

# Baptists Today

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## Forward

Baptists value above all else their freedom. In his book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, Dr. Walter Shurden summarizes the Baptist system of beliefs using four freedoms: *Bible Freedom, Soul Freedom, Church Freedom, Religious Freedom*. I will be referring to these freedoms throughout the paper.

To supplement Dr. Shurden's "freedoms" I sent out a list of questions (Appendix B) to Baptist seminary professors, ministers, and members. The responses of four Baptist ministers are also incorporated in the paper: Dr. Clay Nuttal from Piedmont Baptist College, Winston-Salem, NC; Dr. Minor of Beck's Baptist church in Kernersville, NC; Dr. Mann from Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, NC; Dr. Newcomer from Twin Cities Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, NC. Their input was incredibly useful. As I cite their answers any added clarifying remarks are found between brackets.

Dr. Shurden is also the Executive Director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. The center offers a certification program on Baptist theology for anyone who wants apply. Most of the materials used to complete the certification are available on the Mercer University Web Site. Some of these are also incorporated into the paper.

Even though Baptists resist all creeds, this does not mean that they ignore their historical roots. The influence of three church fathers rises to the surface of Baptist theology: John Calvin, Jacob Arminius, and Ulrich Zwingli.

Some Baptists hold to teachings that can be traced back to John Calvin. Calvinism can be summed up in TULIP theology: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited grace, Irresistible grace, and Preservation of the saints. Calvin's dream was to create a Christian city. This dream found a partial reality in Geneva, Switzerland.

Jacob Arminius is credited with developing decision theology. In Arminianism, the person who hears the gospel either is given a spark of grace or has a little spark of good in him so that he is able to respond to the gospel and make his decision for Christ.

Ulrich Zwingli is the famous reformer who challenged Luther on his understanding of the sacraments. He taught that the Lord's Supper and Baptism were only symbols of the Christian faith and *not* means of grace that God uses to offer the forgiveness of sins.

## Introduction

In 2009, Baptists will celebrate a huge 400<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Born in 1609 the Baptist faith has grown from just a handful of frustrated Anglican Christians to 43 million people in over 200 countries. What is a Baptist? The simplest answer is a Baptist is a member at a Baptist church. It is not so simple to pin down Baptist doctrine and practice because Baptists do not use creeds. They do make descriptive statements about the Baptist belief system, but even these do not always agree. One such summary, known as the Baptist Distinctives, uses the word "Baptists" as an acronym (Appendix A). The *Baptist Faith and Message* is the description offered by the Southern Baptist convention. Although this is only a descriptive document of what Baptists believe, it is a description from the largest group of Baptists in America.

## History

There is a story told about two ministers arguing over when Baptists started. One said, "That's easy, Baptists started with John the Baptist." The other replied, "Baptists go back much further than that. Abraham

and Lot were surveying the land of Canaan. Abraham said to Lot, ‘All right, you go your way and I’ll go mine!’ That’s when Baptists got started.” (Hull, p. 3) It is true that the spirit of Baptists has been around for a long time.

In the early 1600’s two men, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, joined a group of Puritans and separated from the Anglican Church. This group believed that only Scripture, not creeds and traditions, should be the guide in faith and practice. The church should be made up of believers only, not of people born into the church. The church should be governed by members not church bishops (Shurden, *Turning Paints*, p.2).

By 1607 the two men had crossed over to Holland to escape persecution for their separatist beliefs. It was here that the group came into contact with the Anabaptists. There is some debate among Baptists about the influence of the Anabaptists over Smyth’s group, but the circumstantial evidence seems to be more than coincidental. “In 1609 Smyth performed a radical and scandalous act” (Ibid). Smyth poured water over his own head and Baptized himself. He then proceeded to baptize the whole congregation. He rebaptized because he said that infant baptism was performed by a false church on individuals who could not believe, namely infants. He wanted churches made up of people who “sincerely, deliberately, and freely affirmed Christ as Lord of their lives” (Ibid). For Baptists, Baptism was and still is the sign that a Christian has made a choice to follow Christ.

### **Soul Freedom**

In his book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, Dr. Walter Shurden summarizes the Baptist system of beliefs using four freedoms: *Bible Freedom* -- the centrality of the Bible in the life of a Baptist, *Soul Freedom* -- every Baptist must deal with God without outside interference, *Church Freedom* -- the autonomy of a Baptist congregation, and *Religions Freedom* -- the separation of church and state.

