We Are Baptists

Let’s Talk About Why?

Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church
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Summer Sermons - July and August 2010
Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic
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We Are Baptists
Let’s Talk About Why

Sermons preached at
Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church
July and August 2010
Pastor Bill Salyers

The series of sermons is dedicated to the community of faith
that meets as Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church in Kettering, Ohio.
My full year as interim has been a delight.
Mary Jane and I have developed a deep affection for these Baptist saints
and the way they do church.

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B Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom
A Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom
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S Separation of Church and State (Addressed during sermon on Individual Soul Liberty – Religious Freedom)

Why are there Baptists, and what difference does it make?
Why does the world need Baptists and what kind of Baptists does the world need?
What kind of Baptists make up the Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church?
How do we celebrate and practice our Baptist heritage with an inclusive spirit?

Many good Christians are not Baptist, but a good Baptist will always work to become a good disciple of Jesus.

Many of the ideas in this sermon series have nurtured me as a disciple of Jesus since I was four or five years old. The Baptist Acrostic and approach followed in these sermons are not original with me and appear widely on the Internet. I use them with gratitude to those who have clearly articulated the Baptist vision of church and discipleship. At the end of the sermon collection is a list of helpful resources which will strengthen your understanding of the Baptist witness, and focus your own Baptist witness.

Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church is a strong community of faith with deep relationships expressed in active caring for one another and in passionate concern for the God’s world. After a year as interim pastor, I wholeheartedly recommend this church to anyone seeking a place to learn of Jesus and grow in effective discipleship.

Bill Salyers, Interim Pastor

Note on using Eugene Peterson, The Message, for scripture reading in worship.
I did not choose Peterson for the accuracy of its translation, although his translation is very reliable. Reading aloud from The Message helps the congregation hear scripture with fresh ears, like hearing it again for the first time! The true prophets never said “Read the word of the LORD!” Always they said, “Hear the word of the LORD!” May we always listen gladly as God speaks through the scriptures!
Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic  
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Sunday, July 18, 2010
Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom

Matthew 24: 35 (Peterson, The Message)
35 "Sky and earth will wear out; my words won't wear out.

John 5: 39-40 (Peterson, The Message)
39-40 "You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want.

John 16: 12-13 (Peterson, The Message)
12-15 "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the (Holy) Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is.

1 Peter 1: 17-21 (Peterson, The Message)
17 You call out to God for help and he helps—he's a good Father that way. But don't forget, he's also a responsible Father, and won't let you get by with sloppy living.
18-21 Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately—at the end of the ages—become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.
But don't let it faze you. Stick with what you learned and believed, sure of the integrity of your teachers—why, you took in the sacred Scriptures with your mother's milk! There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another — showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

May the Lord bless the hearing of scripture as we listen with open minds, open hearts, and lives open to the Spirit who teaches us and leads us to Jesus.

The Baptist movement started in England with two men who took the Bible very seriously. Most people I know admire and respect the Bible. Yet the Bible is the most owned and least read book in most homes. If you ask, “Do you believe the Bible?” Almost always you get the same answer, “Yes, of course! Doesn’t everyone?”

OK, but which Bible do you believe? Like me, everyone has at least two Bibles. There is MY Bible and then there is THE Bible. MY bible includes only that part of THE Bible that I know and use to guide my life. But make no mistake, all Christians pledge allegiance to the Bible even if they don’t read it at all or understand it very well. People read the Bible selectively, using what agrees with them, and ignoring what does not agree. One reason Baptists insist on reading the Bible in worship is to allow the community of faith to share its understanding and participate in its interpretation. Bizarre ideas about the Bible will be met with other Bible passages in a free and open community of faith where all are priests and all are seekers after truth.

The Baptist movement started 401 years ago in England. In 1606 John Smyth and Thomas Helwys studied the Bible and pledged to let the Bible alone guide their belief and behavior. Under persecution they went to Amsterdam, Holland, where they encountered Anabaptists including Mennonites. Continuing their study they formed a movement we now call Baptist. For a time John Smyth was too close to the Mennonites to suit Helwys, so he returned to England and in 1609, 401 years ago, formed the first Baptist Church. He wrote the first Baptist confession of faith. Baptists wrote more than 20 confessions of faith to explain their beliefs to the world before the Second London Confession in 1677 put the Bible first on its list of important beliefs.

Helwys also wrote the first declaration of separation of church and state. “If the Kings people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane lawes made by the King, our Lord the King can require no more: for men’s religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man.” — This statement in a letter to King James the First, who “authorized” the King James Bible, was part of “A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity.” published by Helwys. King James liked it so little that he put Helwys in prison and there Helwys died.

Drawing on the Bible which asked in Acts whether men “should obey God or men,” Helwys wrote that the King was just a man, and his authority over the country did not extend to the conscience and faith of individuals. He was not king of men’s souls!
Historically, Baptists take the Bible seriously enough to fuel many confrontations and conflicts with authorities. English Baptists, Quakers, Separatists, and others in the radical wing of the Reformation invented denominations or associations of like minded religious folks. Prior to that all churches were also agents of government that attempted to dictate and control what people believed, how they worshiped, and how they thought. In many ways Baptists and Anabaptists were the most radical wing of that radical reformation. They were often persecuted and killed for their radical ideas.

