

Trademarks: Biblical Distinctives of Biblical Baptists

Pastor David Wood

Obvious observations gleaned from the title:



Baptist World Missions

*Baptist-- This name, understood and interpreted in the light of its historical context, denotes a **people who have held tenaciously to great biblical truths when many of these truths were disdained and those who held them were vilified and persecuted.** We do not embrace these doctrines because they were taught by our Baptist forefathers, but because they are taught in holy Scripture. While recognizing there are people calling themselves "Baptists" who are unfaithful to the historic doctrinal position associated with the name, we are unwilling to give up a designation which has both historic and biblical significance.*



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We will use the acrostic, **BAPTIST**, in order to more readily define and remember each distinctive.

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Notes:

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Biblical Authority

2 Timothy 3:16,17 *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.*

The Bible is a (the) Divine Revelation given of God to man, and is the complete and infallible guide and standard of authority in all matters of religion and morals; whatever it teaches is to be believed, and what ever it commands is to be obeyed; whatever it commands is to be accepted as both right and useful; whatever it condemns is to be avoided as both wrong and hurtful; but what it neither commands nor teaches is not to be imposed on the conscience as of religious obligation.¹

II Peter 1:19-21

II Peter 3:1,2

I Thessalonians 2:13

II Timothy 3:16-17

Baptists believe that **every** area of life needs to be subject to the written Word of God. The Bible is the only source for authority and that which is not authorized in God's Word is heresy. "Because the Bible has never been outgrown as the one standard, and cannot be creedified in brief; the Baptist holds the substitution of any authoritative creed as the first step in apostasy."²

Mark 7:7-9

Let us be as the Bereans of old. . . *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."* **Acts 17:11**

1 Edward T. Hiscox, *The new directory for Baptist Churches*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1970), p. 11

2 Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*. (Watertown: Maranatha Baptist Press, reprint, 1976), p. 151.



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Pre-baptists

John Wycliffe –

John Hus

Peter Waldo

Anabaptists

John Bunyan

Conrad Grebel

Georgi Vins

Authority of Scripture is the key issue of the day!

Is the Bible indicative, illustrative, instructive, or authoritative?

Is it merely suggestive or does it give commandment?

Scripture 1st

Table Discussion Topics:

List Five Passages critical to understanding the authority of the Bible.

List four common practices (religious or non-religious) that contradict the Bible.

How would you be able to explain to a non-believer your conviction that the Bible is your authority for your faith and practice?



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Autonomy of Each Local Church

We ought to obey God rather than men.

Autonomy means

Does not connote that we are free from God's governing.

Free of any _____ ecclesiastical control.

"It is important to remember that the Lord is the Head and absolute authority of the church. Neither the leadership of a local church (pastors and deacons) nor the church's congregation has the right to lead the church. Both have the responsibility to discern the direction in which Christ wants the church to go and to head in that direction."³

Scriptures that relate:

Acts 5:29

Acts 6:3

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 6:1,4

1 Timothy 5:19-21

2 Thessalonians 3:11-15

Hebrews 13:7

Different kinds of Church Governments:

Episcopalian

Presbyterian

Congregational

³ Donald K. Anderson, *The Biblical Distinctives of Baptists* (Schaumburg, Illinois: Regular Baptist Press, 1992), p. 20.



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**The Magisterial movement saw a church and state connection.

Luther of Germany, Zwingli of Zurich, Calvin of Geneva, John Knox of Scotland, and Henry the 8th of England all developed their church methodology with a church/state connection in mind.

What resulted?

Anyone who disagreed with the form of Reformation in their country was subject to persecution.

The Radical (at the root different) emphasized a separation of church and state.

John Bunyan Conventicle Act Five Mile Act

"Baptist did not begin with the original Reformation groups. Baptists should not be identified historically with the 16th-century Swiss Brethren Anabaptist, the so-called Radical branch of the Reformation, but they are a part of a broader movement that began simultaneously with the Swiss Brethren in 1525– Free Church Separatism. The concept of an autonomous church with a gathered regenerate membership, practicing believer's baptism and separated from hierarchical ecclesiastical or governmental control, was at the heart of this movement. It is in stark contrast to the magisterial Reformation of the mainline Protestant groups who retained, to some degree, sponsorship of the state. Secondly, Baptists did not directly or physically come out of the Roman Catholic system unless we acknowledge an indirect departure via Puritan separatism from the episcopal Church of England.