After a gathering of Southern Baptists in Charlotte this past summer, this comment was offered, “Our reaction to tension and our respect for each other is what makes us different. We differ on the use of war as a solution to rid the world of terrorism. We differ on how big government should be. We differ on our views concerning homosexuality. Our reaction to these differences is respect. We are humble enough to confess, God has not spoken to us through a burning bush, although he has spoken to us through a passionate Italian [referring to the keynote speaker at the conference], thus our opinion of truth is no more divine than our sisters’ or brothers’ in Christ” (Roy). Another Baptist minister acknowledged, “With freedom, there is risk. Is this dangerous? Not if we are Baptist! A Baptist realizes that Bible freedom will result in various understandings of the Scripture. As individual persons we are not identical, and our experiences of God’s truth will not be uniform. However, I would much rather risk the freedom of turning the Bible loose in the hands of all people, than try to control the process of belief. It is through that freedom that we find the truth” (Hull, 2).

There are some Baptists who see their freedoms threatened not from forces without, but forces within their own movement. One Baptist laments some of the dangers to his faith:

1. Baptizing three- and four-year-olds counters believer’s baptism.
2. Creedalizing confession of faith contradicts voluntarism.
3. Stifling dissent violates liberty of conscience.
4. Advancing civil religion negates separation of church and state.
5. Failing to educate new Christians neutralizes a regenerate church membership.
6. Applying excessive Calvinism harms missions and evangelism.
7. Exaggerating pastoral authority downplays the priesthood of all believers.
8. Exalting biblical inerrancy works against the Lordship of Christ. (Deweese, p. 1).

This freedom also makes writing a paper on Baptist difficult because there could always be the exceptional Baptist who has a Scriptural understanding of any doctrine. Dr. Nuttal describes the difference, “There is a great difference between the liberal Baptist position and the biblical Baptist position, that is because they use two violently difference hermeneutics.”

### **Original Sin**

There is almost no understanding of original sin in Baptist theology. A small minority of Baptists holds to Calvinism. These Baptists understand original sin as Total Depravity. But these same Baptists misunderstand the Grace of God. Calvinism teaches that God does not want everyone in heaven. For the rest of the Baptists who are not Calvinists there is no understanding of original sin.

A Baptist believes that people still are created in the image of God. “Out of love, God created human beings with a capacity to make choices, including a choice as to whether to live from the vantage point of a relationship with God. Isn’t that what the author of Genesis meant when he had God say, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’” (Gen. 1:26, NRSV)? God did not make robots, and God does not impose or inject or impute faith. No. God wants each person to respond voluntarily, like a child to a parent or a friend to a friend” (Hinson, p.2). Again on this point it would seem that not all Baptists completely agree. Dr. Nuttal responding to the question, “What does God mean when he says that mankind was created in the image of God?” writes, “It is clear that we were made in the spiritual image of God, with will, personality etc. The question is what did man lose in the fall (-8.” Dr. Nuttal adds as a follow up on original sin, “Sin was introduced into creation by Lucifer, Sin was introduced into the human race by the sin of Adam, when man disobey he fell and began to die physically and spiritually. The image of God he was created in was marred and man was affected by the fall and became totally depraved spiritually, physically, socially, mentally etc. So that he was incapable of providing a remedy for himself. That is why the work of Christ without the work of man is the only hope for eternal life. If Christ’s righteousness is not imputed to man, man will be eternally damned.” When asked about John 3:6, all of the Baptists saw it to say that people are physically born to natural parents, but spiritual life can only come from God.

Original sin is clearly taught in Scripture. Since the fall into sin, we do not have the image of God. We give birth to children who bear our own sinful image (John 3:5,6). Scripture states that we are stillborn spiritually (Eph 2:1, Col 2:13).

### **Decision Theology**

Baptists teach that the unbeliever plays a small, yet vital role in his or her conversion. Dr. Nuttal writes, “For the Biblical Baptist salvation is by Grace through Faith (Eph 2). Works play no part in the obtaining or retaining of salvation. Even faith is a gift of God so that the individual is not independent in salvation. He has responsibility but not free will in the matter of salvation.” A decision for Christ is the critical step a person must make to become a Christian. Dr. Mann writes, “How can you be a Christian if you never make a decision for Christ?”

