

GOD IS AT WORK IN YOU!      Philippians 2:13

5 Distinctive Contributions of the Baptists

Not many years ago Sam Jones, an evangelist from North Georgia, came to the town where one of my friends pastored a Baptist church. Dr. Jones brought a message that really made a difference, at least to the pastor of The First Baptist Church. Under the influence of the vision and confrontational style of Sam Jones, the pastor preached his Sunday sermon then walked right out the door with the majority of the members following behind him. The few who remained behind stood and sang, "God be with you till we meet again."

The year..... was 1893, and the subject..... was alcohol. But the more fundamental issue was church discipline. This was not our sense of discipline as punishment but the expectation of Christian churches everywhere- that its members adhere to certain standards as conditions of membership, and more fundamentally, conditions of Christian discipleship, being real Christians.

Since its origin in the sixteenth century, Baptists have put a high priority on Christian discipleship as a way of life. This is one of the great contributions of Baptists which aims at what it means to be an authentic church. It has always been a hallmark of Baptists, that we believe in a reformation of life rather than merely a reformation of doctrine. That has set us apart from the other reformers through the centuries, yet typecasts us as 'The Battling Baptists,' always with differences of opinion, usually a conflict somewhere, often a splitting of congregations. Where you find a bunch of Baptists, you usually find as many opinions as people! All of us can tell stories of church troubles we have painfully endured or at least heard about.

There is no shortage of books and pamphlets designating the essential distinctives of Baptist churches, but I like to refer to these as the distinctive *contributions* of Baptists. The lists offered differ slightly, depending on whom you read, but the point is that most differences make real contributions to the Christian movement. As my friend Dwight Moody says, the best contribution we can make is to be Baptist! Let me explain.

The Christian Church is like an orchestra with each tradition playing its good part. The Catholics exemplify order, useful traditions, continuity and reverence. The Episcopalians maintain the liturgy in regular worship, dignity and identity. The Presbyterians emphasize the sovereignty of God through covenant and congregational government and the centrality of scripture. The Methodists led by the Wesley's brought us a focus on revival and spiritual disciplines. The Pentecostals reintroduced healing into the modern church and embody what it means for the church to be a counter-culture to the prevailing secularism of our day.

We Baptists can learn from others. Attend a Lutheran church and through 3 readings of scripture, several prayers, and the recitation of a confession of faith, the entire gospel will be fully declared! We Baptists would do well to declare our faith in more public and explicit ways. Baptists make their contribution to the Christian symphony. We play our instrument, hopefully not toot our own horn, and we make our own distinctive sound. What would it be like if we all made the same sound, played the same instrument? Or even played the same note or same tune. Within our baptist family we sing a different collection of tunes. I would encourage us all to do more than just attend out of convenience or family ties here, but to decide to be here for convictions of your own, and to make your heart and voice be heard as this church is now being shaped for God's future.

Well! Are you ready for my list of the 5 distinctive contributions?! I believe these are evidence of "God working in {our church} to will and to do His good purposes." I will speak of these in some of the well-worn phrases so often identified with our Baptist life. Here they are:

**1. First, ".....Once saved, always saved!".....**

This is a phrase wrongly identified with a fire-brand evangelism. This emphasizes our sense of the centrality of salvation and the experience of salvation as all Grace. We are saved by GRACE through FAITH, and that is not of ourselves.

This is the logical conclusion of the assurance of salvation on 3 important convictions.....

**One**, that God takes the initiative in salvation, it is God's prerogative by God's Sovereign Power. He does it, not we. We come to God through faith, but God saves. What God does never fails, nor can we undo it! What God does cannot be reversed.

**Second**, that salvation is by and for God's good loving purpose of Grace. We do not deserve it, nor can we do anything to earn it. A crucial question is whether we have genuinely experienced God's redeeming grace. One can be religious and never have personally surrendered to God's life changing grace. Some folks are still trying to earn it; and to them some churches bring the false excuse that you can fall from grace. Baptists do not buy that.

We never doubt what God does. We do doubt what some people have professed without really understanding. Then there are many who while professing Christian faith, never join in the chorus of God's people because of the scars or fears that lurk deep in their hearts, sometimes from toxic churches.

