

Baptist History Homepage

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Baptists Not Protestants

By C. C. Carroll

The nature of the church. Back of the question why Baptists are not Protestants lies that of the nature of the church which Christ built. It is important that we understand what is His divine pattern for the church and that we frequently bring our own churches to the test of conformity to this pattern. The term "Protestant Church" is derived from the Reformation which bears the name of Luther. In that Reformation Christians broke away from the Catholic dogma of salvation by works, and everywhere preached the great truth of salvation by faith. Yet different church groups organized out of the Reformation in varying degrees held on to conceptions of Roman Catholic teachings that were basally inconsistent with salvation through faith alone. Most of them, for instance, held to infant baptism and practised for baptism the substitution of sprinkling or pouring, in principle conforming to the claimed right of substitution which had been exercised by Roman Catholics. These bodies were and are known as "Protestant Churches," from the fact that their origin is coupled with Luther's protest against the Roman Catholic hierarchy. On the other hand, Baptists have always from the earliest days appealed directly to the New Testament as their only authority for the form, power and purpose of church organizations.

[p. 176]

Scriptures give the church pattern. Baptists contend that there can be no proper standard for the Bible-believer of what constitutes the church other than that set forth in Scriptures. They claim that the Scriptures themselves determine in

principle the laws that govern the church of Christ throughout all ages until the Lord shall come again. In conformity to this principle they insist that the church is not a legislative body. What it shall do and the power by which it shall live and act are truths of divine revelation. Its nature and the methods by which its life is replenished and strengthened are revealed in the Scriptures alone. Also it has the promise that the Spirit of Christ, in response to the constant prayers of the church for guidance, will guide it and give it power and wisdom to do the work for which it was established. Thus it is an executive body, equipped and empowered by God to carry out His will for it in its witness in the world to the Gospel of Christ.

Its adequacy for all ages. If it is said that men in the first century, however devout and wise, could not co-ordinate an institution that would be adequate and adapted to all of the changes that would ever come in the world, it is granted that this is true. But it is our claim that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself organized the church and that He endowed it with all of the powers it would require to accomplish its ordained work. In Colossians 2:13-20 (Weymouth) Paul set forth our Lord's headship over the

[p. 177]

church and His authority over all created things in heaven and on earth in these words:

It is God who has delivered us out of the dominion of darkness, and has transferred us into the Kingdom of his dearly-loved Son, in whom we have our redemption -- the forgiveness of our sins. Christ is the visible representation of the invisible God, the Firstborn and Lord of all creation. For in Him was created the universe of things in heaven and on earth, things seen and things unseen, thrones, dominions, principedoms, powers -- all were created and exist through and for Him. And He is before all things, and in and through Him the universe is one harmonious whole . . . He is the Head of the Church. He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead; in order that He Himself may in all things occupy the foremost place. For it was the Father's gracious will that

the whole of the divine perfections should dwell in Him. And God purposed through Him to reconcile the universe to Himself, making peace through His blood, which was shed upon the Cross ♦ to reconcile to Himself through Him, I say, things on earth and things in heaven.

Gospel not bound by men. Baptists cannot accept as authoritative any centralization of power in hierarchy, arch-episcopacy, council, synod, convention or consistory, claiming the right of interpretation. The Gospel is not bound. No principle of interpretation that requires any post-Biblical additions to teachings or methods of reaching the meaning of the teachings in the New Testament about the church, has any weight with Baptists. Any claim of

[p. 178]

Apostolic succession that would take to itself authority to make decrees is as devoid of authority to bind Baptists in their doctrine of the church as would be the claims of a sect of the Jews that they sat in the seat of Moses. The law of the Spirit of Life in Jesus Christ, which has set us free from the law of sin and death and from the spirit of bondage, operates to teach the children of God in the right interpretation for themselves of the Word of God. Therefore, Baptists hold that the New Testament is the sole authority on the laws that govern the churches. It is their constitution and bill of rights, their constant court of appeal and end of all controversy.

An assembly of believers. In the search to find what the church is, what it should know and do, and how it is to accomplish its mission, we first discover that it is an assembly of believers associated with Jesus Christ and spoken of as His body and bride. The assembly is so related to the Holy Spirit as to be called His tabernacle, and so related to God the Father as to be called the house of God. The New Testament church was composed of members who had received the glad tidings of the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, and who had made confession of their sins in repentance toward God, and of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and were baptized. It is with definiteness that leaves no room for argument taught that the preaching of the glad tidings and the initiation of the ordinance of baptism were established at

[p. 179]

the hands of John the Baptist, nor is there any doubt that God had given John his authority to preach and to baptize. It is taught that he was set apart for his work from his mother's womb. His forerunner work had been foretold in Old Testament prophecy, which presented Him as a herald of God's new dispensation of grace in the redemption of lost men. From John until the consummation of all things in Christ the administration of God's grace is declared to be in the hands of the King to whom and through whom and for whom the church assembly is the authorized witness to mankind from the time of its enduement by the Holy Spirit. This new dispensation was to fulfill the old through the coming of the prophecy-announced King according to God's unchanged plans.