While decision theology does seem to be a common thread among Baptists, even they agree that a person’s decision can be deceiving to himself and those around him. In response to my question, “Do you ever think that a person can place too much emphasis on their decision so that it detracts from what Jesus has done?” Dr. Nuttal writes, “On this we agree, there are a lot of people who have made a decision... who will never see heaven. Making a decision is not salvation by Grace through faith. On the other hand those who have obeyed the command and call of God can be sure of eternal life without anything placing them in danger.” Dr. Mann and Dr. Newcomer conceded that it was possible for a person to place too much emphasis on a personal decision. “Man must come to God on His terms-faith and repentance (Mk. 1: 15, Acts 20:21). These two elements are two parts of one whole. Both must be present in conversion (Heb. 6:1). Faith without repentance

results in mere mental assent (Ja. 2:14-26). Repentance without faith results in legalistic works (Eph. 2:8-9)” (Newcomer). Dr. Nuttals answers the question, “What do you believe would happen to a Christian if he or she never makes a decision for Christ?” in this way, “One of the problems here is the use of the word decision. This and many other words tend to confuse what happens at salvation and puts man, not God, in the center. Let’s use the words, faith, trust, or belief. What would happen if a person never had saving faith, trusted God for salvation, or believed the record God has given about His son? Well, they would never be a Christian (except in the false concept of professing believers).”

Throughout the history of the Baptist church, certain preachers have used psychological methods to move a person to make a decision for Christ even when there was no such saving faith. I asked the question, “What role does the surrounding atmosphere play [in a person’s conversion]? Such as the music. Can some things cheapen a conversion such as the hot bench, treeing the devil, faith healings, snake handling, etc.” All of the Baptists agreed that these methods can be abused. Dr. Nuttall writes, “You are absolutely right all of the man made things only cheapen the gospel and cause people to look away rather than to Christ.” Dr. Mann writes, “Many people have made conversions that do not represent salvation experiences.”

Baptists have no trouble saying that a person is converted only by the grace of God and will commonly quote Ephesians 2:8,9 as a proof passage. In general Baptists do not believe that a decision for Christ is a “work” that takes away from Christ. The teaching that a person helps in any way with his conversion is synergy. Melancthon writes as a synergist. “From this error (sc. of the Manieheans) minds must be led away and taught that free will does something. Therefore some of the ancients spoke in this way: Free will in man is the ability to respond to grace (*facultas se applicandi ad gratiam*), that is, it hears the promise and tries to assent and renounces sins against conscience... However, these things will become more clear when the promise is considered. Since the promise is universal and there are no contradictory wills in God, it is necessary that there must be in us same cause for the difference, why Saul is rejected (lost) and David is received (saved), that is, it is necessary that these two men must have acted in different ways.” (Hoenecke III, 285).

### **Why some and not others?**

Why are some saved and not others? This is the question that Melancthon asked at the end of his quote. Why David and not Saul? This is the question that boils conversion down to the basics. To whom does the credit go if someone comes to faith? Whose fault is it if the sinner goes to hell? Baptists seem to take this question for granted, because their theology answers it easily. The responsibility rests on the sinner. I asked the question, “The gospel is powerful, Rom 1:16. If the same gospel message is heard by two unbelievers, why might one become a Christian and the other one remain an unbeliever?” Dr. Mann responded, “The power of the gospel is not limited to its power to persuade, but includes its power to save to the utmost, those who choose to believe.” Dr. Nuttall’s response sounded much more Scriptural, “The gospel is powerful in itself. It does not become more or less powerful depending on who does or does not receive it. The fact is that no one can come to the Father except he is drawn by the spirit. We are back to the hundreds of things that God does in salvation and their relationships.” Nuttall adds, “I think this is true because God has given the responsibility to man to believe. He can and does choose and while we may want to know as much as God does about this, God has chosen only to tell us the rules not the rationale, for the believer that should be enough.” Dr. Newcomer responded that he believes in unconditional election.

### **Election**

Baptists for the most part acknowledge that God elects people for salvation, but he does so in view of their faith. Some Baptists believe that God is not capable of knowing everything. “The question is when was their names written in the book. The answer from the Scripture was ‘before the foundation of the earth.’ While some theologians will not deal with the ‘all knowing God’ the truth is if God does not know who is going to be

saved he is not God. Then we ask the question what does he do about what he knows” (Nuttal). There is a small minority of Calvinists who hold that the sovereign God decided that some would not be included in his heaven.

Scripture teaches two truths that defy human logic. God knows who will be in heaven. God promises that these will endure to the end (Jn 10:28-30). But at the same time God warns that a Christian can fall from grace (Mt 13:20-22, 1 Sam 13). Election is gospel comfort. The reality that Christians can and do fall from faith is a threat of the law.

Dr. Nuttal writes concerning this contradiction, “The question is could someone who is made righteous by God and granted eternal life lose that salvation. That would depend who is greater God or man. If man is greater than God he could fall. If God is greater than man and He is the one who provides salvation then there is no possibility of losing what God has provided with no help from man.”