Were exists a local assembly of regenerate believer priests under the headship of Christ and the proper leadership of pastor and deacons, practicing the New Testament ordinances, preaching and obeying the Word of God in purity and clarity, separated from worldliness and external ecclesiastical and civil control, there you have the church emphatically protesting against the world, the flesh, and the Devil."⁴

Table Discussion Questions:

What experience have you had with other types of church government systems?

Why is it important that each church answer directly to the authority of the Bible?

Study project: How is the modern day media concept of "separation of church and state" different from that of the founding fathers? Where did the concept of "separation of church and state" originate?

4 Dr. Gerald Priest, "Are Baptists Protestants" *Frontline Magazine*, September/October 2002, Volume 12 Number 5, page 32.



Notes:



Priesthood of the Believer

Other churches believe this Biblical truth, but they may not clarify it as they might. Others follow the tradition of the Roman Church and have an ecclesiastical hierarchy, which includes a system of priests.

It is important to note that the New Testament makes no mention of a system of priests after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; however, in order to understand the New Testament teaching on this precious truth it is necessary to review the Old Testament system of priests.

I. Old Testament System of Priests:

Exodus 19:5-6 "IF"

God through Moses gave the Decalogue.

Problem:

Solution:

I Samuel 2:22-25

II. The New Covenant High Priest and priesthood of believers.

The Old Coveant replaced by the New.

Hebrews 9:1-9, 11-28

When was the Old replaced by the New?

Matthew 27

I Peter 2:9 I Timothy 2:5 Hebrews 4:14-16 Hebrews 8:1-6

Hebrews 10:19-22 I Peter 2:5 Ephesians 4 (no mention of priests)

Hebrews 13:15,16

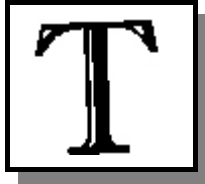
Revelation 1:6 AND 5:10

Believers are called priests



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Two Ordinances of the Local Church

BAPTISM

New Testament baptism had its origin in the command of Christ to make disciples and baptize them (Matt. 28:19). In the origination of this ordinance there is a particular order established; the first act was to make disciples, then those disciples were to be baptized. This is the pattern that is carried out in the book of Acts. Peter commanded that his hearers should first repent, then be baptized (Acts 2:38). Only those who heard the gospel, understood and responded to it through faith and repentance, could be baptized. The result was that the people received the Word, then were baptized (Acts 2:41). Those who responded to Philip's message first believed, then were baptized (Acts 8:12), similarly with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:38), with Paul (Acts 9:18), the Caesarean Gentiles (Acts 10:48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:32-33), and Crispus (Acts 18:8). All of these references indicate that baptism follows belief; repentance and faith precede the ordinance of baptism.

Baptism means identification. In New Testament baptism it involves identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. Being baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38) stresses association with Christ in the rite. Although Romans 6:4-5 refers to Spirit baptism and not water baptism, the passage nonetheless illustrates the meaning of water baptism. It is a public declaration that the believer has been united to Christ by faith in His death and resurrection.

Views of baptism.

(1) Means of saving grace (baptismal regeneration). In this view baptism "is a means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins. By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration." The Roman Catholic view is that faith is not necessary; the rite itself, properly performed, is sufficient.

The Lutheran view is that faith is a prerequisite. Infants should be baptized and may possess unconscious faith or faith of the parents.

(2) Sign and seal of the covenant. This is the view of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are "signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing by means whereof God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit....Like circumcision in the Old Testament, baptism makes us sure of God's promises....The act of baptism is both the means of initiation into the covenant and a sign of salvation."

(3) Symbol of our salvation. The view of Baptists and others is that baptism is only an outward sign of an inward change. It serves as a public testimony of faith in Christ. "It does not produce any spiritual change in the one baptized....Baptism conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing." Moreover, it is to be conducted only with believers. Hence, this third view is the only view that holds only believers should be baptized. The first two views state that, along with adult converts, children (infants) should or may be baptized.

