

Whatever name we choose to call ourselves by, wicked people can attack us, and without a doubt, somebody will come out using that name without really having the significant life, conduct, and doctrine which should go with that name. The only thing that we can do is to make it very clear what are our beliefs and conduct (defining the label as we understand it) and defend ourselves.

John the Baptist

We begin with the fact that the Bible uses different names for the people of God and churches, such as “*the church of God*” **1 Cor 1:2**, “*Christians*” **Acts 11:26**, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the flock of God, the vineyard of God, the house of God, the temple of God, etcetera. But with all of these names, it is doubtful if they are general descriptive terms or if they were actually used as identifying titles as we would think when we think of a name of a church. The problem is that a name doesn’t always describe something in a truthful way, such as “grape nuts” which are neither grape nor nuts. God has not given us a specific name to use for ourselves except perhaps for the term, “*Christian*.”

The prophet John did take a name for himself in the term “Baptist” as a formal name. He is called, “**John the Baptist**.” This unique title was used in this formal manner, and being a preacher, Jesus sought out and was baptized by a preacher formally calling himself “the Baptist”. Jesus did not change John’s name as he did with some of his own Apostles, and God the Father saw with pleasure from heaven the scene of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, His Son.

What does “Baptist” mean for John? I think a lot of things can be cleared up if we understand that John did not use “Baptist” to identify himself with any particular group (he probably was the only “Baptist” around at that time). What “Baptist” meant to John (and to me) is that he centered his ministry on preaching repentance from sin, and to seek God with all your heart. This was the ministry

of John, to bring people to confront their sins, and turn their lives over to their Saviour. His ministry and identification (he was “the Baptist”) was that he was a friend of the bride, and arranged the love relationship between others and the groom, Jesus Christ. To be associated with John you had to formally and actually reject sin (sinful lifestyle as well as particular sins), as well as believe in the Messiah, and follow wholeheartedly the justice of God. His formal identification (baptism as being from “the Baptist”) was a symbol of dying to sin and resurrection to new life through the new birth. So then the identification between John, his baptism, and being “Baptist” were all a picture of death to sin and rebirth to new life, salvation and spiritual victory over sin.

What the name “Baptist” does NOT mean

We want to quickly clarify what many people are doing with the name “Baptist” (as with any label you want to substitute for it). Somebody who identifies himself as “Baptist” is not necessarily good, orthodox, nor righteous in his conduct just because they use that name. They should be, but many times they are not. There are Baptists that speak in tongues, and are worldly, playing with sin, and enjoying it, falling for any false doctrine that presents itself. There are Baptists like this, even though they have not grasp the spirit of John the Baptist, and above all they are not faithful to God. We should also note that some take their game plan from the Roman Catholic Church, in that they trace their roots from the Baptists of today back through group to group to the apostles. Things are not so simple, and when there were times in which the church as a whole (main groups) corrupted itself, it is difficult to find even a small group of people that were faithful to God and to the doctrine and practice we understand today. This is not to say that there were not faithful men and women in those days, just that the record of their existence and spiritual fight has not been saved for us to examine, because God didn’t see fit to preserve that record. We can say that absolutely no one group has remained faithful to God in doctrine and practice

from the apostles until now, because individual groups and organizations always seem to fall when under the intense pressures of Satan’s attack. When Satan achieves his goal of corrupting one group, history teaches us that the truly faithful will separate from that group and form another, normally with another name so as to not confuse themselves with the corrupted group they are separating from. God raises up faithful men where there are none. The spiritual light and understanding from one generation to the next generally grows, so it is difficult to judge the lack of understanding of past generations by today’s standards.