“Biblical Baptists do not believe that any external thing gives or keeps salvation. They do believe that it is impossible to be a new creation and not demonstrate the indwelling spirit. Unfortunately many Baptist make external proof a list of things they made up rather than walking in the Spirit” (Ibid).

The Baptist position places a crushing weight upon a Christian. He is constantly looking for external proofs of his faith. If these external proofs are not found, he doubts, and instead of looking outside of himself and falling at the foot of the cross, he may instead look inside for some scrap of good, that he may or may not find. “Dr. M. R. DeHann used to say election is God’s business, believing is yours, mind your own business” (Ibid).

### **Transformed Life**

In response to the question, “How important is a transformed life in Christ for a Christian?” all of the Baptists interviewed responded that unless there is proof of a transformed life, there is no faith. Dr. Minor writes, “The fruit of ones life is the evidence of an experience with Christ. Where there is no evidence of God’s transforming work there is no assurance of God’s transforming presence. (James 2:26).” In answer to the question, “What do you believe would happen to a Christian if he or she never makes a decision for Christ?” Dr. Newcomer answered, “This question seems self-contradictory. A ‘professing believer’ who does not walk in obedience to Christ has no assurance that they are truly a believer (Cf. First John).”

I do not quarrel with James that a faith without works is dead. If there are no works, then there is no faith. Sanctification follows justification logically, but not chronologically. Where there is faith there are good works. That said, we ought to be careful that we do not condemn a person just because, in our opinion, we do not see any good works. In Romans 7 the Apostle Paul describes a battle that he lost any number of times with his sinful flesh. If someone saw Paul once on a bad day when he fell into sin, he or she may unjustly have come to the conclusion that Paul was an unbeliever. Along these same lines is the faith of an infant. As the father of three I had every right to question the faith of my baptized infant children, if it were not for the promise of God (1 Peter 3:21).

I asked for a comment on the statement, “A Christian is at the same time sinner and saint.” Dr. Nuttal writes, “The members at Corinth were fairly bad examples of Christians but they were called saints. Believers are saints because of what Christ has done. God makes saints not the church and we do not become saints by the manner we live. When God gives eternal life his grace makes them a saint. In I John 2 we discover that God’s goal for us is to live above sin, but the same text tells us that he knows left to ourselves we will sin. So Saints do sin but it certainly isn’t saintly to do so.”

When I moved to Winston-Salem I thought it was odd that in the heart of tobacco country there would be so many Baptists. Baptists value their transformed life, but they are not always consistent in what is and is not acceptable. I asked the question, “There are some stereotypes of Baptist that exist today, such as how a Baptist can’t drink or smoke, or one of my members mentioned that some can’t wear red clothes. Are any of these stereotypes true? Dr. Minor responded:

Many of those are true, although I have never heard anything about red clothes. Back another generation or two, Baptists were encouraged not to play cards, go to movies, and other such “worldly” activities. I can say in the churches I’ve pastored smoking has never been an issue, but drinking has.

There are two streams of tradition in Baptist life which comes into play here. One is our spiritual family tree. Remember, we are theological cousins to the Amish (Anabaptist roots), and in many ways we are “more worldly” Amish, taking on the styles of the society but still considering ourselves both of this world and not of this world. So there is a strand of theological DNA in Baptists that makes us mindful of what activities we engage in. And yes, we are inconsistent deciding what is “worldly” and what is not “worldly.”

But more importantly and what has a more influential impact upon us is our desire (tradition) not to be a stumbling block to other Christians and non-Christians. I know and agree that our Lord drank alcohol and in itself there is no “sin” there. However, in the South, there is a culture which does not equate drinking with a godly life. As Paul said, all things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable. Therefore, as a Christian concerned about the witness of my life, I have chosen not to drink. I believe in our culture Paul would deal with this matter about the same way he dealt with eating meat sacrificed to idols.

There is an old story about a group of Southern Baptists who went to Germany on a mission trip. When the German Baptists saw the Southern Baptists smoking they were so shocked they dropped their beers... A quick word about “stereotypes.” Please remember that all Baptist churches are autonomous. There are many different kinds of Baptists, and you yourself could go out tomorrow and start a “Baptist” church. So what one pastor or congregation says or does can’t be said about all Baptists. For example, there are 1000’s of independent restaurants across the USA. Just because one doesn’t have sweet tea or has bad coffee doesn’t mean all of them do. It is the same way with Baptist churches.