Mode

There are differences of long standing concerning the mode of baptism. Part of the problem is that the word baptism is actually an untranslated word, having been incorporated into English through transliteration of the Greek word baptisma (verb, baptizo). There are three modes of baptism being practiced today: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. The defense for each of the modes is as follows.



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(1) Pouring or affusion. Historically, pouring was applied by the one baptizing pouring water three times over the head of the one being baptized—once for each member of the Trinity. It is argued that pouring best illustrates the work of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the person (Acts 2:17–18). Phrases such as “went down into the water” (Acts 8:38) and “coming up out of the water” (Mark 1:10), it is claimed, can relate to pouring just as well as immersion.... The inference is that although the early church employed immersion, it allowed for pouring. It appears that both of these modes were in existence as early as the second century.

Further support for the pouring mode is claimed from early pictorial illustrations showing the baptismal candidate standing in the water with the minister pouring water on his head. And finally, in the household baptisms of Cornelius (Acts 10:48) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) it would appear more likely that pouring rather than immersion was employed.

(2) Sprinkling or aspersion. In the early centuries sprinkling was reserved for the sick or those too weak to receive public baptism by immersion or pouring. Sprinkling was not accepted in general usage until the thirteenth century. Two precedents are often cited in support of sprinkling. In the Old Testament, Levites were cleansed when water was sprinkled on them (Num. 8:5–7; 19:8–13). Hebrews 9:10 refers to these ritual cleansings as “baptisms” (translated “washings” in the NASB). In the third century, Cyprian declared that it was not the amount of water nor the method of baptism that cleansed from sin; rather, where the faith of the recipient was genuine, sprinkling was as effective as another mode.

(3) Immersion. It is generally acknowledged that the early church immersed the people coming for baptism. A lexical study of baptizo indicates it means to “dip, immerse.” Oepke indicates baptizo means “to immerse” and shows how the word has been used: “to sink a ship,” “to sink (in the mud),” “to drown,” and “to perish.” This basic meaning accords with the emphasis of Scripture: Jesus was baptized by John “in the Jordan” and He came up “out of the water” (Mark 1:9–10; cf. Acts 8:38). On the other hand, the Greek has words for sprinkle and pour that are not used for baptism.

The many pools in Jerusalem would have been used for immersion and would likely have been used to immerse a large group like the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). It is also known that proselytes to Judaism were self-immersed, and immersion was also the mode practiced by the early church. Immersion best illustrates the truth of death and resurrection with Christ in Romans 6.

Infant baptism. Infant baptism, which is practiced by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans, is defended on several grounds. It is related to covenant theology. As infants in the nation Israel were circumcised and thereby brought into the believing community, so infant baptism is the counterpart of circumcision, which brings the infants into the Christian community. It is related to household salvation (cf. Acts 16:15, 31, 33–34; 18:8). Some understand the statement, “when she and her household had been baptized” (Acts 16:15) to mean infants were baptized.⁵

⁵ Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill.



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LORD'S SUPPER

Christ instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of His crucifixion, commanding that His followers continue to observe it until His return ([Matt. 26:26–29](#); [Mark 14:22–25](#); [Luke 22:14–23](#)). This was a new covenant or testament in contrast with the old Mosaic covenant. To enact the covenant, death was necessary because death provided forgiveness of sins. Paul also rehearsed the ordinance for the Corinthian church ([1 Cor. 11:23–32](#)). Of course, the issue at hand is, what is the meaning of the Lord's Supper? There have been four distinct views in Christendom concerning its meaning.

Transubstantiation. The Roman Catholic view concerning the Lord's Supper is called *transubstantiation*, meaning "a change of substance." The Roman Catholic church teaches that a miracle takes place at the eucharist (the Mass) in which the elements of the bread and wine are actually changed into the literal body and blood of Christ, although the sensory characteristics (which the Catholics call "accidents") of the elements—touch, taste, smell—may remain the same. The Creed of Pope Pius IV stated: "I profess that in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead;...there is truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood." As the priest consecrates the elements, their substance is changed from bread and wine to the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Thus in Catholic teaching, the participant actually partakes of the body of Christ. The Catholic church claims that this is the teaching of [John 6:32–58](#)

John O'Brien, a Roman Catholic, has stated, "The Mass with its colorful vestments and vivid ceremonies is a dramatic re-enactment in an unbloody manner of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary." A contemporary Roman Catholic theologian equates it with salvation, stating, "In his body and blood, then, Jesus himself is offered. He presents himself as a gift for salvation."