State churches enforce Creeds, such as the Apostle’s Creed to guarantee uniformity of belief and practice. For example:

**The Apostle's Creed**

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,*  
*Maker of heaven and earth.*  

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;*  
*who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,*  
*born of the Virgin Mary,*  
*suffered under Pontius Pilate,*  
*was crucified, dead, and buried;*  
*the third day he rose again from the dead;*  
*he ascended into heaven,*  
*and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;*  
*from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost;*  
*the holy catholic Church;*  
*the communion of saints;*  
*the forgiveness of sins;*  
*the resurrection of the body;*  
*and the life everlasting.*  
*AMEN.*

Baptists, however, rejected all human creeds in favor of radical freedom for every person to read and interpret the Bible without interference from princes or priests. God’s people could and should think for themselves without the guidance of princes, priests, law enforcement, or inquisitions. For Baptists it was not what you believed, but who you believed. “**Jesus is Lord**” was the only creed Baptists needed, and they needed the Bible to know what the Lordship of Jesus meant. Free access to the Bible by free people who could freely think for themselves as their own priests was the Baptist way.

No one reads the Bible in a vacuum, and many don’t read it at all. We read the Bible through different lenses and those lenses color what we see. The choice of lenses through which to see the Bible have created systems that competed with the Bible for authority in Baptist churches. For example, General Baptists read through an Armenian or free will lens, and insisted on radical
freedom in all aspects of religion and taught that Christ died for all men. Particular Baptists read through a Calvin or predestination lens, and insisted on the same freedom, but believed that some were elected to salvation and others elected to damnation. Those two lenses still exist today, and increasingly some in the Southern Baptist Convention insist on a Reformed or Calvinistic reading of Biblical salvation.

Baptists come in many styles. We are a peculiar people given to conflict and disagreement. But all of us use the Bible to support our beliefs. In 1845 the American Baptist Home Mission Society refused to appoint slave owners as missionaries because it was contrary to their reading of the Bible. Baptists in the south formed the Southern Baptist Convention because they found slaves and slavery in the Bible and saw no conflict between the Bible and slavery. They used the Bible to justify the institution of slavery, and later to justify institutional segregation. Southern Baptists were not the only ones, but Baptists, they should have known better!

Dispensationalism is another lens that has an obsession with end times prophecy and that lens colors how one reads the Bible and what one sees in the Bible. This extreme emphasis on end times starts with an outline of history and forces the Bible to fit the outline and quotes only texts that agree with the outline.

Same Bible. Read through different lenses. OUR Bible did not agree with THEIR Bible. And none of them, probably would agree completely with MY Bible.

Sharing THE Bible within a community of faith is a powerful way to prevent using only the lens of fantastic schemes or private interpretations of the Bible.

The Bible matters. Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church sits in Kettering because the Bible matters to us. We are eager to share our Bible understanding with others and to learn from the way others understand the Bible.

If you read the Bible through from cover to cover by yourself and have no one to discuss it with, you will get very confused. The Bible is a strange and difficult book written by peculiar people over hundreds of years in ancient languages. The Bible is not assembled in a consistent fashion. It is not chronological. Nor it is logical in its arrangement. It seems that it just grew. Yet anyone who reads can find Jesus and salvation within it!

Times change. Language evolves. Thoughts in ancient languages do not make the same sense in modern languages. Attitudes also change. In high school a student challenged my mentioning the Bible in a discussion. “I don’t care what the Bible says,” he told me, “that book was written by people who mostly did not know what they were talking about.”

Well that floored me because it was the first time I had met that way of thinking. It is much more common today. Billy Graham could preach, “The Bible says!” and people were moved. Which Bible, Billy? Mine? Or yours? Or THE Bible? And who gets to say?

Jim Washam was my first college roommate. He went to church one time before he was sixteen, and that was for his mother’s funeral. At sixteen he met a girl who went to Atkins Chapel, a
Baptist Church in North Knoxville. To date her he had to go to church with her. Rev. Peters was a good preacher and HIS Bible mostly said “You must be born again!” Jim listened and decided he wanted that new birth. But Jim had no idea what “Born again” meant or how to do it. He went to Rev. Peters and asked, “Pastor, you keep saying I must be born again, but why don’t you ever tell me how?” Rev. Peters loved that Bible phrase so much he did not realize how little it meant to someone outside the church. With different language Rev. Peters led Jim to the Lord.

Yes, the Bible is essential. The Bible alone is enough to bring us new life. But like the Ethiopian Eunuch Philip met on the road back home from Jerusalem, people reading the Bible alone cry, “How can I understand it when there is no one to explain it to me!” Jim needed help to understand and so do others.

What does the Bible say? What does the Bible mean? And what has that got to do with me? These questions should motivate every Bible reading and Bible study. That is the main job of the church. Jesus saves! Let’s talk about the details. And you and I must be prepared to explain in modern terms what the ancient good news means today!

Recently our daughter took granddaughter Jubilee to a store where they could eat. Jubilee wanted to take off her shoes, but Joy explained that she could not do that. “Why?” Jubilee asked. “Because there’s a rule that says you have to wear a shirt and shoes in here” Joy answered. Jubilee looked at her mom steadily and demanded, “Where’s the sign that says that?” That girl has a Baptist attitude.

“God said it, we believe it, and that settles it” attitude leads a Baptist to demand, “Show that to me in the Bible!” That may not settle things, but it can start a conversation. Maybe serious conversation about the Bible is what it really means to be a Baptist!