Dr. Mann adds, “Many older church covenants still contain wording to the effect of not using alcohol as an intoxicating beverage in order to mirror the biblical admonition to be sober-minded. Baptists are still known for their agendas to bring a higher standard of living to the culture.”

### **Church and State**

There is great diversity on the topic of church and state relations. In 1920 George Truett a prominent Southern Baptist commenting on Mat 22:21 said that Jesus’ words were the “most revolutionary and history-making utterances that ever fell from those lips divine. That utterance once and for all, marked the divorcement of church and state.” In 1984, W.A. Criswell, the man who followed Truett at First Baptist in Dallas, gave a different comment on the topic. “I believe this notion of the separation on church and state was the figment of some infidel’s imagination.” (Hull, p.4)

In answer to the question, “Separation of church and state also seems to be important to Baptists. What is the church’s role in society?” Dr. Minor responded, “The church is to be salt and light. Yes, Baptists have a long history with separation of church/state because we were persecuted by the state in both Europe and early Americas. We believe that the state should not be involved in the church, but we certainly believe the church should be involved in the state. Issues such as abortion are moral issues and not simply political issues.” Dr. Mann answered, “The church is to be free from the state control of religious thought and practice, but the state is not to block all religious expression; since there is no expressed right of freedom from religion.”

It seems as though Baptists demand that the state stay out of the church's business, but that it is irresponsible for the church to remain outside of the state. Dr. Shurden under the topic of Religious freedom cites the dangers of "Civil Religion." These include prayer in public schools, using public tax dollars to support private religious programs, and the presence of religious symbols in civil contexts. He writes, "Christians have to work hard at distinguishing between pietism and patriotism, assessing critically where one begins and the other ends" (TBI, 52).

Currently Lutherans are wrestling with these same topics. It is naive to believe that the state does not play a role in the day-to-day operations of the church. Without touching the topic of school vouchers; books, bussing, and hot lunches, are just a few benevolent ways that the state plays a role in many of our churches. While our Lord does leave many of these issues to our Christian freedom, it still strikes me how some Baptists rejoice in their theological diversity. Commenting on the striking difference of Criswell's comment from Truett's listed above Hull writes, "His statement simply demonstrates Baptist freedom!" (Ibid).

### **Kingdom of God**

In response to, "What is your understanding of the kingdom of God?" Dr. Nuttal writes, "The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven have some similarities but I think I can explain this best as follows. Each kingdom has a ruler, those ruled and a realm." He then lists off a number of kingdoms that include the Eternal kingdom, the Millennial kingdom, the Mystery kingdom, and the Spiritual kingdom. The millennial thread that runs through the Baptist doctrinal tapestry seems to blur the distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man. Dr. Minor answers the question this way, "Wow. Volumes have been written on this subject and so anything I can say will be incomplete. In short, the KOG is the rule of Christ. Currently, the KOG runs parallel with the Kingdom of this World and intersects (or invades) it at points throughout history. At the Second Coming, the KOW will be replaced by the KOG."

God tells us that the kingdom of God does not have physical boundaries, but the kingdom of God comes to each believer when the Holy Spirit through the Gospel creates faith (2 Tim 2:19, John 18:36). Dr. Mann's response seems to reflect this, "A spiritual realm in which God is King. Early Israel was its prototype, the worldwide community of true believers its current expression, and heaven its fulfillment."

### **Autonomous Church**

As we have seen the Baptists are fiercely independent. Dr. Nuttal answers the question, "What role does a synod or some kind of organizational structure play in your church's ministry, if any?" in this way, "A Biblical Baptist Church has no hierarchy or outside control of any kind. The truth is that some of the conventions or associations in Baptist organizations do act like a synod. The oversight of the local church is congregational. That means the local church operates like a body with local members and a local head. It conducts itself as a flock with a local shepherd. I have a published book on the subject of church polity 'The Weeping Church.' The book explains all of this in detail." The other ministers offered very similar answers.

There is a concern among some Baptists that the Southern Baptist convention is stepping over a line. "Of concern also is the prohibition in Baptist Faith Message 2000, limiting who can be called to be pastor of a local congregation. This is seen as a direct intervention in the church's freedom to choose its own leaders, another violation of local church autonomy" (Dilday, p.7). Dr. Shurden records that pastoral authoritarianism was seen as the greatest concern from a number of mission leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (TBI, p. 38).

Christ is the head of the church. All authority in the life of a Christian comes from Christ (Mt 28:18,19). The church is simply a gathering of Christians (Mt 18:19,20). God does not limit his church to a local congregation. There is nothing in scripture that states a church cannot gather together to form synods. Since a synod is a church, all the privileges and responsibilities of a church go along with it, such as the administration of the keys (Mt 18, 1 Tim 5:20) and calling public ministers (2 Tim 2:2).

