

WHY I AM A BAPTIST
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INTRODUCTION: The Bible says, “*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches...*” (Prov.22:1a). I still believe that the name “*Baptist*” is a good name! I want to first say that I am a Christian! That is the greatest name a person can bear...to be a follower...a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, by God’s sovereignty, I express my faith to God as a Baptist. Why? I seek to answer that question today.

Many might think that I am a Baptist simply because my Great Grand Parents and my Grand Parents were Baptists, and because my parents are Baptists today...and I do not deny that this is certainly a factor in my being a Baptist. However, I went through a season in my twenties that there was a “bad taste in my mouth” about my being a Baptist.

When I was at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, the liberal stronghold there almost drove me away from the SBC. On the other side of the equation, it seemed to me that there was an epidemic of dead traditional conservative churches that resisted the movement of the Spirit of God and the bold preaching of the Word of God. I graduated seminary feeling like a “man without a country.” I remember telling my wife as I neared graduation, “*There is no place for me in this denomination.*”

I must confess that I am often still frustrated with the Southern Baptist Convention! I tire of denominational politics and the liberal strongholds that most state conventions still operate under even today. I am nauseated by the fact that the “model church” that is being held up as the example by our denomination today is the seeker friendly model. It saddens and sickens me that by and large our denomination has forsaken the exposition of Scripture. I am also deeply troubled by our denomination’s lust for numbers at almost any cost. I really do believe we have some threats looming in our denomination today that are far greater than what we faced in the 70’s through the 90’s.

But as I read of Southern Baptist men of the past...as I read my Bible...as I exegete Scripture I have made a wonderful discovery on my own...to the core of my bone marrow I really am a Baptist! Not because of heritage or lineage but because of the Bible!

Fifteen years plus of exposition of Scripture has led me to the conclusion that the Baptist faith is New Testament Christianity! Fifteen years of exposition has affirmed my being a Baptist! Fifteen years of diligent study of the Word of God has caused me to see why I am a Baptist.

I experienced a special blessing earlier this year before I traveled to India in January. I was in Lifeway Christian Bookstore and I saw a book that caught my attention. The name of the Book was Why I Am A Baptist by editors Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

The book is a compilation of various Baptist men and women who answer the question “*Why I Am A Baptist.*” While I thought that a few of the writers were weak, overall it was an excellent book. The refreshing thing for me as I read the book was to see other men and women who searched the Scriptures and arrived at the same conclusions I have arrived at. It really affirmed this journey that I am on as a Baptist. Charles Spurgeon once said, “*I am not ashamed to take to myself the name Baptist.*” Neither am I! Let me give you a few reasons why:

1. The Inerrancy of Scripture: By inerrancy, Baptists believe that the entire Bible is “*truth without any mixture of error...therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy...*” (Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) Article I. The Scriptures) The Bible says,

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim.3:16-17)

That word “*inspiration of God*” *theopneustos*, means “the breath of God” and therefore “divinely inspired.” Since the Bible is God’s very breath, as God Himself, the Word of God can contain no error!

As a Baptist, we place no question marks over the Word of God! We bow our knee before the sacred Scriptures and trust the Bible as the complete revelation of God of Himself to man!

The battle in the 70's, 80's, and 90's in the Southern Baptist Convention was over the inerrancy of Scripture. Our denomination did something no other denomination has ever been able to accomplish. We turned our denomination back away from liberalism that sought to destroy the very fabric of who we are as a denomination.

Many of our state conventions are still very liberal, just like the Tennessee Baptist Convention. But I'm thankful that the national convention and our boards, agencies, and seminaries are on a solid theological footing. The inerrancy of Scripture is one reason I am a Baptist.

Every denomination that has wavered on the issue of the Inerrancy of the Bible has declined and died! I am thankful that Baptists thought the Inerrancy of Scripture worth fighting for!

2. Salvation By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone: As Baptist we regularly quote Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* The BF&M says,

"Salvation...is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer." (Article IV. Salvation)

Baptists believe that salvation is only by the grace of God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and involves no works on the part of the believer...

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal.2:16)

Salvation is offered freely to the believer as a gift, completely apart from religious deeds and meritorious works, *"...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Rom.5:23b). Baptists are firmly in the "grace camp." That is another reason I am a Baptist.

3. A High View of Sovereign Grace: Historically, Baptists have had a very high view of the sovereignty of God in salvation. This rich history is also rooted in the forefathers of the Southern Baptist Convention. Listen to the BF&M,

"Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which he regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners." (Article V. God's Purpose of Grace)

Article V means that our salvation from sin, our present spiritual growth and maturity, and our future perfection at the coming of Christ are all due to God's choosing us for salvation. This what Baptists mean by "grace." That God *"...hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."* (Eph.1:4) Because God chose us in Jesus to be saved even before the world began, our salvation is not due to some work we do...but the sovereign grace of our loving Father.

