

Baptist History and Their Distinctives

Lesson #7 Some Common Baptist Weaknesses & Challenges

I. Introduction

Baptists in America are a very broad group of Christians with some common beliefs and practices. They have great diversity and many strengths. The criticisms of this lesson are not to mean that there are not great Baptist Churches or that all Baptists have all of these problems.

These are my observations having been associated with Baptist Churches for over 50 years and comparing what they say to what they actually practice. I am unapologetically Baptist, but often in my life I have had a hard time finding what I considered a “True Baptist Church” in communities I have lived in.

II. Regenerate Membership

A. A Cheap and Easy Gospel – Our evangelical zeal has sometimes led to a desire to manipulate people to accept the gospel. This has resulted in some churches and some individuals stripping the gospel presentation of its “Offense”* by dropping the hard parts such as:

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|---|--------------|----------------|
| 1. The need to repent of our sins. | Is 64:6-7; | Acts 2:37-38 |
| 2. Our total depravity in our good deeds. | Rom 8:5-8; | 1 Cor 1:18-24; |
| 3. Our salvation is from God’s wrath. | Is 8:13-14; | Heb 6:4-6; |
| 4. God’s sovereign action and purpose in salvation. | Rom 9:22-26; | 1 Cor 1:22-30 |

Note: Greek - σκανδαλον skandalon (Str. 4625) 15x meaning a trap, a stumbling block, a cause of ruin, scandal, offense, a cause of indignation. Mounce; p. 1270; GK #* 4998

The Gospel is offensive to the lost man or woman!

*(GK # is the Goodrick/Kohlenberger numbering system) The KJV, NKJV, NIV, HCSB, & ESV all translate the word to “*offense*”. NASU translates the word “*stumbling block*”.

B. Screening New Members – New potential members should be carefully screened in order to ensure that they are truly “born again”. The Baptist distinctive of “regenerate membership” is based on this logic:

- The Church belongs to and is ruled by Jesus Christ.
- It’s membership determines what actions it takes. (in congregational rule)
- Christ rules and directs His church through the Holy Spirit’s directing of regenerate members.

When lost people are part of the Church, they are not dependably directed by the Holy Spirit to represent Christ’s wishes when voting on Church matters.

They are “Blind and dead” in their sins. Eph 2:1-3

III. Failure to Clearly Teach the Whole Counsel of God

A. Doctrinal Ignorance – There are many Churches that do not teach doctrine. As a result, the membership is weak in its faith and its knowledge of who God is. They do not have the tools to participate in spiritual warfare. Doctrine is relevant. Doctrine is essential.

“When you don’t even lay down clear doctrine at the level of the Gospel, where are you going to go from there? And the cry is, as one man said to me when my book on *The Gospel According to Jesus* came out, he said, ‘Your book is divisive!’ You want to know something? He’s right. He’s right. Want to know something else? Doctrine divides. People say, ‘Oh doctrine divides...doctrine divides.’ I say, ‘Amen, preach it, doctrine divides.’ You know what it does? It confronts error. It separates true from false. It makes judgments. Today’s climate, however, of unity in the priority of relationships, that’s not tolerable.” **John MacArthur**; *The Gospel According to Jesus*;

B. Systematic Understanding of Doctrine – Not only must the congregation understand basic doctrine, but in conforming themselves to doctrinal truth, they must begin to have an understanding of how

doctrine connects together into a comprehensive whole of who God is and what He has accomplished and is accomplishing.

Doctrine tells a comprehensive story of reality as sovereignly decreed by God. These consolidating themes include:

- 1st Revealing the true nature of God**
- 2nd Revealing the true nature of man**
- 3rd Revealing God's plan of redemption for His people**
- 4th Revealing God's plan in and through His Creation**

This comprehensive revelation from God is expressed in theological understanding. To know God is to know Him specifically as He has revealed Himself. This knowledge is not just experiential, but is in fact propositional.

John 1:1-5 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

This is a propositional theological statement that is critical to our faith. This nowhere implies that personal experience trumps objective truth statements about what God has revealed.