## Divine Call

There are two kinds of called leaders in a Baptist church, ministers and deacons. Ministers are those who serve in special areas, such as music, counseling, youth, etc. Deacons are laypeople called to serve with ministers on behalf of the congregation (TBI, p. 38).

In answer to the question, “How does a Baptist minister receive a call to serve God? Does the call come straight from God? Does it come through the Word? Does it come through a congregation?” Dr. Mann answered, “Yes. Traditionally the call is an inner conviction, supported by a biblical outworking of a gift to serve, and affirmed by the experience and observation of a local congregation.” Dr. Nuttal adds concerning the practice of ordination, “Baptists normally use the procedure of ordination but the process they use is entirely outside the scripture as many Baptist traditions are.”

My call is a call from God given through Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. My mediate call from God is no less divine than an immediate call from an Old Testament prophet (Acts 20:28, Jer 1). Today God does not usually offer immediate calls to individuals to serve his church; instead, he uses other Christians (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). One summer during my college years I met a man my age who said that he too wanted to be a minister but couldn't because he had not received a call. There is an inherent disadvantage to placing too much trust in one's own feelings. At the same time, I think the Holy Spirit can move individuals to serve their Lord in countless ways.

## Means of Grace

This is a topic that I, a Lutheran minister, would assume is near and dear to every Christian. There is no way that we can come to God by ourselves. There are only a handful of ways God has told us that he will come to us, namely through the gospel in Word (Mark 16:15,16) and Sacrament (Eph 5:26, (Mat 26:26-28). “For Christ, in whom we are elected, offers his grace to all men in the Word and the holy sacraments, earnestly wills that we hear it, and has promised that, where two or three are gathered together in his name and occupy themselves with his holy Word, he is in the midst of them.” (Formula of Concord 2, II, 57).

Baptists see Jesus as the sole means of Grace. This does not necessarily mean in God's Word. They would also include the way that God deals with us in everyday life as God's grace. In answer to the question, “What are means of grace to a Baptist? Or what does God use to feed a sin sick soul the forgiveness it so desperately needs?” Dr. Minor comments, “First of all, Baptists do not hold to sacraments. We consider the Lord's Supper & Baptism to be ordinances. The means of grace is the presence of God Himself given through His Spirit. All of the above which you mentioned can help one feel the presence of God, but we do not hold that grace is dispensed the same way a coke is from a machine.”

## Lord's Supper

For Baptists, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance, not a means of grace. In the Lord's Supper Baptists joyfully fulfill God's command. Dr. Nuttal writes, “He does not receive forgiveness, as I have explained, he has already received grace but he receives the joy of obeying God's command to participate in the Lords.”

One way to determine what a person believes about the sacrament of the altar is to ask what an unbeliever receives. When asked this questions Dr. Nuttal replies, “The unbeliever at the Lords table receives condemnation (I Cor. 11) since the table is a constant reminder that he has chosen the judgment of God rather than His grace. The unbeliever can only apply the grace of God when he obediently honors Christ by accepting the work of salvation. Communion has no positive value for the lost person except as a lesson about what he needs to do.”

Baptists hold to the warning in Corinthians, but for different reasons than Lutherans do. The body and blood of Christ are present. The sacrament is not just a symbol. “We believe, teach, and confess that not only the genuine believers and those who are worthy but also the unworthy and the unbelievers receive the true body



and blood of Christ; but if they are not converted and do not repent, they receive them not to life and salvation but to their judgment and condemnation,” (FoC 1, VII, 16).

In the Lord’s Supper Jesus comes to Christians through his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine to give and reassure Christians of the forgiveness of sins. Some have compared the loving word of forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper to the message of forgiveness in the gospel as a hug to a handshake. The Lord’s Supper is a very personal way that God comes to us to give us his grace

### **Baptism**

Baptism is the second ordinance. There are some Baptists who refer to Baptism as a sacrament because they feel that “it is a rich practice that conveys deep meaning spiritually to the believer” (Brackney, p. 6). Baptism is the ritual that signifies membership in the Baptist church and a new life in Christ. The Baptist concept of baptism is known as the believer’s baptism, as opposed to a Lutheran or Catholic baptism. “Most Baptists believe that baptism is a rich symbol. By this we mean that baptism in itself does not convey salvation or transformation, but it is a sign of what has happened in a spiritual sense to a new believer” (Brackney, p. 4). Dr. Mann states that in baptism a person “does not receive; he gives witness and testimony to the community of a personal decision, and gives evidence of coming under the authority of Christ.”