This sermon is also meant to be a Bible conversation starter. Let’s close by singing hymn 408 which exalts the firm foundation laid for us in God’s word. “How Firm A Foundation” # 408

Sunday, July 18, 2010

Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom

Questions for Discussion during Let’s Talk Time after Worship

- What surprised you in the scripture reading and sermon today?
- What Baptist confession first began with an article on Scripture, and how did this article impact Baptists?
- How has the pattern of biblical authority competed at times given way with other patterns in Baptist life?
- How is the Baptist way of biblical authority unique?
- How do freedom and authority relate in Baptist life?
- What are the roles of human reason and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation?
- In what sense is the local church the final interpreter of biblical authority?
- What is your response when someone says, “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it!”

What are your own questions or comments?
Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic
Summer Sermons 2010
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Sunday, July 25, 2010
Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom

Acts 4: 18-20 (The Message, Peterson)
18-20 They called them back and warned them that they were on no account ever again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John spoke right back, "Whether it's right in God's eyes to listen to you rather than to God, you decide. As for us, there's no question—we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard."

Acts 5: 25-32 (The Message, Peterson)
25-26 Just then someone showed up and said, "Did you know that the men you put in jail are back in the Temple teaching the people?" The chief and his police went and got them, but they handled them gently, fearful that the people would riot and turn on them.
27-28 Bringing them back, they stood them before the High Council. The Chief Priest said, "Didn't we give you strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying your best to blame us for the death of this man."
29-32 Peter and the apostles answered, "It's necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, the One you killed by hanging him on a cross. God set him on high at his side, Prince and Savior, to give Israel the gift of a changed life and sins forgiven. And we are witnesses to these things. The Holy Spirit, whom God gives to those who obey him, corroborates every detail."

Acts 13: 1-3 (The Message, Peterson)
1-2 The congregation in Antioch was blessed with a number of prophet-preachers and teachers: Barnabas, Simon, nicknamed Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, an advisor to the ruler Herod, Saul.

One day as they were worshiping God—they were also fasting as they waited for guidance—
the Holy Spirit spoke: "Take Barnabas and Saul and commission them for the work I have called them to do."

3 So they commissioned them. In that circle of intensity and obedience, of fasting and praying, they laid hands on their heads and sent them off.

**Lord, help us hear your word clearly and apply your word to our lives fruitfully.**

“Church” is one of those words we all know, but each of us has our own image when we hear the word. Baptists don’t have a “Church,” but Baptists have “churches.” The difference is a matter of control. When Methodists need a pastor, the Bishop and District Superintendent decide who to send. When Baptists need a pastor, they have to find their own. Presbyterians have a Book of Order that prescribes exactly what its local churches can do and how they can do it. Baptists have to decide for themselves what ministry to practice and how to go about it. The Catholic Bishop owns the churches, and can decide whether to close a local church or to start a new one. Even as we speak, Cleveland Catholics are finding out how much control the Bishop has over their congregations.

On Friday I passed a church in Springfield and looked at its sign. “The Church of Christ meets here” the sign said. Once upon a time, Baptists met in a “meeting house,” not a “church.” The word for “church” in Greek is “ekklesia,” meaning “people called out together.” The emphasis is on people, not on a building nor on an organization!

At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked “Who am I?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus proclaimed that Peter was a Rock, and that Peter’s confession was a rock to build his church on. His church, not Peter’s church.

“Church” has two meanings in the New Testament. One meaning is the Body of Christ made up of all believers everywhere and at all times. The other meaning of “church” is a local body of believers striving together to understand and live out the gospel of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus. Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is the head of the church.

The church belongs to Jesus. As Colossians explains it: “Col. 1: 15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*”

So how does Jesus start a new church? Matthew has an answer: Matthew 18: 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (TNIV)

Baptists believe that a church is people making up a local body of born again, baptized believers.
Freedom is the key to most Baptist beliefs. Individual soul liberty for every person empowers each person to make an individual choice about which God to serve or even whether to serve God. The same radical insistence on freedom of choice led Baptists to insist that a church by its nature is bound only by the Lordship of Jesus. Beyond confessing that Jesus is Lord, each church is a law unto itself, entering into a covenant that guides how they live out the gospel together in their community of faith. Local church autonomy means that we have a congregational polity. This church reports only to God and itself. It acknowledges no other control of its life together in the Lord.

That is the meaning of “autonomous,” self-governing under its own rules and laws. “Auto” means “self.” “Nomos” means “law.” Baptists hold that belief because those are the kind of churches the New Testament describes. As influential as Paul was in spreading the good news of Jesus and in forming people together in churches, Paul could not dictate what churches did.

Baptists have good news for the world. Salvation in Jesus is free and transforms people into children of God. Baptists also think freedom to serve God is also good news, a freedom that rejects outside interference by government, denomination, or public opinion.

Freedom is exhilarating, but it also carries a burden of responsibility. We have to decide to hang together and help each other live for Jesus as well as possible. We have to decide what other churches we will align ourselves with for mission in the community and in the world. If we control our own affairs as a church, then every member has a duty to stay “up to speed” on issues that affect the church. That allow members to make informed choices relying on the leadership of the Holy Spirit and open dialogue with each other.

When churches don’t have their members committed or up to speed on issues, they often find themselves, as Jeff Johnson says, “Singing ‘Standing on the Promises’ while merely sitting on the premises!”