- C. Ignorance of the Words** – “Over the years, I have found that people of every age, in the church and world, do not know the meanings of many of the most basic biblical and theological words. This isn't primarily the fault of the people, it is the fault of us pastors. We have not been faithful to our calling to equip God's people in the theology of His Word and in the theological terms of His Word.”

Burk Parsons; TableTalk magazine; November 2011

IV. Failure to Edify of the Body

A. Failure to make disciples -

Matt 28:18-20 *And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

The Great Commission is to make disciples. It is true that only the regenerate can be disciples, but winning people to Christ does not in and of itself make disciples. The 3rd clause of the Great Commission clearly requires we saints of His church to teach (edify) them.

- B. Seeker Sensitive** - The “Seeker Sensitive” Church is one which looks for pragmatic ideas and practices on how to win people to Christ. The seeker sensitive Church modifies the practices of the Church and the language of Scriptural doctrine so that it is more relevant and attractive to the lost.

1. The goal is to get the lost into the Church where the “good news” of the gospel can be heard by them and that they might become converted. This sounds logical and reasonable, but the problem is, it ignores the “Offense of the Gospel” for the lost. (consider the 4 points under **II. A.** above)
2. This form of ministry ignores the role of the Biblical role of the Holy Spirit in the new birth process and presumes that if we get the lost into church and preach the gospel to them, they will hear and decide to believe unto salvation.

3. The Bible describes the appropriate Biblical practice of the Church:

Acts 2:42: *So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Here we see the faithful elements of the first Church:

Believers within the local church are to be continually devoted to:

1. *The apostles teaching*;
2. *Fellowship* one with another; (See V. below.)
3. *Breaking of bread* – communion; and to
4. *Prayer*.

4. I believe that we have much freedom in our Churches, but we must never cease from these 4 approved elements by replacing them with other things. We can do many ways to reach out, but the Church service is primarily for the saved, to be edified, not for the lost.

C. Mentoring vs Age Segregation -

Fellowship has the idea of: The Greek word used for “Fellowship” in Act 2:42 is **κοινωνια** (Str 2842) meaning – fellowship, communion, participation, sharing. As we are members of a local Church (& members of the Universal Church),

- we are to fellowship with one another,
- we are to commune with one another,
- we are to participate with one another, and
- we are to share with one another.

We are to know one another!

This model can readily be understood to include learning from one another. The word “mentor” has the idea of teacher and advisor. I believe that the New Testament model for Christians is to mentor one another in the faith. We want preachers, we want teachers, but there is also a need for “mentoring” one another. I would describe this as including:

- Listening to;
- Advising another;
- Praying for; and
- Sharing with;
- Informal teaching of another;
- Being with, alongside through times of trouble.

I think our Baptist Churches generally do not encourage these kinds of relationships enough. I don’t think we emphasize the need for these kinds of relationships. I think, often our age segregation discourages mentoring between different age groups.

V. Wrong Understanding of Christian Fellowship

Christian fellowship is given such high priority throughout the New Testament that it is clearly a very important aspect of the Church’s life and practice.

As you saw in **IV. B. #3** above, Christian fellowship is one of the four elements of the first Church.

I John 1:6-7 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

↑
Then is implied.
An “If/Then” argument is being made!

This verse clearly teaches:

1. *if we walk in the Light, - - we have fellowship with one another,* (Those who walk in the Light)
2. *the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.* (Those who are born again)

Christian fellowship is not just Christians fellowshiping with one another. It is not just having a barbecue and talking about the Tennessee Vols last game. Christian fellowship is when Christians spend time together sharing their own stories and experiences with one another about the glorious grace of God in their lives.

Christian Fellowship consists of:

- Learning about each other’s salvation experience.
- Learning about each other’s Christian life experience.
- Learning about each other’s ministry work.
- Learning about each other’s trials and tribulations in this life.

- Praying for one another regarding these trials and tribulations.
- Mentoring one another through these difficult times of life.
- Sharing the glories and gratitude found in the Christian life with one another.
- Holding one another accountable for our holiness and righteousness before men.
- Sharing our growth in God's word with one another.
- Lifting one another up through encouragement.