**2. The next** follows; ..... **BELIEVER'S BAPTISM**.....

Bartholomew Hubmeister was a Catholic Theologian who bucked the church's infant baptism practice. It was the early 1600's. His

conviction was a scriptural truth which formed early Baptist thought, that genuine religion cannot be coerced, or institutionally performed with any real effect.

Though we accept the fact that we need some protective security for our children, we believe that God created children innocent, and cares and provides for them until they reach an age of accountability. It happens at some point where they encounter evil and recognize a chance to choose otherwise. Reason tells us that faith is not created because someone speaks it over another, or a family takes you to church. Can it be truly faith if your inclusion into the church came without your own admission or confession accompanied by your understanding?

Believer's Baptism doesn't celebrate the mode of baptism but the meaning: That you have seen the difference and have made a decision to reject a life without God and follow Christ's way. You accept that Jesus has given His own life for your sins and opened heavens gates for all who would take Him at his word and follow, for YOU! A father and mother cannot baptize and save a child, but I will never understand a father who does not care enough to take a child to church to hear and receive the grace of God and the promise of Heaven so freely given in Jesus.

**3. This leads to another** formative conviction of the Baptists,..... **a REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**.....

This means that we believe in a gathered church, not a territorial church. In 1648, after much religious conflict, the civil and ecclesiastical leaders agreed on the Peace of Westphalia in which they affirmed the principle of *cuius region, eius religio*, the Latin for "as the prince, so the religion." The symbol of safe inclusion in a church was...infant baptism. So territorial churches include all who live in their boundaries rather than those who express their intent to live in obedience to Christ. Obedience qualifies any

church to follow the leading of God's Spirit, making each church AUTONOMOUS. There is no one who has authority over any Baptist church, no Pope, Priest or Council.

The Presbyterians were formed out of this atmosphere of a territorial church, the acceptance of infant baptism and rule of a presbytery. Some of the Presbyterians today have moved beyond and encourage personal confessions, though many are simply put on schedule to receive a catechism, and then agree to a baptism. These are areas Baptists have never been willing to compromise, though often we have been guilty ourselves of a wooden requirement of doing things our way, and out of fear have browbeaten people into guilt confessions.

Only adults who accept Jesus as Son of God, Savior, and Lord of their lives are to be recognized as having received the gifts of God. Their faith is evidenced by an open confession of their faith and a witness of God's power to change and give a spiritual rebirth, by the waters of BAPTISM. It is a MARK of those who are counted by Jesus Christ as His church.

#### ***4. The Fourth:.....PRIESTHOOD OF EVERY BELIEVER.....***

It is Martin Luther's original conviction and confession during the famed momentous era called the Reformation. It has 2 important elements. Every person has the right and responsibility to address God. No priest, pope or intermediary is required, nor are they able to secure salvation or blessings from God for another.

This was devastating to the Catholic Church in the 1500's when first professed. The ecclesiastical structure built up by the church at that time had become a man-made organization, a crutch, a powerful hold over a sacred trust. This conviction effectively dismantled the corrupt church of that day. If we ever abandon it or turn it into an excuse to no longer have responsibility for God's

church as a living witness and refuge for the peoples of the world, we do so to our own peril.

**5. Another part of the Priesthood is Competency of the Soul.**

William Carey was an early missionary whose statement of Scripture went against the church leaders. He believed that God was calling us into the darkest parts of the world to share the gospel! *“Sit down, young man! When God wants your help, He’ll ask for it!”* Carey made a statement as he left for the East Indies, one that has defined the obligations of every priest before God.....**EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD....**

.....**ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.....**

We Baptists live by this sense of mission and with this further theological interpretation: that everyone may speak **TO** God for people, and that everyone must speak **FOR** God to people. Our baptism is our ordination into ministry, because that is the life Christ Jesus has claimed us for.

Here you have my list of 5. There are so many contributions from all our sister denominations. We are a symphony, and the best way we can contribute is to be Baptist, fully baptist!

END 1<sup>st</sup> DRAFT, 1750 words