

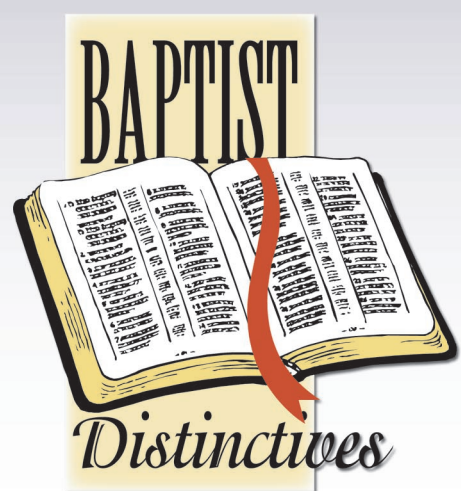


BAPTISTS

**WHO?
WHAT?
WHY?
WHERE?
WHEN?**

**“Yea,
I have a
goodly
heritage.”**

Psalm 16:6



Baptists number in the millions worldwide and frequently make news. Yet little is known about Baptists by the world in general and what is known is often misunderstood. Even some Baptists are not familiar with Baptist beliefs and practices, heritage and history. For example,

Did you know...

- ...a Baptist pastor established the first form of governance in America that provided complete religious freedom for all
- ...the first Baptist missionaries from America were not Baptists when they set sail for the mission field but became Baptists *on the way* to the mission field
- ...the first Baptist pastor in England was imprisoned by King James I (of King James Bible fame) for insisting that all persons should have freedom to worship
- ...the first elected president of the Republic of Texas became an outstanding Texas Baptist layman
- ...some of the earliest Baptists practiced baptism by pouring and not by immersion but soon determined that the Bible taught immersion is the correct way to baptize
- ...some early Baptists in America were publicly whipped for including singing in a worship service because such singing was viewed as unspiritual and unbiblical
- ...the first Baptist missionary from the United States to another country was an African-American who had been a slave
- ...a Baptist pastor from Texas preached a sermon from the steps of the United States Capitol in Washington D. C. on religious liberty
- ...a Baptist pastor in Virginia met with James Madison to encourage an amendment to the Constitution of the United States guaranteeing freedom of religion
- ...the best known evangelist in the world is a Baptist whose church membership is in Texas
- ...that the first person baptized in the Gulf of Mexico as a Baptist when Texas was still an independent nation founded a major milk company
- ...that a former President of the United States of America and a Nobel Prize recipient is a Baptist layman Sunday School teacher
- ...that a generous Baptist businessman was the first to develop an effective process for pasteurizing cheese
- ...that the author of the widely used devotional book *My Utmost for His Highest* was a Baptist from a devout Baptist family, his father and brother being Baptist pastors

These “did you know” statements are interesting (there will be more information on them in subsequent articles in this series) but they do not indicate what beliefs and practices characterize Baptists. If someone were to ask you, “What is the one thing that distinguishes Baptists from other Christian denominations?” what would your answer be? Or if you were asked, “What difference

does it make being a Baptist Christian?” what would you say? In the coming weeks this series of articles will explore such questions.

Why Is There a Lack of Knowledge About Baptists?

Why do many Baptists today lack understanding of what it means to be a Baptist? Several factors likely have contributed to this lack of knowledge:

- BYPU, BTU, Training Union, and Church Training held on Sunday evenings in churches (the name differed in different eras of Baptist life but the aim of each was to “make disciples”) emphasized Baptist doctrine, practice, and history, but they no longer exist.
- A multitude of people have joined Baptist churches in recent years from other denominations and others have come with little or no church background. In both cases their knowledge of Baptist beliefs and practices is usually limited.
- Some Baptist churches provide little or no help for members to understand what it means to be a Baptist Christian and a Baptist church.
- Some persons believe that denominations are either a thing of the past or of little importance. (The fact is that the Baptist denomination is growing, not fading away, and denominational differences are important.)

“Every Baptist ought to know why he is a Baptist, and to know it from the specific commands of God’s Word. Not to have such knowledge is for our churches to be harmed in every way.”

George W. Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, 1897-1944

The Growing Interest In Baptist Beliefs

Such a decline in understanding of who Baptists really are, both among Baptists and non-Baptists, has ignited a renewed interest in the beliefs, practices, and heritage of our Baptist family of Christians.

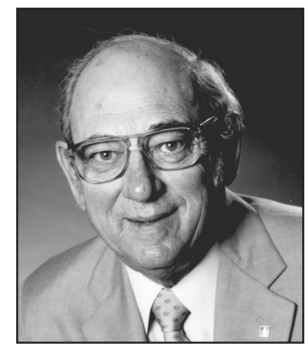
We are recognizing the importance of what George W. Truett, famed pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, declared a century ago: “Every Baptist ought to know why he is a Baptist, and to know it from the specific commands of God’s Word. Not to have such knowledge is for our churches to be harmed in every way.”

Baptists of the past held steadfastly to those beliefs and practices that made them a distinct denomination. They did so, not because they wanted to be distinct, but because they were convinced that they were true to God’s Word. They endured fierce opposition from governments and other Christian groups. They suffered ridicule, fines, public floggings, imprisonment, and death for their refusal to abandon their convictions

based on the Bible. Surely we ought to take seriously and pass to succeeding generations the biblically based faith that they paid such a high price to preserve.

Thankfully, a renewed emphasis on Baptist doctrine, practice, and heritage is underway. In 1994 the Baptist General Convention of Texas established the Baptist Distinctives Committee and Baptist Heritage Center to provide information and inspiration about Baptist beliefs and polity. Baptist schools offer courses on Baptist identity. Increasing numbers of churches provide conferences on Baptist beliefs. Books and other materials on Baptist beliefs and heritage are being produced. More and more pastors preach sermons on Baptist distinctives.

A Year-long Series of Articles on Beliefs Important to Baptists



Noble Hurley

Mr. Noble Hurley had a passion for helping to tell the story of Baptists, to swell the tide of increased interest in Baptists, and to

expel the darkness of misunderstanding and ignorance about Baptists. Thus, prior to his death in 2004, he provided the resources to help do just that. This year-long series of articles in the *Baptist Standard* is the result of his generosity.

These articles are not an official statement of Baptist beliefs. In fact, no such “official” statement exists. No Baptist speaks for all Baptists. Therefore these articles represent the viewpoint of one Baptist, the author.

The series will deal with basic Baptist convictions and practices, supplying biblical bases and historical background. Topics to be covered include the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Bible, soul competency, the nature of salvation, the priesthood of believers, believer’s baptism, church membership and polity, autonomy, voluntary cooperation, religious liberty and the separation of church and state, and major ways Baptists relate to the world.

Some if not most of these topics are controversial. That is not surprising. Heated differences among Baptists is not new. It has been said that Baptists are not a silent people. Rather Baptists passionately express their convictions. Our commitment to freedom of interpretation and expression leads to differences.

Of course, such brief articles cannot adequately deal with these topics. In order to make more information available a website will carry articles and resources on each topic. See www.baptistdistinctives.org.

These articles go forth with the prayer that the end result will be not only better understanding of the who, what, why, where, and when of Baptists but also the advancement of the cause of Christ throughout the world.

For more information see www.baptistdistinctives.org.