This used to be basic teaching in the Southern Baptist Convention and is the birthmark of Baptists down through history. Here is a short roll call of Baptist and Southern Baptist leaders of the past who affirmed sovereign grace:

- John Bunyan – Author of Pilgrim's Progress
- John Gill – Well known Baptist Commentator
- Andrew Fuller
- W.B. Johnson – 1st President of The Southern Baptist Seminary
- R.B.C. Howell – 2nd President of The Southern Baptist Seminary
- Richard Fuller – 3rd President of The Southern Baptist Seminary
- J.L. Dagg – 1st writing systematic theologian of the Southern Baptist Convention
- Baisel Manley, Sr. – Founder of Furman University
- J.P. Boyce – Founder of The Southern Baptist Seminary

- John Broadus – From which we get the name Broadman and Holman
- B.H. Carroll – Founder of Southwestern Baptist Seminary
- A.T. Robertson – Greek Scholar from Southern Baptist Seminary

The courage to say what the Bible says about election and sovereign grace is another reason I am a Baptist.

4. The Eternal Security of the Believer: This is the Bible doctrine that once a person is genuinely saved, he can never lose his salvation in Christ Jesus. Again, the BF&M says,

“All true believers will endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” (Article V. God’s Purpose of Grace)

This is completely consistent with the doctrines of grace! If God chose us in Christ Jesus before the world began (Eph.1:4), then nothing in this world can ever separate us from Jesus Christ...

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38)

There are precious few Christian churches that affirm the eternal security of the believer in Christ...Baptist are one of those few. This is why I am a Baptist.

5. Believers Baptism: This is where we get our name, “Baptist” because our forefathers demanded (often at the price of their lives) that baptism be administered only for believers...those who are already saved! The BF&M says,

“Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior...it is a testimony to his faith...”

Below is a summary of what the Bible teaches about water baptism:

- It has no power to save (1 Peter 3:21; 1 Cor.1:17)
- It follows conversion (Acts 8:36-37; Acts 2:38; Acts 16:32-33; Acts 2:41)
- It is by immersion: *baptize*, means to bury or submerge!
- It is public identification with Christ and His local church (Acts.2:41)
- It pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom.6:4)
- It is a Trinitarian baptism (Matt.28:19)

Our forefathers thought the doctrine of Christian to be so important that they gave their lives defending it and considered it worth of starting a new denomination over. They believe that the doctrine of believer’s baptism was worth dividing over! That’s why I am a Baptist!

6. Congregational Church Polity: By this Baptist teach that the body of Christ, the church, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the final authority in church government. Not some small group of men that meet and decide which direction the church should go. The BF&M says,

“Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic process. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.” (Article VI. The Church)

In the book, [Why I Am A Baptist](#), Bro. Mark Dever gives some compelling Scriptural evidence for congregational government in the church:

- In Matthew 18, when Jesus taught on church discipline and the correction of a sinning brother, He said, “*tell it to the church*” (Matt.18:17) not to a pope or a bishop, a conference, and elder, or even the pastor...but rather the church! The church was “*the final court of appeal.*”
- In Acts 6 when the Greek widows were being neglected at meal time and a murmuring arose with potential to split the church...who did the apostles appeal to in order to solve this problem in the congregation? The congregation! *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*
- In 1 Corinthians 5, who did Paul call upon to remove the incestuous member of the church? The church!
- In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul acknowledged that the congregation had acted to remove the incestuous member by a vote of the majority. “*The punishment of the majority is sufficient for such a person.*”
- In Galatia some were teaching damnable doctrines and appealing to angels and the authority of men to authenticate their message. Paul appealed to the “*churches of Galatia*” not to receive their message. It was the church Paul addressed...not some group within the church. Paul was teaching that no angel or apostle should be received by the church unless the message lined up with the Word of God.
- In 2 Timothy 4, Paul blamed the churches for not “*enduring sound doctrine.*” The blame did not rest on the elders or the deacons...but the church as a whole!

I believe the Baptist model for of church government is biblically correct. The church, under the Lordship of Christ, is the final authority on matters relating to the church. The church is overseen by pastors and served by deacons but the final say must remain with the body of Christ.

Through the years I have heard numerous arguments against congregational rule...and certainly it is not a perfect system. One such argument is that the church can vote not to follow the pastor’s leadership. While that is true, in my 15 years of pastoral ministry, I have never once had a church vote go against me as pastor. I believe this is because by the time I bring something to the church it has been so bathed in prayer and godly counsel that the church sees the validity in my request.

I also take comfort in the fact that no clique, schism, or power group can hold me or this church hostage from following our Head, the Lord Jesus. If that is ever attempted, I will take my case to the church and let the body rule! I will rest in and accept the will of the body...but I’m not comfortable with a few exclusively determining the direction of the church.

If we did not have congregational rule here I would probably no longer be your pastor. There was a time when a small group of men wanted me gone. There was a time when if they could, they would have terminated me. But they knew that the by-laws of our church called for a 75% majority vote to remove the pastor and that there was no way they could get that...so they themselves left. Congregational rule saved the day! Congregational church government is one reason I am a Baptist.