Christ placed baptism in the church. The fact that Jesus was baptized by John separates baptism from the actual sacrifice of the Lamb, and leaves it forever as an ordinance to picture the likeness of His death and burial, and of His resurrection. Later, as the head of the church assembly of baptized witnesses, Jesus expressed His sovereignty over the act and its perpetuation, but did not Himself baptize the disciples resulting from His preaching. That the authority to perpetuate the act was His alone is made clear in the fact that John never sought to organize his disciples into any kind of organization, nor did he authorize any of them to baptize others. To the contrary, John pointed his disciples to Jesus as the person in whom they had been planted and to

[p. 180]

whom they had been joined in the likeness of His death and the promise of His resurrection. Jesus committed the stewardship of baptism to the church assembly and authorized and directed its perpetual observance. This He did in the Great Commission to His assembly. The authority for the act, therefore, inheres in the stewardship of the church and its perpetual observance is guaranteed in the perpetuity of the church -- which in turn is guaranteed to His disciples in the promise of the ever-living and ever-reigning Christ.

John's disciples built into the church. It is the writer's purpose to show that the Lord Jesus called out the baptized disciples of John and built them into an assembly upon the sole foundation rock of His being the Christ, the Son of the living God. At Caesarea-Philippi He explained to His disciples what was the foundation basis of edification of the church. It was himself, and the God-imparted power given to men to receive Him. Vast credulity is required to enable one to imagine that the Lord Jesus turned away from explaining this one and sufficient foundation, that He might follow a tangent of explanation about Peter that would in effect leave out the foundation. That is to say, it would require that one of the living stones to be built upon this foundation (Peter) should himself become that foundation and able to bear the whole superstructure. Peter himself had no such illusion concerning the matter, nor did any of the other Apostles or disciples. Neither did Paul, the Apostle born out of due season, but

[p. 181]

personally indoctrinated by the Lord Himself. For Paul wrote of the Lord Jesus as the foundation of the church and explained the relationship of the Apostles to that foundation. Paul was in thorough accord with Peter's testimony in doing this. Only the Anointed One, the Christ, could be the Head of the Church, and the Rock upon which the Church is built. John the baptizer saw the anointing of the Christ, saw the Lord coming up out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descending upon Him as a dove, and he heard the confirmation of His anointing in the words of the Father, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

No authority for a "church" of churches. The setting up of a centralized authority that presumes to speak for and pass out laws to the local church assembly which Christ built, is entirely without New Testament authority. But it is in consonance with the material power by which men seek to secure impressive world results and it has therefore not failed to seduce many groups of professing Christians. The papal system, with headquarters in Rome, and with a multiplicity of officials down the line between the pope and individual members of the flock, is an impressive world spectacle and vehicle of material power among men and nations. But it is utterly at variance with the

church that Christ built and over which He alone was ever to be the Head, Himself empowering and guiding each church through the Holy Spirit dwelling within it. Protestant bodies in varying degrees have sought to

[p. 182]

set up centralized instrumentalities of power that would authoritatively function for and direct the local assemblies within their spiritual body. Insofar as they have done this, they have held on to principles of the Roman body out of which their forebears came in the protest of the Reformation.

Other errors from hierarchical assumptions. When vaulting human ambition changed the New Testament pattern of the church into the papacy, it was inevitable that it would be followed by other unwarranted assumptions of authority in church organization and life. This exhibited itself, contrary to the New Testament teaching, in the change of ordinances, doctrines, terms of discipleship, and in entangling alliances between Church and State. It is unfortunately true that not all of the Christian fellowship which came out by way of protest from Romanism, cleared their skirts at all points in relation to world-conforming heresies. In the New Testament we find in the churches certain officers and servants, whose functions are clearly exhibited. Some of these were to be in perpetuity under the setting apart by the assembly. But we find no provision for this except for pastors and deacons, the service of which two classes of ministers is definitely prescribed. Baptists have brought themselves into grief and confusion whenever they have failed to confine the work of pastors and deacons to that which is exemplified and prescribed for them by the Holy Spirit in the written Word. Most Protestant bodies, following the Roman example, have numerous

[p. 183]

ecclesiastical officials with recognized ecclesiastical authority, all of which is without New Testament authorization. Baptists place individuals in places of responsibility and honor them for faithfulness in spirit and service, but none of these has any

ecclesiastical authority over the church. Roman Catholics, claiming authority under God to change whatever "the Church" wants to change, turns from New Testament baptism which was always by immersion to the sprinkling substitutes therefor. Catholics did not and do not claim that this is Scriptural. Therefore Protestant bodies, influenced by the Catholic change, yet refusing to claim authority to change the Scriptural requirements, found it necessary to claim that their substitutes for Scriptural baptism were valid on the ground of sound scholarship. They have done so and a sorry mess they have made of it. The matter is mentioned here for its light upon our thesis that Baptists are not Protestants. Aside from their personal spiritual weaknesses, which they share with other Christians, Baptists are without reason, temptation, or even excuse, for turning away from the New Testament pattern in order to conformity to whatever happens to have popular vogue in the world about them.