There are several serious problems with this view. (1) It views the work of Christ as unfinished, the sacrifice of Christ continuing in the Mass. Yet Christ declared His work completed ([John 19:30](#)) as did also the writer of Hebrews ([Heb. 10:10–14](#)) (2) Christ's human body would have to be omnipresent if this teaching were true; however, Christ's human body is localized in heaven ([Acts 7:56](#)). (3) In instituting the Supper, Christ used a common figure of speech—the metaphor ("This is my body...my blood")—in referring to the bread and cup. He was physically present yet distinct from the elements when He referred to them as His body and blood. Similarly, in the [John 6](#) passage, Jesus used a powerful metaphor ("eat my flesh...drink my blood") to vividly picture a saving faith-relationship to Himself. To insist that these expressions are literal language is to do violence to fundamental hermeneutical principles. (4) It was forbidden for Jews to drink blood ([Lev. 17:10–16](#)), yet this is what Jesus would be asking them to do if transubstantiation was what He intended.

Consubstantiation. The Lutheran view is referred to as *consubstantiation*, meaning Jesus' body and blood are actually present in the elements but the bread and wine remain such; they do not change into literal body and blood as taught in Roman Catholic doctrine. To emphasize the presence of Christ in the elements, Lutherans use the terms "in, with, and under" to express the actual presence of the body and blood of Christ. Martin Luther illustrated the point by stating that as heat penetrated an iron bar when placed in the fire, the bar nonetheless remained iron.

Lutherans also differ from the Roman Catholic view in rejecting the notion of the perpetual sacrifice of Christ in the eucharist. Luther insisted, however, "that by partaking of the sacrament one experiences a real benefit—forgiveness of sin and confirmation of faith. This benefit is due, however, not to the elements in the sacrament, but to one's reception of the Word by faith."

The problem with the Lutheran view of the eucharist is the failure to recognize Jesus' statement, "This is My body" as a figure of speech.



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Reformed view. The Reformed view is also called the Calvinist view because its adherents are from the Reformed churches (and others) who follow Calvin's teaching on the subject. Adherents to this view reject the notion of the literal presence of Christ in any sense and in this are similar to adherents of the memorial view. This view, however, does emphasize the "present spiritual work of Christ." Calvin taught that Christ is "present and enjoyed in His entire person, both body and blood. He emphasizes the mystical communion of believers with the entire person of the Redeemer.... the body and blood of Christ, though absent and locally present only in heaven, communicate a life-giving influence to the believer."

A problem with this view is that there is no explicit statement or inference from Scripture suggesting that grace is imparted to the participant.

Memorial view. The memorial view is also referred to as the Zwinglian view because the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) is considered a clear exponent of this view in contrast to other current views of his time. In contrast to the Calvinist view, Zwingli taught that there was no real presence of Christ but only a spiritual fellowship with Christ by those who partake in faith. Essential to the memorial view is the notion that the bread and cup are figurative only; they are a memorial to the death of Christ. While Zwingli acknowledged a spiritual presence of Christ for those who partake in faith, Anabaptists rejected the idea of Christ being present in the Lord's Supper any more than He would be present anywhere else. The memorial view emphasizes that the participants demonstrate faith in the death of Christ through this symbolic activity.

The memorial view has much to commend it in the Scriptures. An examination of the passages reveals the significance of the Lord's Supper. It is a memorial to His death (1 Cor. 11:24, 25): the recurring statement, "in remembrance of Me," makes this clear, the bread symbolizing His perfect body offered in sin-bearing sacrifice (1 Pet. 2:24) and the wine His blood shed for forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). It is a proclamation of the death of Christ while waiting for His coming (1 Cor. 11:26): it involves a looking back to the historical event of the cross and an anticipating of His return in the future (Matt. 26:29). It is a communion of believers with each other (1 Cor. 10:17): they eat and drink the same symbolic elements, focusing on their common faith in Christ.⁶

⁶ Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill.