In 2005 a group within the American Baptist Churches family attempted to force the denomination to draw up mandatory resolution that would allow them to expel churches that did not agree with them. That group was terribly frustrated because the organizational structure of American Baptist Churches has no authority or power over local American Baptist Churches, and refused to seek such power or authority.

Every American Baptist church has the authority to decide for itself who it will accept and ordain as pastors or elect as leaders. Every American Baptist church has the authority to decide for itself who is qualified to be members. Demanding freedom for themselves, Baptists extend freedom to others. Baptists at their best agree with Voltaire who declared, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Baptist freedom demands open dialogue with those who are different. Baptist freedom enables us to cooperate with other religious bodies in matters that advance God’s kingdom while continuing to disagree.

Today our scripture lessons from the Book of Acts give us three examples of the church practicing radical freedom. The first lesson declares that the church must listen to God rather than to religious leaders. This means the church will decide whether religious leaders speak in
harmony with God. The second lesson declares that the church must obey God rather than men, even when the men are religious or political leaders, and Temple officials were both. The third lesson declares that the local church at Antioch has the authority to ordain ministers and apostles and send them on a world changing mission without checking with other churches, or with the original church in Jerusalem.

Baptist churches still practice that freedom today. While we cooperate with other American Baptist churches for ministry and mission and with ecumenical groups to work for common goals in the world, we cannot be forced to support any cause or work with any group that threatens our autonomy.

Autonomy of the local church speaks most clearly to the issue of church and state. Baptists were leaders in separating church and state in America. Baptists objected to government interference in church affairs. They especially objected to government actions that defined what people must believe, and how they must worship.

Baptists demanded radical freedom for each individual soul to relate to God without coercion or limitation from civil or religious authorities whether government or state-sponsored religions. They objected when government collected taxes from all citizens and used public money to subsidize the official religion of the state. It was years after the Constitution was approved before some states disestablished their sponsorship of Anglican or Puritan churches.

Even today people make the mistake of asking government to adopt or display religious symbols such as the Ten Commandments. It is also misguided to want the government to pay lip service to any one religion with national slogans and adding reference to God in official pledges or on national money. Baptists should remember that giving government a say in religion leads to government control of religious practice. Government control of churches is dangerous to freedom of religion, freedom of worship, and freedom to follow Jesus where the Spirit leads us.

If Jesus is Lord, we maintain our freedom to live for Jesus by refusing to let anything come before our loyalty to Jesus. We will talk more about the role of pastors in a later sermon, but remember that the pastor is also under the lordship of Jesus, and speaks to the church, not for the church. We learn from each other as we seek to understand and follow where Jesus leads us.

Baptist churches in my youth often described themselves as “spiritual democracies” because every member had a voice and a vote on what we taught and practiced. I have come to understand that we are a spiritual democracy under the Lordship of Jesus. The will of God is not subject to majority vote in a church or in a nation. Justice is not decided by a majority vote in a church or in a nation. What the Bible teaches and how the Bible reveals God to us in Jesus is not subject to a majority vote.

Our mission is to transform the world into God’s kingdom on earth by sharing the transforming good news in Jesus.

**In a nutshell, this is God’s good news for people:**
You don’t have to be the way you are! God has a dream for you as his obedient children. God is more interested in where you are going, than in where you have been. God forgives our past and creates a new future in Jesus and the local church. God is more interested in what you are becoming than in what you have been. Every saint has a past! Every sinner has a future!

In this Baptist church we are obligated to enter into honest discussion on matters of faith and the Bible to guide us in our life together as a community of faith. Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead us into all truth, so in our dialogue, we remain open to what the Spirit teaches and where the Spirit leads us.

Rise up, O Church of God *Hymn # 433) and freely go where the Spirit takes us.

Sunday, July 25, 2010
Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom
Discussion Starters for Let’s Talk Time after Worship
Please add your own questions and comments

● What surprised you in the scripture reading and sermon today?
● How is personal freedom related to church autonomy?
● What is the biblical basis for congregational polity?
● What theological concepts support congregational polity?
● If there is a Presbyterian Church and a Methodist Church, why is there no "Baptist Church," and why do some Baptists make that claim?
● What steps could our church take to improve honest dialogue within the church?
● What practices in our church threaten the Baptist principle of congregational autonomy?
● In a church governed by congregational polity, what is the relationship between church and pastor?
Ephesians 2 (The Message, Peterson)

1-6 It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin—dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

7-10 Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

11-13 But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything.
14-15 The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.

16-18 Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. **Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.**

19-22 That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. **This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.**

May the Lord bless the hearing of the Word!

**Good morning, fellow priests!** Baptists have always taught that we are priests one to another. In your mind go back with me to 1609 when the First Baptist Church in the World was convened in London, England. Priests dominated religious life. Priests had dominated religious life for hundreds of years. Priests were required to approach God. They were like brokers who controlled access to God, to grace, and to salvation. On occasion they could broker access to hell by withholding sacraments or by excommunication. In many ways in 1609 the church was priests, and priests were the church.

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys took exception to that for the Bible they read had a different understanding of priesthood. Looking at today’s call to worship from Exodus, they saw that God intended the whole people, all of Israel to serve God as priests.

**You saw what I did in Egypt, and you know how I brought you here to me, just as a mighty eagle carries its young. Now if you will faithfully obey me, you will be my very own people. The whole world is mine, but you will be my holy nation and serve me as priests.**

Reflecting on church history, the first Baptists realized that Christian priests also tended to control access to God. In the process, the church accumulated great wealth in lands and worldly goods. The Bible teaches that God intended a different kind of priesthood..