Churches are built and grow under the Holy

Spirit. Witnessing power came to Christ's assembly in the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Churches were rapidly multiplied under the direct jurisdiction and empowering of the Holy

[p. 184]

Spirit. He guided them in indoctrination, polity, comity, stewardship, spiritual understanding and knowledge, and in the scope and method of their witness. It is vital to understand that the multiplication of churches was the direct result of the increasing number of believers. The believers increased through the preaching of the Gospel by the church, which in its witness-bearing was honored and sustained and guided by the regenerating and sanctifying Holy Spirit. Thus each believer had in himself the witness and life of an incorruptible seed. When he became a disciple, he also became a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. The assembly of baptized believers became the house of God, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Both the believer and the church became capable of receiving spiritual communications from God through His Son, by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit measured the gifts to those whom He set in the church for its edification as a witnessing body. Thus order and not confusion resulted in the early churches, through gifts of the Spirit which Paul enumerates in I Corinthians 12:27, 28: "Now are ye the body of Christ and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles,

secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." The use of the gifts are explained in the preceding context, and it is later shown how they pass away when their purpose is accomplished.

[p. 185]

The two church ordinances. Our Lord has set two ordinances in the church. Baptism precedes church membership, but it is administered under the authority of the church to those who profess repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Credible profession of faith in Him constitutes discipleship and follows next in the order of the Great Commission. Disciples are next taught to observe all things whatsoever Jesus has commanded His church. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Him, and committed to the Apostles to deliver to the church for its observance. It was so committed to Paul, and how he delivered it to the churches is illustrated in the case of the church at Corinth. The supper is explained by the Lord to be a memorial to His death, and a prophecy of His final assembling of all of the redeemed to be forever with Him. Its observance on earth is put into the hands of the churches until He shall come in glory, and it is not subject to be changed in any way. It was not given as a means of salvation, for those who received it did so on the basis of their already having eternal life. They received it, too, because He was in them and they were in Him and in God through Him, in a mystical union of regeneration and adoption by the Holy Spirit. It is thus a memorial of His death, in which He was offered once for all as the sacrifice for sin. The Priesthood of Jesus is set forth in *Hebrews*, where we read that the sin-offering of His blood was made once and forever and cleansed forever all who believed in His name, so that repeated

[p. 186]

crucifixions would put Him to open shame. There is absolutely no authority in the New Testament for changing either of the two ordinances.

We should avoid man-made patterns and follow the divine. Baptists acknowledge their obligation of obedience

only to churches of Christ which He has patterned in the New Testament. Yet they need to be watchful lest by imperceptible processes they shall be found seeking the apparent advantages of ecclesiastical hierarchy and centralization. These advantages are on the side of worldly appearance and not of inner spiritual reality. The church of Christ, the only church He built, antedates in origin every hierarchical and centralized ecclesiasticism. Christ's church differs from them fundamentally. The difference is in the means of growth, in doctrines, and in fidelity to the ordinances. The two groups also differ in devotion to New Testament order and faith. But Baptists today need to examine themselves in regard to the danger of internal inconsistencies and in regard to comity and methods of co-operation. If they do not, the danger is real that they shall increasingly exchange the revealed church pattern of God for expediency. And they shall also be in danger of neglecting the Scriptures of Truth while they mistakenly seek to profit by adopting systems that appear to catch the world-mind and that in spectacular results seem to work better than God's revealed plan. These world-pleasing devices are being mightily pressed among many Protestant churches today, and many Baptists are

[p. 187]

already being caught in the net of over-organization or that of unscriptural alliances made in the fair name of unity. Baptists must hold firmly to the standards clearly set out for them in the New Testament in regard to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and they must not become enamoured or be seduced by the world's standards of knowledge and education or their worldly notion of what constitutes proper religious comity, which carries with it the demand that Baptists reject their deepest principles, in order to conform, not to Bible principles, but to the false teachings of men.

Baptist principles in the first century and the twentieth. The successors of those disciples whose testimony was empowered at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, and which rang throughout the Apostolic and post-Apostolic churches, continued to multiply until the wilderness period described in the Book of Revelation. Faithful churches went into that wilderness period which through their testimony left many

spiritual descendants and from these other churches were formed of the New Testament order. Baptists hold that we have received from this succession of churches that bore faithful witness to the New Testament church pattern and teaching of continuity. We contend that it is only by the distribution of the Gospel through such assemblies that the blessed hope of the resurrection may be maintained on earth and religious liberty kept alive within the human race. We also hold that this true church testimony to the field and nature

[p. 188]

of civil government is essential to the preservation of civil liberty. We have faith to believe that the multiplication of these New Testament churches will continue, for we find in the closing Book of the New Testament that the enlightenment of the world is through the shining of the Lord's face. He continues to shepherd that light into the assemblies as lampstands, and into their pastors as His angels or messengers as stars. This He does through the work of the Holy Spirit who brings to life and to life more abundant preachers and churches to bear the witness Christ has commanded them. We believe that God's call to Baptists for this consistent ministry of His Word shall not be eclipsed nor cease. For the Son of God walks in the midst of the lampstands, and He holds His stars in His hands.

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Landmarkism Index
Baptist Controversies
Baptist History Homepage

Baptist History Homepage