Notes:



Individual Soul Liberty and Responsibility

Key figures:

1. Roger Williams
2. Isaac Backus
3. John Leland

James Madison, October 1785

(Patrick Henry Assessment Bill to tax Virginians to support the teachers of Christian religion... supported by George Washington, John Marshall)

To the Honorable the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia:

"...A Bill establishing a provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion" and conceiving the same, if finally armed with the sanctions of a law, will be a dangerous abuse of power...

Because we hold it for a fundamental and undeniable truth, "That Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence," the religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man.... It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent both in order of time and degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe..." (William J. Bennett *Our Sacred Honor* (Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1997), 326-328.)

It was James Madison who introduced the terminology "free exercise of religion" into the Bill of Rights. George Mason suggested the phrase, "that all men should enjoy the fullest toleration in the exercise of religion." Madison pushed the terminology, "free exercise"

"It was John Leland (a Virginia Baptist pastor), James Madison's near neighbor with whom Madison counseled on more than one occasion, who wrote, "Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another."

(W. Wayne Thompson and David L. Cummins, *This Day in Baptist History* (Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, SC, 1993), p 397.)



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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The meaning Individual Soul Liberty

Every individual has the liberty of conscience to _____.

Baptists don't force _____.

We do not coerce anyone to worship God.

Corinthians 5:10 Romans 14:12 2 Corinthians 4:2 Revelation 3:20

Limits of Individual Soul Liberty

1. Soul liberty is not a justification for disobeying Scripture.

Romans 13:1

We are not a law unto ourselves.

2. Soul liberty does not mean you can do whatever you want.

Romans 14:13,15

Our liberty stops where it infringes on another's right to exercise free choice.

Table Discussion Questions:

Do Baptists proselytize when they witness?

What is the proper definition of the word proselytize?

How is it used today in the media and by liberal politicians?



Notes:



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Acts 5:29

Matthew 22:17-22

2 Corinthians 6:14- 7:1

Romans 16:17-18

1 John 2:15-17

Three areas of Separation:

1.

2.

3.



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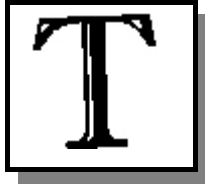
Notes from your own study of the Separation of Church and State issue:

See Appendix– Separation of Church and State

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Two Offices in the Local Church

I. The office of Pastor

One office with three titles.

Pastor –

Elder–

Bishop/Overseer–

Do these three titles represent three aspects of one office, or is the office of elder different from that of the pastor? Is the office of pastor different from that of bishop-overseer?

Acts 20:28

The same men identified as elders earlier in the chapter were also called overseers. These elder/overseers were to take heed for the flock and feed the flock– a pastoral function.

Feed– verb form of the word shepherd or pastor

One man performing three aspects of the same office.

Titus 1:5,7

The elder and the bishop refer to the same office.

1 Peter 5:1,2

Feed the flock – pastoral Oversight– bishop

The Elders were pastors and bishops.

How do Hebrews 13:7 and 17 relate to our local church?



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Why did the Holy Spirit use three different words to describe the same office?

He probably did so in order to give a fuller portrayal of what the office involves. The title "pastor" emphasizes the care, feeding, protection and comforting of God's people; "elder" emphasizes that the man is spiritually mature among the people of God; and "bishop" emphasizes that he guides and directs God's people.⁷

II. Deacon

The word means servant, minister.

Read the qualifications of deacons I Timothy 3:8-13

Read Acts 6:1-3

What is the primary goal of a deacon?

The word ministry is the word diakonia (our word for deacon)

In what ways can deacons help?

The Scriptures show that deacons are to serve in the church, but the Scriptures do not give deacons authority to govern the church. Deacons are ministers, not masters. Some people tend to view the church as an organization, in which the deacons form the board of directors and the pastor functions as a president who is accountable to the deacons. Often, church members refer to their deacons as "the board." Scripture gives the overseer (one of the titles for pastor) responsibilities to oversee or administer the church. First Timothy 3:5 and 5:17 refer to the pastor as taking care of or ruling the church. Of course, this administration must be based on the Word of God rather than on personal whim.⁸

7 Donald K Anderson and David M. Gower, *The Biblical Distinctives of Baptists* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1992), p. 62

8 Ibid, p. 68,69



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How should Ephesians 5:21 be applied in a church?