More recently Catholics have come to appreciate the idea of the priesthood of all believers. A Catholic friend saw an email from me that mentioned the priesthood of all believers, and said, “The priesthood of ALL believers! I like that!”

Pope John Paul II had something to say about that as well. His statement is 32 pages long, so I’ll
only mention a bit of it. Catholic teaching says that:

Christ is present to his Church in the most sublime way in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the priest acting in the person of Christ celebrates the Sacrifice of the Mass and administers the Sacraments. Christ is also present through preaching and the guidance of the faithful, tasks to which the priest is personally called.

The presence of Christ, which thus takes place in a daily and ordinary way, makes the parish an authentic community of the faithful. It is therefore of fundamental importance for the parish to have a priest as its pastor and the title of pastor is specifically reserved to the priest. Certainly, other faithful can actively collaborate with him, even full-time, but because they have not received the ministerial priesthood, they cannot replace him as pastor.

If the common priesthood results from the fact that the Christian People are chosen by God as a bridge with humanity and that every believer belongs to this people, the ministerial priesthood is the fruit of an election, of a specific vocation: "he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve" (Lk 6, 13-16). Thanks to the ministerial priesthood, the faithful are made aware of their common priesthood and they live it (cf. Eph 4, 11-12); the priest reminds them that they are the People of God and makes them able to "offer spiritual sacrifices" (cf. 1 Pt. 2,5), through which Christ himself makes us an eternal gift to the Father (cf. 1 Pt. 3,18). Without the presence of Christ represented by the priest, the sacramental guide of the community, this would not be an ecclesial (or church) community in its fullness. (End of quote from Pope John Paul II)

That statement is an improvement over the theology of 1609, but those Baptists would object to the difference between “common priesthood” and “ministerial priesthood.” They read the second half of today’s call to worship and came to the conclusion that all are priests!

But you are God’s chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation. God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now you must tell all the wonderful things that he has done.

So, good morning, fellow priests!

American Baptist Joseph Ban wrote, “By our baptism we are ordained to become evangelists.” Baptists reserve local church membership for people who are born again, fully immersed, baptized believers on their way to becoming disciples. Smyth and Helwys taught that by our baptism we are all ordained to be priests to one another and priests to the world.

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain that shielded the Holiest Room in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. Baptists understand that to mean that every believer now has direct access to God without someone like a priest to broker and facilitate that access.

Our call to worship today provides the Biblical basis for proclaiming the priesthood of all believers in Judaism and in Christianity. Once King Henry VIII separated the church in England from Catholicism and the Pope, Henry appointed himself as head of the Church of England. If you have an older King James Bible, it will name King James as the Protector and Defender of the faith. That is the same King James who put Baptist Thomas Helwys in prison to die and who
executed Quakers and Puritans because of their beliefs. Baptists talk about the church being a spiritual democracy under the Lordship of Jesus, and every member of the Baptist spiritual democracy is a priest, not one elevated above the others. Soul freedom demands that we be free from spiritual oppression and religious coercion. Oppressors can kill the body, but they cannot touch the soul that belongs directly to God through Christ Jesus.

In 1855 Soren Kierkegaard published his “Attack on Christendom.” Like the early Baptists, Kierkegaard was disturbed by the way Christianity was practiced. If you baptize every baby you create Christendom, not Christianity. Kierkegaard wrote that Satan had discovered the perfect way to destroy true Christianity. You call everyone a Christian, and then no one actually ever become a Christian, and the nation deceives itself. Kierkegaard wrote that it is very difficult to become a Christian while under the illusion that you already are a Christian!

In the Lincoln - Douglas debates Lincoln asked Douglas, “If we call a cow’s tail a leg, how many legs does the cow now have?” Douglas replied, “Why, she would have five legs.” Lincoln retorted, “No! No! No! Calling a tail a leg doesn’t make it one! She still has only four legs.”

That was the point of Kierkegaard’s Attack on Christendom, calling a person a Christian doesn’t make a Christian. Kierkegaard understood why Baptist insist on born again, true believers as the only proper candidates for baptism and church membership.

Lincoln also said that a lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client. Sometimes lawyers need lawyers. And sometimes priests need priests. We are a community of faith and a congregation of priests. We are priests to ourselves when we approach God directly in prayer and service. We are priests one to another when we admonish each other and help each other to grow in grace.

We are also priests to the world. We are not priests of control, but priests of witness, pointing to God’s mighty acts of salvation in history and especially in the death and resurrection of God’s only Son. As priests we have the grace to live with and for our God. As priests we have the burden of representing Jesus fairly and truly to a world trapped in darkness and sin.

During our celebration of the Lord’s Supper we remember Jesus and grace that saves us and makes us a holy nation, a royal priesthood to the world. This morning we take communion by intinction. This is one of several ways to serve communion. You will take a piece of bread, dip it into the cup, and then eat it. The servers are priests to you. When you help yourself to the elements that remind us of broken body and shed blood of Jesus, you are priests to yourselves.

Most of you will come to the servers. Those who wish to remain in their seats may raise their hands and the servers will come to you first.