VI. Failure to Understand the Corrupting Influence of the Culture

A. Failure to teach in preparation for real spiritual warfare!

Usually when preachers/teachers teach about spiritual warfare they spend their time talking about demonic possession and esoteric theories about evil spirits. They miss much of the true Biblical teaching about spiritual warfare. This teaching includes things like:

- Satan and his demons are deceivers.
- Satan and his demons are opportunists.
- Satan and his demons' deceptions are subtle.
- Satan and his demons' lies are appealing to our fleshly nature.

We never fight spiritual warfare apart from the power and communion of the saints!

B. Failure to warn of the dangers of corrupting influences

- The culture is continually corrupting apart from the influence of Satan and his demons.
- The culture largely reflects fallen man's thoughts and ideals which lead to death.
- The culture titillates our sinful palate with its temptations.

Without solid grounding in God's word and a developed wisdom of discernment, we are very susceptible to these cultural deceptions. These deceptions can destroy us. The cultural comes at us powerfully and continuously.

C. Postmodernism and the Emergent Church

Postmodernism is a philosophy that stands diametrically opposed to traditional Christian ideals. This philosophy denies the existence of objective truth and says instead that truth claims are about power and that the words of a truth claim cannot reflect actual reality. Therefore truth claims in and of themselves are arrogant and/or corrupt. **This view is antithetical to Christian Biblical faith!**

The Emergent Church is a term describing a set of beliefs by certain Churches that reflect a Postmodernist philosophical perspective.

Amongst these theological perspectives are:

- Attempts to describe God and His attributes with universal truths are futile and arrogant.
- God is best reflected by individual experiential knowledge rather than propositional truth claims.
- Theological differences are mostly arbitrary and personal in nature.
- Scripture, written in words, is incapable of communicating final truth.
- To say as a Christian that you "know" something is divisive and inappropriate.

Emergent Churches basically deny the existence of truth and that implies that we cannot objectively know the truth of God. They say that what is important is how you feel about God.

What you think you know is of little final importance to any supposed discernment regarding your individual truth claims.

Postmodern philosophical ideas are a brilliant Satanic attack on the Truth claims of Christianity. For the saints in our churches to be deceived by Postmodernist deceit is a terrible sin. To not know that you have been deceived about Postmodernism is a sad state of affairs.

The answer to this problem is that every born again Christian must be thoroughly grounded in the Truth claims of Scripture.

Some Important Quotes

Whatever churches say they believe, the incoherent answers offered by those entrusted to their ministry substantiate my argument that a moralistic religion of self-salvation is our default setting as fallen creatures. If we are not explicitly and regularly taught out of it, we will always turn the message of God's rescue operation into a message of self-help. **Michael Horton; *Christless Christianity*; p. 42**

I cannot believe in the spirituality of any Christian man who keeps an eye open for the approval of others, whoever they may be. The man after God's own heart must be dead to the opinion of his friends as well as his enemies. He must be willing to cross important persons as obscure ones. He must be ready to rebuke his superior as quickly as those who may be beneath him on the ecclesiastical ladder. To reprove one man in order to gain the favor of another is no evidence of moral courage. It is done in the world all the time. We'll never be where we should be in our spiritual lives until we are so devoted to Christ that we ask no other approbation than His smile. When we are wholly lost in Him the frantic effort to please men will come to an end. The circle of persons we struggle to please will be narrowed to One. Then we will know true freedom, but not a moment before. **A. W. Tozer; *Price Of Neglect: and Other Essays*; p. 141**

The vessel through which the Lord Jesus can reveal Himself in this generation is not the individual but the Body. True, "God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith" (Rom 12:3), but alone in isolation man can never fulfill God's purpose. It requires a complete Body to attain to the stature of Christ and to display His glory. Oh, that we might really see this!

Watchman Nee; *The Normal Christian Life - Hendrickson Christian Classic*; p. 143

Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true. Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. The long career of Israel demonstrates this clearly enough, and the history of the Church confirms it. So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God. **A. W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy*; p. 12**