

What is an Independent Baptist Church?

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“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;”

Ephesians 5:25

Introduction:

Is the church important? Consider our text, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;” Yes, the church IS important:

- Jesus established the church.
- Jesus died for the church.
- Jesus purchased the church.
- Jesus directs the church.
- Jesus builds the church.
- Jesus purifies the church.

One time I saw a sign on the back of a semi-trailer in Tennessee, “**This Sunday, attend the church of your choice.**” It ought to have said, “This Sunday, attend the church of God’s choice.” You may ask, “Aren’t all churches basically the same?” If not, then why do we have so many different denominations today? Let me explain by giving you a very brief synopsis of Christian history:

- Early churches: 100-300 AD. Basic tenets: salvation by faith; baptism by immersion after salvation; Biblical authority;
- Arising of apostate groups - teaching baptismal regeneration etc.
- Founding of Roman Catholicism by Constantine 313 AD. This was a marriage between paganism and Christianity - thus the worshipping of Mary, prayer to the saints, etc.
- Infant baptism was established by law in the 6th century.
- The division of Catholicism in 869 AD (Orthodox and Catholic).
- After 313 AD, there was a flourishing group of underground Fundamental churches that were heavily persecuted by the catholic and orthodox religions. These independent churches went by such names as Novatians, Paulician, Paterins, Donatists, Puritans, Waldenses, Albigenses, Henricians, Picards, etc. These churches held the same basic beliefs as the early churches - the beliefs that we, too, hold.
- Late in the 15th century, these Fundamental churches were given the name Anabaptists (rebaptisers) by those who persecuted them. They were later renamed Baptists. Not only were they persecuted by the Catholics, but also later by the Lutheran church and the Church of England. Why were they persecuted? What crime had they committed? They held the Bible as their supreme authority; they believed salvation was a free gift; and, they practised baptism by immersion after salvation.
- 1520 - Start of the Protestant Reformation by Martin Luther. The Reformation gave birth to such *denominations* as:
 - Lutheran church: 1530
 - Church of England (now the Anglican Church): 1531
 - Presbyterian church: 1541
 - Congregationalist church: 1602
 - Methodist Church: 1785
- Mormonism began by Joseph Smith: 1820
- Jehovah’s Witnesses started by Charles Taze Russell: 1884
- Pentecostal movement: 1901

What is different about our church, and other independent Baptist churches, from the denominational churches? Are we all basically the same, or do we have some fundamental differences? Let me use the 8 letters of "BAPTISTS" to explain who we are and what we stand for:

1. B - Biblical authority.

The truth is not decided by a man. The truth is not decided by a group of men. The truth is not decided by what we feel. The truth is not decided by what we see or experience. Then, who decides what is truth? "...Thy word is truth" (John 17:17) The Bible is all we need and everything we need. It is complete and without error, the very Words of God written down by human hands:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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."

We do NOT believe in extra-biblical revelation. We do NOT believe in placing experience above Scripture. We DO believe in *Sola Scriptura*, the principle that God's Word is the only basis for divine authority. Once a congregation sees Scripture as less than the final, complete, infallible authority for faith and practice, it has opened the doors to theological chaos. Anyone can claim to be speaking God's revelation, and almost anything can be passed off as divinely revealed truth.

For example, some of the best-known charismatic leaders have abused their people's trust by claiming they are receiving new truth from God, when what they really teach are lies and fabrications. Perhaps the most brazen example of that is a widely publicised "prophecy" delivered by Kenneth Copeland. He claims Jesus gave him a message "during a three-day Victory Campaign held in Dallas, Texas." Judge for yourself whether this could be a message from the Christ of Scripture:

"It's time for these things to happen, saith the Lord. It's time for spiritual activity to increase. Oh, yes, demonic activity will increase along at the same time. But don't let that disturb you. Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God. Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of a fanatical way of life. Don't be disturbed when people put you down and speak harshly and roughly of you. They spoke that way of Me, should they not speak that way of you? The more you get to be like Me, the more they're going to think that way you. They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah. That's what you're doing."

Copeland's "prophecy" is clearly false. The real Jesus-the Jesus of the New Testament-did claim he was God; using the covenant name of God, he told the Jewish leaders, "...verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

Our church statement of faith reads, "We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men controlled by the Holy Spirit, that it is truth without any error, and it is the only complete and final revelation of the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions shall be tried. We believe that God has supernaturally watched over His Word and that He has preserved His Word. In English, this is the King James Bible." That is where we stand.

We interpret the Bible literally. We do not interpret it allegorically or figuratively unless Scripture is clearly intended so. We do not explain away the Bible by our preferences, culture, or opinion. We do not rewrite or re-translate the Bible. We just read it, study, obey it, and use it, as God intended.