On Tuesday we held a memorial service for Jerralyn Wood’s aunt Marium Dagger. Marium pretty well planned her own funeral service, and one thing she most wanted was the song, “Living for Jesus,” because that song was a witness to how she lived her life. We sing it now as we prepare ourselves for the Lord’s Supper. Number 605, “Living for Jesus.”
Sunday, August 1, 2010  
Priesthood of All Believers – Soul Freedom  
Discussion Starters for Let’s Talk Time After Worship  
*Please add your own questions and comments*

- What surprised you in the scripture reading or sermon today?  
- Why is baptism for “believers only” important to the Christian community?  
- What is the biblical basis for the priesthood of all believers?  
- Why did early Baptists view this principle as crucial?  
- Why is the priesthood of all believers seen as a keystone belief of Baptists?  
- Why is “all” significant to the concept of the priesthood of all believers?  
- What is the difference between being a priest as an individual and being a priest in community?  
- What other questions or comments do you have?
Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic
Summer Sermons 2010
Pastor Bill Salyers

Sunday, August 8, 2010
Two Ordinances: Believer’s Baptism and Lord’s Supper
Believer’s Baptism and Lord’s Supper

Matthew 3 (The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)
1-2 While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called "the Baptizer," was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."

4-6 John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life.

7-10 When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It's your life that must change, not your skin!"

13-14 Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, "I'm the one who needs to be baptized, not you!"

15 But Jesus insisted. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism." So John did it.

16-17 The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit--it looked like a dove-descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life."

Matthew 28 (The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)
18-20 Jesus went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

The Lord Supper in the Gospel of Mark

Mark 14 (The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)
22 In the course of their meal, having taken and blessed the bread, he broke it and gave it to them. Then he said, 'Take, this is my body.'
23-24 Taking the chalice, he gave it to them, thanking God, and they all drank from it. He said, 'This is my blood, God's new covenant, Poured out for many people.' 25 "I'll not be drinking wine again until the new day when I drink it in the kingdom of God."
26 They sang a hymn and then went directly to Mount Olives.

John’s gospel reports a commandment of Jesus that most churches tend to ignore.

John 13 (The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)
3-6 Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.
12-17 Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do.

May the Lord bless our hearing of the Word that we might obey!

Are baptism and the Lord’s Supper sacraments? And does it matter? Well it matters if we take Jesus seriously and take the New Testament as our guide to faithful living. Baptists call the ordinances because Jesus ordained or ordered the disciples to keep doing them.

The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were commanded by Jesus. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were practiced by the earliest churches in the book of Acts and by all churches ever since. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were taught and explained in the Epistles of Paul and others in the New Testament. Three things are required for a church ordinance:

   Commanded by Jesus
   Practiced by churches in the New Testament
   Taught by the Epistles

Jesus also clearly commanded that we wash one another’s feet. Foot washing is not reported in Acts or taught in the Epistles, so it fails two of the criteria for Baptist practice today.
Who gets baptized and how they get baptized has often led to debate and even conflict. “Baptizo” is a Greek word meaning “to submerge or immerse in water.” Baptists were convinced that “being buried in baptism requires a lot more water than sprinkling or pouring provides. The New Testament describes the act of baptism as “going down INTO the water,” and “coming up OUT OF the water.” “Baptizo” is the one Greek word that describes those actions.

People often ask why Jesus needed baptism. Jesus was tempted as we are, yet without sin. So why baptism for one without sin. That question suggests that baptism does something to sin. Does it? Does baptism actually do something to sin? When I was six or seven years old, two preachers held a debate in the Wheelwright, Kentucky, elementary school gymnasium. The debate was about baptism, and the issues were these:

1. Is baptism necessary for salvation
2. How was baptism performed in the New Testament?
3. Who is a proper candidate for baptism?

It’s been many years since I’ve heard public debate about those issues anywhere except on the internet. The Campbellite preacher insisted that you must be baptized to be saved, that baptism requires being fully submerged beneath the water, and that a person who wants to be saved is a candidate for baptism because the baptism is what saves that person.

The Baptist preacher in that debate agreed that baptism properly done requires full immersion. The Baptist insisted that the proper candidate was one who could testify that he had already been saved by God’s grace and his faith, and that the baptism was a public symbolic testimony to the change God has already created in his or her life.

In the New Testament there are no unbaptized Christians and no baptized infants. Baptism witnessed to belief already in place. Baptists hold that baptism is a symbolic act that dramatically pictures death, burial, and resurrection. We are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit because our faith and God’s grace has canceled our sin and set us into that eternal life which always begins with faith, not with death.

So Jesus was not baptized because Jesus needed to get saved. Jesus was baptized, like us, as a witness that life belongs to God whether we live, die, or experience resurrection. Jesus set an example of a person fully reconciled with God performing the most dramatic witness possible to God’s redeeming love and resurrection power.

In the Great Commission Jesus specifically commanded his followers to set up intense disciple-building training for everybody and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The second ordinance was commanded by Jesus during the Last Supper, and involves using bread and the fruit of the grapevine which was always real wine in the New Testament. After all, as soon as you make grape juice from grapes, God always begins turning it into wine or vinegar! Jesus administered the first Lord’s Supper before his betrayal and crucifixion, and told his
followers to keep doing it as a symbolic memorial of Jesus himself. Symbolism was intended by Jesus and is understood by Baptists. The broken communion bread is always just bread, but it reminds us in a powerfully symbolic way of the body of Jesus broken on the cross. The fruit of the grape remains grape juice or wine, but reminds in a powerfully symbolic way of the blood Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of our baptism when we “went public” with our faith in a dramatic re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Wes Babian, pastor at First Baptist Church in Springfield for 18 years, used to talk at Communion about “remembering our baptism. Curtis Fett asked, “What about us who have not been baptized?” Wes replied, “Then we remember the baptism that is to come!” Curtis has now been baptized.

