeling of stability to reflect that I, as a Baptist, am in the stream of this long continuity of faith and practice. The Baptist people are a great continuity. They are a great essence. They are a great dignity. The world never needed them more than it needs them today.

Why I am a Baptist

by Vance Havner

(Dr. Vance Havner is a widely known Southern Baptist evangelist and Bible teacher. The author of numerous books, his home is in North Carolina.)

I have good fellowship with all who know and love the Lord, but I am a Baptist because I believe that the basic and original Baptist position is that of the New Testament church. I do not accept all that some Baptists believe nor do I endorse all that some Baptists do, but I stand on what Baptist started out to believe and do. Some Baptists have departed so far from this position that they would not be recognizable as Baptists to their forbearers. One old giant of my earlier days whom I came to know and admire used to say, "When some of these Baptists get right they'll be with me for I'm where they used to be!"

Dr. George McDaniel defined a Christian as one who accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior, submits to him as his Lord and takes the New Testament for the law of his life. I believe that is a good definition of a Baptist. Anything less is inadequate. Anything more is superfluous.

I remember another Baptist preacher who was converted from a different faith. When asked how it happened, he said: "It was just plain carelessness. Somebody left a New Testament lying open and I read it." I believe that anybody who gets hold of a New

Testament, reads it, and obeys it is very likely to come out of the experience a Baptist.

Why I am a Baptist *Billy Graham*

The including of this statement by Billy Graham is not to be interpreted as support for Dr. Graham's ecumenical ministry. Dr. Graham's compromises with apostasy and Roman Catholicism are well documented.
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(Dr. Billy Graham is the most widely known Baptist in the world today. He probably has preached to more people than any other preacher in history. He is a Baptist and is a member of First Baptist Church, Dallas.)

...My church affiliation is Baptist and I share with Baptists certain basic convictions:

First, I am a Baptist because Baptists take the Word of God, the Bible, as their supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. Most Baptist services center around the Word of God and the proclamation of its truths. As has been said, they have “no creed but Christ, no law but love, and no book but the Bible.” Their creed, their discipline, their rules of faith and practice have historically been the Bible.

Second, Baptists advocate baptism for believers only. They hold that if baptism is the badge or mark of the Christian and if a Christian is one in whom faith has been awakened, then baptism, rightly administered, must be for believers only. No responsible Baptist would claim that baptism is necessary for salvation, but it is essential if we are to be obedient to our Lord in following his example and instruction.

Thirdly, I share with Baptists a strong belief in the priesthood of believers. Baptists believe that a church is composed only of those who have been gathered by Christ and who have placed their trust in him. Thus all are equal, all may pray, witness, and serve. The minister is the chosen leader but each member, being a believer, is equal in status.

Fourthly, I share with Baptists a conviction that the New Testament teaches the independence of the local congregation. Membership in a Baptist association or convention is only for fellowship, combining our energies in service, and sharing common interests. Each church, Baptists teach, is a divinely appointed unit, functioning to glorify Christ and to win people to him.

Fifthly, I share with Baptists a strong belief in the separation of church and state. Baptists have

scrupulously avoided political entanglements and crippling alliances. Baptists were in the forefront for religious freedom, both in Europe and America, and they have played an important part in the guarantees embodied in the First Amendment of the American Constitution.

But most of all, as an evangelist, I share with Baptists their strong emphasis on evangelism and missions. Wherever I go throughout the world, I can always count on the Baptists assisting and supporting my efforts to win the lost.

Lloyd Douglas, the famous novelist, coined a phrase which aptly describes millions of Baptists—“a magnificent obsession.” I believe that Baptists, more than any other major evangelical segment of the church, have an obsession to get the gospel to as many people as possible while there is time.

The people of Jesus' day accused him of “being beside himself” and they accused Paul of being “mad.” When Baptists declare Jesus Christ and him crucified as an answer to the frustration, problems, and dilemmas of the world, we too are accused of being mad. After watching one of our crusade telecasts in New York, a columnist in that city wrote in his column, “Billy Graham is beside himself.” He could have paid me no greater compliment! He went on to say that it is foolish, even ridiculous, to suggest that the answer to the world's problems lies in the cross of Christ. Without realizing it the columnist was using almost the identical words of the apostle Paul. For centuries Baptists have been “beside themselves” with enthusiasm, vision, passion, and faith.

It is my prayer that Baptists will always keep this strong emphasis on evangelism and missions. The world appreciates and understands enthusiasm until it becomes religious fervor; then immediately enthusiasm becomes suspect. You can be as mad as you like about sports, pleasure, money, or drink. You can be mad about a pop star and still be considered a sane and normal person. But bring that same enthusiasm into evangelism and we are accused of being “beside ourselves.” Yet hundreds of thousands of Baptists are dedicated to Christ and must of necessity be possessed of that fervor to bring to others the message of the gospel which he or she has experienced.

Baptists have been able to maintain the zeal of their early founders. Baptists have carried the plain truths of the gospel around the world, reckoning nothing of peril or reproach. They surmounted obstacles, overcame difficulties, and endured persecution. That has been their madness—the madness of doing great things for God. I share that madness with them!