2. A - Autonomy of the church.

Ephesians 5:23, 24 "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

We do not believe in hierarchies. We do not believe in denominations. We do not believe in church councils. We do not believe in popes, cardinals, bishops, primates, denominational presidents, or any other authority who places himself over the local church. We DO believe in the independence and autonomy of the local church; that each New Testament church is free to govern itself on the principles laid down in the Bible without interference from outside organisations or other churches.

Throughout the history of the early church recorded in Acts and all the New Testament epistles which formulate the doctrine of the church, there is evidence only of local church autonomy. Nowhere is denominationalism taught. Each church is accountable to its spiritual head, Jesus Christ. The pastor is the shepherd of the church subject to Jesus Christ Who is the Chief Shepherd. No other church or organisation has the right or power to govern the body of Christ.

Colossians 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”

If a denomination begins to become corrupt from the top, it quickly passes down the ranks into the individual churches. Truth is preserved when individual churches are free to practice what they believe the Word of God teaches, not what their denominational heads dictate. For example, compare the liberal, modernistic state of the Uniting Church today with what was preached by John Wesley. What happened? The denomination started decaying from the top down.

3. P - Priesthood of the believer.

What is the priesthood of the believer? The belief that no special order of priests is required to intercede for us to bring us to God; that no man stands in a role of mediator between God and man.

1 Peter 2:5,9 “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”

A mediator is a go-between, a person who goes to someone on our behalf. There is only one mediator between you and God: Jesus Christ, our High Priest:

1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

Hebrews 2:17 “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

Christians are therefore to confess our sins directly to God, not to any human intermediate. For example, The catholic religion says we are to confess our sins to a priest. God says confess your sins to Him. The catholic religion says that Mary is our mediator. God says that Mary is just a woman, and that Jesus Christ is our mediator.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

4. T - Two ordinances: baptism and Lord's supper.

What is an ordinance? An ordinance is a public ceremony that pictures a spiritual truth. We perform ordinances to obey the Lord. What is the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament? A sacrament does not just picture a truth; a sacrament is believed to have the power to save a person's eternal soul. An ordinance is like a wedding ring. The ring doesn't make one married, but it is an external symbol of the fact that one is married. You can be married without a ring, and you can be unmarried with a ring. It is only a picture of truth.

A) Baptism.

Matthew 28:19 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:”

Baptism is the immersion of a new believer in order that he might make a public profession of his faith and please the Lord. The word "baptise" is not a translation from Greek, the original language of the new testament. It is a transliteration, where the word "baptiso" is carried over from the Greek into the English, and becomes "baptise." "Baptiso" means to immerse or plunge. The Greek words for sprinkle or pour are completely different. The only possible meaning for baptise is immersion. Sprinkling and pouring were invented by man, not God. Therefore, christenings and other such ceremonies are NOT baptism at all.

Baptism is to take place AFTER a person has believed the Gospel and been born again through their faith in Christ.

Acts 8:36, 37 “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

B) Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.”

The Lord's supper is the public eating of unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice to remind the church of the their Saviour's body and blood. Note that the bread and grape wine do NOT become the physical and literal body and blood of Christ:

Hebrews 10:12 "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;"

5. I - Individual and ecclesiastical separation.

Throughout history because of our belief in the need to be faithful to the Word of God above all else we have maintained a position of separation which covers two aspects:

A) Ecclesiastical separation.

This is a separation from religious and spiritual involvement with churches or religious groups that are:

- comprised of unsaved people
- are liberal or modernistic in theology
- that deny the authority of the scriptures by doctrine or practice

Scriptural authority for this is found in:

Ephesians 5:11 "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"

For example, consider the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC is an ecumenical organisation founded in 1948 in Amsterdam as "a fellowship of Churches which accept Jesus Christ our Lord as God and Saviour." It works for the unity and renewal of the Christian denominations and offers them a forum in which they may work together in the spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding. The WCC's members include most Protestant and Eastern Orthodox bodies but not the Roman Catholic church. The controlling body of the WCC is the assembly, which meets at intervals of approximately six years at various locations throughout the world. The assembly appoints a large central committee that in turn chooses from its membership an executive committee of 26 members, which, along with specialised committees and 6 co-presidents, carries on the work between assemblies. The headquarters of the council, in Geneva, has a large staff under a general secretary. Why aren't we a member? **Because it would be a sin.** Many of the members do not believe the Bible.

B) Personal separation.