How can a pastor avoid being a dictator, yet at the same time lead?

The Bible speaks of the wisdom of having a multitude of counselors. Experience alone has demonstrated the danger of allowing one person to make unilateral decisions. Since most churches have only one pastor, it is wise for the pastor to have counselors to assist him in the oversight of the church. And since the personal and spiritual qualifications of a deacon are nearly identical to those for a pastor (I Timothy 3), logically the best assistants for the pastor are the deacons.⁹

⁹ Ibid, p. 69



Notes:

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ppendix ~ Separation of Church and State

The Truth About Separation of Church and State

Americans are generally uninformed when it comes to the United States Constitution. The results of a 2001 survey show that 84% of adults don't know that freedom of religion is one of the five rights guaranteed by the First Amendment! On the flip side, the majority of Americans wrongly believe that the phrase "Separation of Church and State" is actually found in the Constitution.

Here is what the First Amendment actually says:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

As Christians we have come to associate the phrase "Separation of Church and State" with the government's current hostility towards religion in the public arena. It is important, therefore, that we understand the "truth" about how this phrase became a part of constitutional case law and our culture.

Intent of First Amendment

The First Amendment was intended to forbid the federal government from establishing a national religion. The American people favored this because they had seen the harmful effects of established churches in most of the colonies. In Massachusetts, for example, Baptist pastors such as Isaac Backus were imprisoned for refusing to pay state taxes to support the established (Congregational) church.

In Virginia, the established Church of England

had used the Divine, Moral, and Martial Laws of 1611 to compel daily church attendance. Willful failure to attend divine services could result in a loss of wages, whipping, imprisonment, or even death! Although Christians not belonging to the Church of England won the right to practice their faith in Virginia without fear of persecution in 1699, the state government still tried to exercise control in religious matters.

In the 1780s, the Virginia legislature considered a general tax bill for the support of "Teachers of the Christian Religion." Payment was mandatory. As a result, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and other denominations vehemently opposed the bill. In 1785, James Madison expressed their sentiments well:

[T]hat religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence. The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right...We maintain therefore that in matters of Religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance.

The bill not only failed, but also served to promote the successful passage of Thomas Jefferson's "Bill for the Establishment of Religious Freedom" in 1786. Under this Virginia law, the people could not be forced to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever. There could be no punishment for religious opinions or belief. Freedom of religious expression replaced the sin and tyranny of compelling a man to contribute to the spread of opinions that he disbelieved and abhorred



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Virginia's religious freedom law laid a foundation for the passage of the First Amendment. By 1791, when the First Amendment was ratified, most of the colonies saw the merits of not establishing a national religion. The 1631 sentiments of Rhode Island's Roger Williams were echoed in all but Maryland, Connecticut and Massachusetts:

God requireth not a uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls.

Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists

In 1801, the Danbury Baptist Association in the state of Connecticut rejoiced at the election of Thomas Jefferson as the third President of the United States. On October 7, they wrote to Jefferson, their fellow believer in religious liberty, saying: "[We] believe that America's God has raised you up to fill the Chair of State." The Danbury Baptists complained to Jefferson of religious laws made by Connecticut's government. They feared the Congregationalist Church would become the state-sponsored religion and expressed approval for Jefferson's refusal to "assume the prerogative of Jehovah and make laws to govern the Kingdom of Christ." Although the Danbury Baptists understood that Jefferson, as President, could not "destroy the laws of each State," they expressed hope that his sentiment would affect the States "like the radiant beams of the sun."

It was Jefferson's response to this letter that is the origin of the infamous phrase "Separation of Church and State." Jefferson's reply on January 1, 1802, showed his agreement with the Danbury Baptists that:

Religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their

legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.

In referring to this "wall of separation" Jefferson was borrowing from the metaphor of Roger Williams, a fellow Baptist and Rhode Island's champion of religious freedom. Williams had previously written of "a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world."