7. The Autonomy of the Local Church: The BF&M states, “*A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.*” (Article V. The Church)

The word “*autonomous*” means independent, self-directed, self-governing, or self-ruling. In layman’s terms...no one can tell our congregation what to do except our congregation! This is a foundational principle of the Baptist faith and goes all the way back to the Protestant Reformation...it is also one huge reason I am a Baptist!

No Cardinal, Pope, Bishop, Session, Council, Board or Agency can impose their will upon us. No one can interfere with our church as we seek to follow the Lordship of Christ. We are accountable to no “*higher authority*” on this earth, but are directly accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the “*head of the church and the Savior of the body*” (Eph.5:23)

Even our association with the Southern Baptist Convention is strictly voluntary! We can change, alter, or suspend our partnership with them at any time if we as a body deem it necessary!

We have had several discussions already about our frustration with the Tennessee Baptist Convention's liberalism and direction of the money we send to them each month. We have the power to stop giving, give more, designate our giving away from objectionable things. No one in Nashville can impose their will on Shelbyville Mills Baptist Church. They are our denominational servants! Their only reason for existence is to serve us, the local church.

This is a non-negotiable for me! I cannot tell you the blessed privilege it is to pray, read my Bible, seek godly counsel, and then lead you as a church without some "superior" over me check-mating all my decisions. I could not work that way. I must be directly accountable to my Blessed Lord and this local church...no one else! I am a local church man to the core of my being. This is why I am a Baptist!

8. A Fervor For Evangelism: Jesus said, "...Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt.4:19) I am thankful that I have been raised in a denomination that has consistently taught me that it is the job of every Christian to be personally involved in witnessing! I am thankful to be in a denomination that has taught me well and equipped me to share my faith with anyone at any time!

The passion for souls that is Baptist runs deep in me! My entire ministry I have made personal witnessing a top priority! I believe the FAITH emphasis in our own Southern Baptist Convention to be one of the best models for spreading the gospel I have ever been a part of. I cannot tell you how it thrilled my heart Monday night to see over 130 people enrolled in FAITH for Semester 8.

It is such a blessing to be a part of a denomination that affirms personal witnessing. This is another reason I am a Baptist

9. A Passion for Missions: The BF&M says that the church should be "*seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.*" Historically, Baptists have been a mission minded people. In our own Southern Baptist Convention we support over 5,000 missionaries through the Cooperative Program.

The International Mission Board under the leadership of Dr. Jerry Rankin has encouraged churches to get personally involved in doing their own mission work! Missions is the mandate of each local church. While the IMB and NAMB can assist us in going...they cannot go for us! We, SMBC, are commanded to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt.28:18-20).

What a blessing it is to be in a denomination that does not tip missions but makes missions a top priority! This is why I am a Baptist.

My life and journey for Christ has been like being on a narrow road (Matt.7:14). All along this road there have been exit ramps enticing me to forsake my Baptist roots.

(A) The "*Charismatic Exit Ramp*" was put in front of me early on in my journey. But as I went down that exit ramp I discovered...

- They tend to be too man-centered and experienced based in their faith.
- Many of them sound a mixed message on salvation – incorporating works / baptism.
- Most of them do not believe in the eternal security of the believer.
- Exposition of Scripture is all but unheard of.
- Doctrinal error abounds.
- They are weak on evangelism and missions.
- They are weak on accountability to the local church.

I decided not to take the Charismatic exit ramp!

(B) Being from the Muscle Shoals, Alabama area which is the “hub on the wheel” for Campbellism or “The Church of Christ” as they like to call it, the “*Church of Christ Exit Ramp*” was placed in front of me early on. However, as I explored what was at the bottom of that ramp, I quickly recoiled...

- They teach a works-based salvation.
- They teach baptismal regeneration.
- They do not have congregational church government...but Elder rule.
- They do not have instrumental worship.
- They are Armenian, believing that a soul can “fall from grace.”
- They are weak and often anti-missions and evangelism
- Exposition of Scripture is not a priority

(C) The most recent exit ramp that I have traveled past is the “*Reformed or Presbyterian Exit Ramp*” There was much about this exit that was and still is attractive to me. There are several things that endear me to these brothers and sisters:

- There is a strong emphasis on exposition of Scripture.
- They believe in the inerrancy of the Word of God.
- They believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone.
- They teach and practice church discipline.
- They believe in the eternal security of the believer.
- They are honest and truthful for the most part about the doctrines of election, predestination, and foreknowledge.

What then kept me from taking the “*Reformed exit ramp?*” There are a few things that will not allow me to take to myself the name “*reformed*” even though I deeply love and respect them as my brothers and sisters in Christ:

- Infant Baptism – The idea of a “*covenant community*” where infants are included in the covenant through infant baptism is completely unscriptural! There is not a shred of Biblical support for this spiritually dangerous practice!
- Elder Rule – This is the Presbyterian model of church government in which an Elder board completely decides the direction of the church. In this model, I believe the authority of the church body is usurped.
- Coolness or indifference to evangelism and missions. This would certainly not apply to all...but it seems to be the case with many if not most reformed churches. A passion for souls does not seem to be a top priority!

I could go on...but let me just say that I’m still on the Baptist highway! By God’s grace that’s where I plan on finishing my race!