### **Immersion**

In answering the question, “How important is the method or way in which a person is baptized?” Dr. Mann answered, “We understand the Greek word ‘baptizo’ means to immerse. We don’t know how else to immerse than to immerse.” To immerse is the classical Greek definition of the word. Dr. Minor points out that too much emphasis can be placed on this symbol of the Baptist faith, “It is not essential, however, that someone is ‘dunked’ for their salvation.”

In Scripture the word βαπτίζω means to wash. The classical definition of the word cannot be forced into κοινή Greek. Lowe/Nida offers this example, “αἱ ἄλλα πολλά ἐστὶν ἃ παρέλαβον κρατεῖν, βαπτισμοὺς ποτηρίων καὶ ξεστῶν καὶ χαλκίων καὶ κλινῶν ‘and they follow many other rules which they have received such as to wash cups, pots, copper bowls and beds’” Mk 7.4 (53.31). There is no denying that immersion offers a powerful symbol. Luther writes in the large Catechism, “This act or observance consists in being dipped into the water, which covers us completely, and being drawn out again. These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of Baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions must continue in us our whole life long.” There is no basis for insisting on immersion from Scripture.

### **Infant Baptism**

The historical practice of infant baptism in the church is undeniable. However Baptists see the development of infant baptism as a gradual change that crept in over the first three centuries of the church. Speaking of the church during the Middle Ages Brackney writes, “Thus, baptism had both a theological and social importance that the early church had not recognized” (p. 2). The Anabaptists are credited with rediscovering the ancient practice of the believer’s baptism. The Anabaptists rejected infant baptism and insisted that a Christian be rebaptized after making their decision for Christ. This view has not changed among Baptists today. The World Council of Churches statement on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (1982) says it this way, “Baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament.”

While it is true that there are no specific cases of an infant being baptized in the New Testament, this does not rule out that it actually happened (Acts 16:31-33). Nowhere does Jesus exclude children from baptism or the Christian faith (Mt 28:19). On the contrary, Jesus welcomed children and held up their faith as a model for us to follow (Mat 19:14).

Baptists acknowledge that others are critical of their rejection of infant baptism. Some critics see this refusal as a rejection of children in an adult or believer's church. Baptists do value the presence of children. "Instead of baptizing young children and infants, Baptists prefer to dedicate children to the Lord in a public service where the parents and the members of the church are called upon to live exemplary lives before children, and to teach them the ways of the Lord. Water baptism is not an element in that service" (Brackney, p. 6).

### **Age of Accountability**

The age of accountability requires that at some point a child must decide on his or her own to follow Jesus and have a believer's baptism. Not all Baptists are in agreement on this point. Dr. Nuttall comments, "I can tell you that Biblical Baptists do not believe it is some historically established age at 12 etc. The very use of the word accountability means the individual has a mental capacity to understand the level of his responsibility and his opportunity. So that when a person would know and understand they are a sinner, then they are responsible to respond to God moving in the being." Dr. Minor compares the age of accountability with the Jewish coming of age ceremony. "Similar to the Hebrew concept of bar mitzvah; knowing right from wrong; foolishness from wisdom (Paul's distinction of thinking and reasoning as a child and thinking and reasoning as an adult in 1 Cor. 13)." Dr. Newcomer offered *Safe in the Arms of God* by Dr. John MacArthur's as a detailed explanation of this position.

There is no mention in Scripture for an age of accountability. At the seminary one of my dogmatics professors offered the last verse of Jonah for the Baptists, "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" Deuteronomy 1:39 and Isaiah 7:16 offer similar examples. The fact that children cannot always tell right from wrong does not excuse them from their inherited sin, nor does their mental capacity mean that they are beyond forgiveness in Jesus. Dr. Minor struggles with the logical contradiction of the Baptist requirement of a decision for Christ, even though Jesus, has no such requirement. "At the same time, and the stories [Rich Young Ruler & Jesus welcoming the children] are placed side-by-side in the Gospels, is Jesus' insistence that the Kingdom belongs to the children. Can a child give away his life when he doesn't have a full understanding of all his life is?"