Interpretations of the "Wall of Separation"

Christian scholars interpret Jefferson's Danbury letter in its context. They accept Jefferson's view that religion is a personal matter that should not be regulated by the federal government and that the federal government has no power to change law in the States. They interpret the "wall of separation" in the same way as Roger Williams: as a wall to protect God's garden from the world, to protect the church from the government.

In contrast, non-Christian scholars lift the Danbury letter out of its historical context. They turn the "wall" metaphor on its head and use it to protect the government from the church. This results in a concerted effort to rid government of any religious influence. Hence, the opposition to Bible reading in schools, the Boy Scouts, official proclamations promoting religious events, nativity scenes in public displays, the posting of the Ten Commandments on public buildings, prayer in public places, etc. They fail to recognize that



Notes:

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the Danbury Baptists would never have rejoiced at Jefferson's election if he stood for removal of religious influence on the government.

In 1947, the Supreme Court made the situation worse. This is when the Court gave the "wall" metaphor constitutional standing in *Everson v. Board of Education*. In this case, the court said:

The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach. (Note: no breach of the wall was found in *Everson*. The New Jersey statute permitting the state to reimburse parents for the expense of busing their children to and from private, including parochial, schools was upheld.)

In the *Everson* case the Supreme Court held for the first time that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment applied to individual states through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Prior to this only the federal government was precluded from establishing a religion. It is this Supreme Court case that stands in the way of individual states passing legislation that favors religion.

The *Everson* decision is a clear departure from the view of the Founding Fathers. The First Amendment was not intended to stop the states from establishing a church or favoring a particular religion. Both Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists understood this. Jefferson's reference to the legislature of "the whole American people" shows his understanding that the First Amendment applied to the federal government exclusively. Indeed, on January 23, 1808, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Rev. Samuel Miller saying:

Certainly no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government. It must then rest with the states, as far as it can be in any human authority. . .

The Danbury Baptists did not even ask Jefferson to apply the First Amendment to the states. They acknowledged, "the national government cannot destroy the laws of each State." Rather, they looked to Jefferson's power of persuasion to prevail in Connecticut.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

In the battleground to find the true meaning of the "wall of separation between Church and State" it is useful to consider the actions of the founders after the First Amendment was passed. A review of a sampling of their activities makes it clear that the founders had no intention of neutralizing government from all religious reference:

- The House of Representatives called for a national day of prayer and thanksgiving on September 24, 1789—the same day that it passed the First Amendment.
- From 1789 to today, Congress has authorized chaplains, paid by public funds, to offer prayers in Congress and in the armed services.
- Jefferson closed the Danbury letter, written in his official capacity as President, with a prayer: "I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man."
- On the very day Jefferson sent his letter to the Danbury Baptists he was making plans to attend church services in the House of Representatives.
- Jefferson signed a treaty into law in 1803 that provided for a government-funded missionary to the Kaskaskia Indians.
- In response to Congress' request of July 9, 1812, President James Madison issued a proclamation recommending a day of public humiliation and prayer to be observed by the people of the United States, with religious solemnity.
- In 1832 and 1833, Congress approved land grants to Columbian College (later George Washington University) and Georgetown University, Baptist and Jesuit schools respectively.



Notes:

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- The Ten Commandments are inscribed on the wall of the United States Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court begins each session with the prayer: "God save the United States and this Honorable Court."
- The ongoing use of the New England Primer in public schools despite its many religious references.
- Every president has invoked God's name in a prayerful manner in his inaugural address.

Presidential Viewpoints

This month as we celebrate President's Day, let us also consider the views of our first three Presidents on matters of church and state:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports...And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion...reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.

—George Washington, Farewell Address to the United States, 1796

[W]e have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion...Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

—John Adams, October 11, 1798

In matters of religion I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the General Government. I have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but have left them, as the Constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of the church or state authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies.

—Thomas Jefferson, Second Inaugural address, March 4, 1805

The intent of the First Amendment and the words and actions of our Founding Fathers, including Thomas Jefferson, clearly demonstrate how the words "the separation of church and state" were originally understood. These words were never intended to remove God from government; rather they were intended to keep government from controlling and manipulating religious practices. Unfortunately today, two hundred years after Jefferson wrote the phrase, these words have turned on those they were intended to protect.

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