These two ordinances point to two basic Baptist principles. Baptism is intensely personal, and gets your personal body very wet. It is an intensely personal and powerful witness by a single individual to the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism does not save us, but is our witness to the salvation already at work in us through our faith and God’s grace. As an intensely personal action, baptism also symbolizes the individual soul competence and freedom of each person who freely chooses Jesus as Lord and makes a commitment to rise from a watery grave to walk in newness of life following in the footsteps of our savior. Christ chose us, and we respond by choosing Christ.

The Lord’s Supper is something Baptists do together. You can’t be Baptist, or be a Christian by yourself. So we have communion, table fellowship to share the bread and cup that remind us powerfully of our Lord’s life and death. Baptists typically have its members serve the Lord’s Supper to the community of faith, practicing our priesthood as we remember Jesus.

An ordinance is a practice commanded by Jesus and practiced by churches from the beginning.

Other churches call these religious practices “sacraments,” and believe that God is present in a special way during the sacraments. Their seven sacraments include baptism, Communion or Eucharist, Penance or Confession, Confirmation, Matrimony, Last Rites, and Holy Orders or priestly ordination.

Ordinances are sacramental, however, because the word, “Sacrament,” means Oath of Allegiance. The Sacramentum was an oath taken by all Roman citizens upon entering the Roman army. That oath, the “Sacramentum” was a life-changing event for the citizen. Only death or demobilization of his Legion could release a man from the Sacramentum!

There are many oaths that are life changing. The vows we exchange in marriage change our lives in dramatic ways as we begin to live as a couple instead of living as individuals. So also the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the oath of allegiance to a new King and a new Kingdom launches into a new life lived in community with the family of God in a particular place.

The two Ordinances celebrated by Baptist churches are symbolic, but they are also public commitments to Jesus. Baptism proclaims our entry into the family of God and into this community of faith as committed followers of Jesus. The immersion is dramatic, but Greek Orthodox churches immerse infants, not once, but three times! The infant is immersed once for
the Father, once for the Son, and once again for the Holy Spirit. Then the Orthodox community works to nurture the infant toward an adult commitment to Christ and confirmation in the church. Baptists believe that infants are never ready for baptism. Like our Anabaptists brothers, Baptists often rebaptize people. When Luther Burke walked down the aisle at Lick Branch Baptist Church 50 years ago and asked for membership, he was well over seventy years of age. I said, “Luther, you know we immerse people who have not yet been properly baptized, don’t you?” Luther, who had been a Presbyterian most of his life, looked me in the eye and said, “Pastor, I want that!” I baptized Luther in a nearby rock quarry as he witnessed not only his faith in Jesus, but his determination to be fully Baptist as a new member of that church.

Baptism is the doorway to church membership. However, getting believers baptized is more important than baptizing them by full immersion. The people with mental retardation in the hospital I served as a chaplain taught me that baptism matters, even if it cannot be by immersion. A woman in the state hospital where I was chaplain had a degenerative disease that was gradually crippling and killing her. Because she gave her heart to Jesus, she begged me to baptize her, but she was often ill, and often in an oxygen tent. Then one Christmas Eve the hospital unit called my home and said she might not live through the night and wanted to see me. I went to the hospital, unzipped her oxygen tent, stuck my head in, and heard her say, “Preacher, if you’re ever going to baptize me, you need to do it now!” So this Baptist preacher learned to baptize by heavy sprinkling. We packed towels around her head and shoulders, and I got a basin of water and baptized her by pouring with staff as witnesses to her profession of faith in baptism. Believers should be baptized! It is our most powerful witness to the world! Her witness grew as she survived the night and lived for two more years!

At Kings Creek Baptist Church our baptistry was behind the pulpit like here. When we baptized people, I invited the children to stand on either side so they could see into the water without blocking the view of the people. After baptizing the candidates, I would walk to the edge of the pool and look each child in the face, and say, “Someday I would love to walk through these baptismal waters with you!”

One Saturday afternoon my phone rang. It was a girl, a teen ager at Kings Creek. She said, “Pastor, my twin and I want to be baptized.” We immediately started a new members class for them and I had the joy of baptizing both of them. A pastor never gets a more exciting call than one from youth who want to follow Jesus in baptism!

Now is the day of salvation! Now is the day to be set free! Now is the day to witness your faith to the world. We invite you to make public your decisions to live your life for Jesus as we sing “Jesus, Our Lord and King” number 466.