The Distinctive of the Baptists

Baptists in general have been identified with 7 or 8 “pillars” that distinguishes them from other groups. Here we are going to admit that **following the Baptist distinctive is to cling to these Bible truths as very important, and being a true Baptist cannot be defined just because they have “Baptist” in their name.**

(1) The Authority of the Bible – True Baptists exalt the Bible as their authority over everything else. Church councils, fellowships, tradition (even Baptist tradition), popular leaders (such as Calvin, Wesley, Finney, etc.) are not our authority. We preach using “*thus saith the Lord*” as our final authority to resolve every matter. In our sermons, true Baptists do not resort to jokes, storytelling, emotionalism, and other types of such material¹ to move people’s hearts, or to convince them. God’s word is accomplished with His word, not with our foolishness. The Scriptures are our authority. Equally Baptists are fundamentalists and Separatists: a **fundamentalist** is somebody who

¹ God condemned the use of fables and genealogies, 1 Tim 1:4, profane fables and old wives tales 4:7; questions and contentions of words 6:3-4; profane talk and arguments of falsely called science 6:20; contentions of words to no profit 2Tim 2:14, profane and vain babblings, 2:16-18; foolish and unlearned questions 2:23; Jewish fables 4:4; commandments of men Titus 1:14; foolish questions and genealogies, contentions, and discussions 3:9; cunningly devised fables 2 Peter 1:16;

keeps the essentials of the Christian faith against all attacks, and a **separatist** is somebody who does not fear to separate from others when they err on the fundamentals or conduct, be they friends or brethren.

(2) **True Baptists demand an exclusively saved membership.** The emphasis of true Baptists returns to John the Baptist who rejected the Pharisees who pretended to be saved, but their lives do not conform to the life of an obedient Christian. It is doubtful easy believism churches should be considered true Baptists because of this distinctive. Being Baptists requires a clear testimony as a condition of membership, and use church discipline when necessary (**1Cor 5:2, 13; Rev 2:20-22**) in order to remove members when they do not conduct themselves worthy of Christ, and contaminate the weaker brethren through their bad example (**1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:9**). We all sin, but to not fight against this sin and to not pressure one's self to defeat it, are unacceptable to a real Baptist.

(3) **Soul Liberty** – While other groups make never ending lists of rules, standards, and convictions restricting the Christian life, true Baptists believe that God has given us the principle, and have left specific application to each individual Christian for application. What this means is that what is not explicit in the Word of God is not obligatory upon the rest (cannot be elevated to “Thus saith the Lord,” but is only somebody's view and opinion, and nobody can impose their convictions on others. **1 Cor 8:9; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 2:4; 5:1,13; 1 Pet. 2:16**).

(4) **The Priesthood of Every Believer** – Equally there are many groups which exclude common believers from “the ministry”, from praise, worship, and other services before God, making a distinction between clergy and common Christian, but Baptists believe that each believer has a right and responsibility to participate in the ministry **1 Pet 2:5, 9**.

(5) **There are two Ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper** – An ordinance is something specially commanded and a sacrament is something that communicates grace in a works based belief system. Baptists do not believe in sacraments. The only two ordinances that are special are baptism (special identification with Christ **Mat 10.32-33; Rom 10:9**) and the Lord's Supper (a spiritual cleansing through repentance and self examination by meditating on one's life).

(6) **There are only two official church offices: Pastor and Deacon** – Baptists believe that the man of God responsible for the church and sheep has to fulfill spiritual requirements (**1Tim 3, Titus 1**). (**Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Cor 16:15-16; Acts 20.28; Tit 1:5-7; 1 Pet 5:1-2**). There should be a **plurality of elders** ministering and governing in a local church, but there should also be one man who is responsible before the Lord for what goes on. The elders and the pastor form a leadership and ministry team, and the deacons are God's servants in that place. Deacons should not govern but be official servants of the church to relieve the pastoral team from these more secular and non-spiritual jobs.

(7) **The Autonomy of the Local Church** – Baptists have always insisted that there should not be any government control or forced influence from other entities on the local church. The model of God is that each local church is autonomous in itself, governing itself by men of God that are local members of that church, and that the church is sustained only by the offerings of that membership, and reproducing itself. Reproduction of the membership and ministers should be by that particular church.

(8) **Separation of Church and State** – Some groups put this under point number 7, saying they do not receive state funds or support.

Baptists

Why we call ourselves “Baptists”? What does “Baptist” mean?

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Many religious groups proclaim “*We are not a religion. We are not a denomination, and because of that we don't use any name except ‘church’. Names are bad.*” But it is as if a person goes to the doctor and the doctor gives a prescription but he doesn't want to write down the name of the medicine, and just writes “*that medicine*”. It is useless. We use labels and names to identify what is what. Each name has a meaning, and we use these labels to correctly identify things. This tract will explain why we use the name “Baptist”.