

What is a Baptist?

Externals

If we surveyed 'Baptists' merely externally it would be very difficult to answer this question. Some reach to tradition to create a common denominator across of historic Baptist beliefs to answer this question (e.g. baptism, autonomy of local church, priesthood of all believers, etc). Those who claim the mantle differ so widely (and wildly) in their belief and practice (e.g. Arminian & Reformed, liberal and conservative, open and closed communion, conventional and societal, etc) that at minimum we might define Baptist as a loose movement of visible Christians who embrace baptism by immersion ('believer' cannot always be assumed because of liberalism). Such tradition or man centred approaches fail to strike at the heart of Baptist identity. For this we must turn to the plumb line of God's truth and the Baptist convictions that men and women have derived from it.

Internals

There are three types of Baptists. Those who are born into Baptist families, those who attend a Baptist church out of expedience and those who are Baptists by conviction.¹ The latter is the only type to be for we don't want to base our lives on the traditions of men but the doctrines of God (Mk 7:7). What does the Bible teach?

In 1812 three Congregationalist missionaries, Adoniram & Ann Judson and Luther Rice, set off for India. They knew they would meet William Carey and the other Baptist missionaries there. They had to defend infant baptism and so studied their Greek New Testaments. It is a great danger studying the Bible for they were all convinced of believer's baptism by immersion! Upon disembarking they were all baptized.

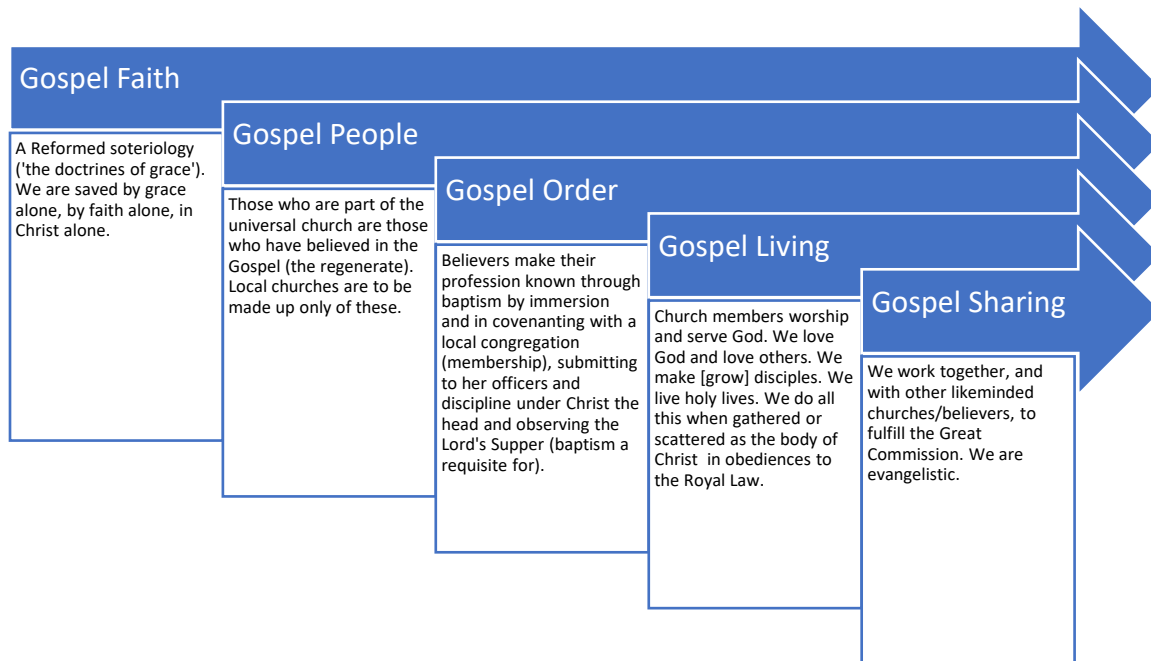
The Christian denomination called Baptist arose during the English Reformation, a time of religious tumult when people were trying to search the Scriptures (*sola scriptura*) and rediscover NT Christianity. What was the faith and practice of the early Church? Baptists emerged as a reform movement. Baptist historian David Bebbington puts it this way: "They adopted the same principles of punctilious loyalty to God's word, of passionate desire to worship the Almighty correctly, and of willingness to restructure the church in accordance with God's precepts. Their biblical, liturgical, and ecclesiastical priorities drove them through Puritan loyalties into separatism and, eventually, to the further step of repudiating infant baptism.

***Baptists were the people who took Reformation principles to their ultimate conclusion.*"²**

Baptist belief and practice flow from the Bible and the Gospel (*sola fide*) to form their identity:

¹ M. Haykin et al, *The Baptist Story* (2015), 325–26.

² D. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries* (2010), 23–24.



A BAPTIST: A believer in the biblical Gospel, who has been baptized by immersion as the New Covenant sign and has covenanted together with an autonomous local church under its officers and the Lordship of Christ to fulfil their place in the body; who participate in the Lord's Supper; who seek to live a holy life for Christ's sake/God's glory in accordance with the Word and by the Spirit; and to make the name of Christ known.

Secondarily Baptists believe in religious liberty (no one can be forced to believe) and separation of church and state (the Kingdom of God is not the kingdom of this world) because of Scripture and their experience.

Summary

One of the most famous Baptists, Charles H. Spurgeon, grew up in a godly Congregationalist family. He was converted in a Primitive Methodist Chapel. Soon after he became a Baptist. The following is his recollection of a conversation with his mother:

My mother said to me, one day, "Ah, Charles! I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist." I could not resist the temptation to reply, "Ah, mother! the Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty, and given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought."³

Baptists do not hold a monopoly on salvation but are convicted as to the biblical nature of their central beliefs and practices. The name does not matter but rather standing for what one believes the Bible teaches.

³ Spurgeon, *Autobiography* 1:69.