### **Summary**

In Shurden's chapter on Soul Freedom he related a story about a respected Roman Catholic priest who spent a Wednesday evening with a Baptist congregation to share his beliefs. "During the question and answer session someone asked him, 'Father Cuddy, what one thing do you admire the most about Baptists?' Quickly and without struggling for a response, he answered, 'Freedom'" (27). This response is ironic. There is very little difference between a Catholic and a Baptist at the most basic level. Both look for certainty of their salvation in the merits of Christ and their sanctified lives, yet both would confess that Christ is the sole reason for their salvation. Looking at the daily lives of Baptists and Catholics, it is true that the Catholic bondage of works is much more structured than the Baptists, but both find at least some security for their salvation in their own merits. The freedom that Baptists value so highly has led them into spiritual slavery.

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## Appendix A

### *The Baptist Distinctives*

#### B Bible

The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice. The Bible alone determines what we must believe and do, Acts 2:42a; II Tim. 3:16.

#### A Autonomy

Autonomy of the local church. Every local Baptist Church governs itself without interference from any other church, council, or man. Every Baptist church is independent, although it may identify itself with other Baptist churches for fellowship and mutual support of the Gospel, Acts 2:41-47; 6:I-6, 13:1-3.

#### P Priesthood

Priesthood of believers. Every believer is a priest unto God and may approach God directly through Christ without necessity of going through an earthly priest or church, Acts 2:42d; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

#### T The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper. The ordinance of the church which commemorates the Savior's death, testifies of our love for Him, and anticipates His soon return, Matt. 26:26-39, I Cor. 11:23-31.

#### I Immersion

Immersion, the only correct method of baptizing believers. Believer's baptism is necessary for church membership and is a public testimony to one's saving faith in Jesus Christ, Acts 14:1, 8:36, 37.

#### S Salvation

Salvation by grace. God saves by His grace, all who receive, by faith the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can be saved by good works or religious deeds, Acts 16: 31, Rom. 3:24, Eph. 2:8-9.

#### T Transformed Life

All who trust Christ receive a new life and should seek, to live holy lives, 11 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3: 1-10; Titus 2:11-12; I Peter 2:9-10.

#### S Separation of Church and State

Separation of Church and State, with neither controlling the other, Mark 12:17

## Appendix B

Is the Bible God's Word, or does it just contain God's Word?

### *Church and ministry*

The autonomy of the local congregation seems to be an important point with Baptists. What role does a synod or some kind of organizational structure play in your church's ministry, if any?

Separation of church and state also seems to be important to Baptists. What is the church's role in society?

What is your understanding of the kingdom of God?

How does a Baptist minister receive a call to serve God? Does the call come straight from God? Does it come through the Word? Does it come through a congregation?

Can a synod or association of churches call a minister or must the call come from a local congregation?

Is there a church father that you admire or model your ministry after? If so which one? Luther? Calvin?

### *Christian life*

There are some stereotypes of Baptists that exist today, such as how a Baptist can't drink or smoke, or one of my members mentioned that some can't wear red clothes. Are any of these stereotypes true? Are there others? Do stereotypes find their roots in scripture or have some traditions just evolved into stereotypes?

Evaluate: A Christian is at the same time sinner and saint.

How important is a transformed life in Christ for a Christian?

Is this statement accurate? Jesus is your Lord first and then he is your Savior.

Is the New Testament Christian bound to obey Old Testament Laws?

Has Christ freed Christians from the Law of God?

If a person dies a Christian will he have to answer for any of the wrong things he has done during his life?

### *The Sacraments*

What are the means of grace to a Baptist? Or what does God use to feed a sin-sick soul the forgiveness it so desperately needs? Some have said prayer, following God's commands, being in the Word.

What does a Christian receive at the Lord's Supper compared to an unbeliever?

How important is the method that the Lord's Supper is received?

What does God mean when he says that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father?

What does a Christian receive in Baptism compared to an unbeliever?

How important is the method or way in which a person is baptized?

### *Conversion*

In conversion a Baptist believes that a person must make a decision for Christ. He or she must choose to follow Christ. What role does the surrounding atmosphere play? Such as the music. Can some things cheapen a conversion such as the hot bench, treeing the devil, faith healings, snake handling, etc. or might all of these have their place at certain times?

The gospel is powerful, Rom 1:16. If the same gospel message is heard by two unbelievers, why might one become a Christian and the other one remain an unbeliever?

What do you believe would happen to a Christian if he or she never makes a decision for Christ?

What does God mean when he says that mankind was created in the image of God?

What is your understanding of John 3:6?

Can you explain a scriptural basis for the Baptist teaching of an age of accountability?

I have heard Baptists quote the very hour that they made their decision for Christ. Do you ever think that a person can place too much emphasis on their decision so that it detracts from what Jesus has done?

### *General*

In all my research for general statements of what a Baptist is, not one article mentioned the rapture or a millennium. Is this teaching a Baptist teaching?