We also believe that Baptists have identified themselves with the need to remain "unspotted from the world" by upholding the importance of believers to abstain from unholy and worldly practices which tarnish their testimony for Jesus Christ. Baptist churches have long been scorned by the world, and by liberal Christianity, for their stand against such worldly and sinful practices as drinking, gambling, sensual dancing, ungodly movies, immodest dress, etc. Why such a strict lifestyle? Why the emphasis on personal holiness?

2 Corinthians 7:1 "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

1 John 2:15 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

1 Peter 1:15 "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

6. S - Saved & baptised church membership.

The scriptural definition of a church is, "An independent body of baptised believers whose purpose is to preach the Gospel to the lost world and strengthen the people of God for His service." It is astounding how many hundreds of church members have I met who are unsaved! A gathering of unsaved people in the name of religion is NOT a church.

The terms "church" and "body of Christ" are synonymous. The word which is translated in the Bible as "church" is the Greek word "*ecclesia*," which means a called-out assembly. An assembly of who? An assembly of saved, baptised believers. The "universal church" or "invisible church" does not yet exist, and will not exist until all Christians are assembled in heaven, because all believers are not yet assembled. The only true church is the local, New Testament church.

The New Testament plan is for people to be:

- 1) Saved
- 2) Baptised by immersion after salvation
- 3) Join a church.

Acts 2:41,42,46,47 “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Why is baptism by immersion so important?

- It is commanded in Acts 2:38.
- We must follow Jesus’ example, and He was baptised by immersion. Matthew 3:16
- It is commanded in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20
- It gives us a good conscience. 1 Peter 3:21
- It identifies us with Christ. Romans 6:3,4
- Those who got saved in the New Testament were always baptised afterward by immersion. Acts 2:41-47; Acts 16:30-33

7. T - Two offices: pastor & deacon

Ephesians 4:11 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;”

1 Timothy 3: 10 “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.”

What is a pastor? The word “pastor” means “shepherd.” The words bishop (or overseer) and elder are also used for the office of pastor. The Bible method of church government is a theocracy with Christ as the Head of the church; His deputy on earth is the pastor, who is commanded to oversee the congregation, to teach and preach, to win the lost, to lead by example, to serve, and to guide the business of the church. The pastor is not a dictator or tyrant, but rather is a servant who leads lovingly by example.

Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

To understand the role of a pastor, consider the shepherd. The job of the shepherd is to feed, guide, and protect the sheep. He makes sure they eat good pasture. He keeps them safe from wolves and other predators. He tends to the weak and the sickly. He keeps them together, moving them all in the same direction. This is a good illustration of the shepherd of the church, the pastor.

What does the Bible say about the position of the pastor?

1) The pastor is put in place not by man, but by God.

Romans 13:1,2 “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

2) God calls pastors overseers.

Acts 20:28-30 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (speaking to the elders at Ephesus)

1 Peter 5:2 “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;”

3) God describes pastors as having authority to rebuke Christians and correct problems in the church.

Titus 2:15 “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”

2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

A deacon simply means a servant or a helper. Deacons are to serve the church and help the pastor/s do the work that God has called them to do.

8. S - Separation of church and state.

The need to state this only became necessary only after corrupt religious organisations merged with civil (state) authority to combine religious and social authority.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight," (John 18:36). We are not to use violence to establish His spiritual kingdom. We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth. We are not trying to establish an earthly kingdom but a spiritual one and believe that Christ will come back one day to establish His physical kingdom upon this earth (and He won't need our help to do it!)

What does the Bible say about the Government?

1) The state authorities are put in place by God.

Romans 13:1 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

2) Christians are to obey these authorities.

1 Peter 2:13 "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;"

Matthew 22:21 "They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

3) We obey the Bible when the state commands us to go against Scripture.

Acts 5:29 "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

For example, consider the Communist suppression of Christianity in Russia. Christians were forbidden to evangelise or to meet for worship and fellowship. But, they still met together even though forbidden by the government. Why? The government had no right to contradict the Word of God.

Conclusion:

If there was a group of churches more true to the Bible than the Independent, Fundamental Baptists, then I'd join that group. I am a Baptist by conviction because I believe the Bible. Dr. Jack Hyles once said, "We are to be loyal to principles, not institutions." You need to understand what you believe and why you believe it. You need to know what kind of church the Bible says we should be members of. Here are the eight characteristics again:

- 1. B - Biblical authority.**
- 2. A - Autonomy of the church.**
- 3. P - Priesthood of the believer.**
- 4. T - Two ordinances: baptism and Lord's supper.**
- 5. I - Individual and ecclesiastical separation.**
- 6. S - Saved & baptised church membership.**
- 7. T - Two offices: pastor & deacon**
- 8. S - Separation of church and state.**