**Ephesians 4: 1-6 A Biblical Benediction**

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
Sunday, August 8, 2010

Two Ordinances: Believer’s Baptism and Lord’s Supper

Discussion Starters for Let’s Talk Session

Please add your own questions and comments

1. What surprised you in the scripture reading or sermon today?
2. Describe how “ordinance” and “sacrament” are alike and how they are different.
3. If ordinances are practices commanded by Jesus, why don’t Baptists practice washing one another’s feet?
4. How did Baptists come to believe that baptism by total immersion is the only scriptural way?
5. Why has “believer’s baptism” become essential for Baptists?
6. Some churches teach that grace comes only through the sacraments properly administered by qualified clergy. How do Baptists understand the flow of grace to believers?
7. How is the witness of the two ordinances alike and how different?
8. Share interesting or humorous stories about your participation in the ordinances.
9. What other questions or comments do you have?
Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom

Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom

Priesthood of All Believers – Soul Freedom

Two Ordinances: Believer’s Baptism and Lord’s Supper

Individual Soul Liberty – Religious Freedom

Saved Church Membership

Two Office of the Church: Pastor and Deacon

Separation of Church and State

Individual Soul Liberty – Religious Freedom

Romans 14: 5-12 (The Message, by Peterson)

5 Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

6-9 What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's God we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

10-12 So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

"As I live and breathe," God says, "every knee will bow before me; Every tongue will tell the honest truth that I and only I am God."

So tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

May the Lord bless the hearing of the Word!

After John 3:16, Romans 14: 5 could be a Baptist’s favorite text – As Peterson translates it: one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is FREE to follow the convictions of conscience.
The Book of Acts reports that Peter and John told the Temple Authorities that they would obey God, not man.

Today that kind of Religious Liberty is at risk in these United States of America. In Evanston, Illinois, the city once used restrictive zoning rules to prevent First Baptist Church from feeding and housing homeless people in winter. First Baptist fought those rules and won. A war on religious liberty continues as people in government try to tell people how and where they serve their God preventing the free exercise of their religion.

A Muslim cleric who consistently speaks out against Islamic terrorism seeks to establish an Islamic culture center and mosque several blocks from the site where the 9-11-2001 attack destroyed the World Trade Center. Opposition violates the religious liberty of Muslims. I’m sorry to say that some Baptists have joined in the protest against Muslim freedom of religion. I’m proud to say that the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty supported by several Baptist groups including American Baptists fights every day for total religious liberty.

Baptist belief in complete religious liberty grows from their belief that each person must make a mature, adult free decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. No one else can make the decision for anyone. As long as there are tests in school, you can’t keep kids from praying, and as long as people try to tell kids when to pray and what to pray, good Baptists will protest and help take them to court over it.

(Examples from BruceGourley.com – The Baptist Index)

In September 1774 the first Continental Congress was convened in Philadelphia to form a united response to the British assault on our rights. Also in 1774, in Northampton, Massachusetts, 18 Baptists were sitting in jail for refusing to pay taxes to support the town’s Congregational minister.

Still in 1774, in Virginia, James Madison said “I must beg you to . . . pray for liberty of conscience for all.”

For 200 years from the mid 1600s to 1848 Baptists were the most persecuted religious group in America, and they became most insistent on religious liberty for all, taking the lead in the establishment of religious liberty first in Virginia, and then at the federal level.

In the 1600s Puritans established religious liberty, but only for themselves. They forced Baptist Roger Williams into the wilderness to stop Baptist preaching.

Roger Williams was the first champion of full religious liberty in colonial America. Williams founded the Rhode Island colony in 1635 on the principles of full religious liberty and democratic government. In 1638, he founded the first Baptist Church in America. I have worshiped in that church. Religious Liberty in colonial America was primarily limited to Rhode Island and to William Penn’s Pennsylvania.

Baptists entered Virginia in the early 1700s. The first Virginia Baptists were thrown in jail in Spotsylvania in 1768, for refusing to stop preaching, and thus disturbing the peace. Among
them were John Waller, Lewis Craig, James Childs. Imprisonment of Baptists continued until at least 1778, often they were jailed for five months. Baptists were accused of child abuse, and Baptist marriages were not recognized in Virginia.

**Virginia court records tell interesting things about Baptists.**

"ducked (baptized) and nearly drowned by 20 men"
"commanded to take a dram of whiskey, or be whipped"
"jailed for permitting a layman to pray"
"Baptist meeting broken up by a mob"
"Baptist arrested as a vagabond and schismatic"
"tried to blow Baptist up with gun powder"
"Baptist shot with a shot-gun"
"ruffians armed with bludgeons beat a Baptist"
"Baptist whipped severely by the Sheriff"
"Baptist’s hands slashed while preaching"

In 1770 – Baptists presented petitions for the removal of restrictions placed on them. In 1775 – Baptists presented petitions calling for the abolishment of the established church; with 10,000 signatures, including Presbyterians and some Anglicans.

In 1776 – Virginia disestablished Church of England; and dissenters were exempted from attending church and paying taxes to the Church, and were allowed to publicly voice their religious sentiments but no separation of church and state; Baptists were still not happy, and were still persecuted.

1778-1786 – John Leland led the Baptist agitation for complete separation of church and state. Some denominations were willing to compromise with a general religious tax to support all churches, but the Baptists refused. With government money comes government control.

In 1786 – Virginia established Religious Freedom. And Baptists complained that the proposed new federal constitution did not guarantee religious liberty.

In 1787 – John Leland rallied Baptist support behind James Madison’s candidacy for the Virginia Convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution in turn for Madison’s promise to promote a federal religious liberty amendment.

In 1789 – Madison was elected to congress and was a champion for constitutional amendments based on the model Virginia Declaration of Rights.

In 1791 – The “Bill of Rights” was ratified, with freedom of speech and a Religious Liberty clause in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

In 1833 – Massachusetts became the final state to grant full religious liberty and established state churches were no more in this country.

Stan Hastey writes: A basic distinction must be made between two terms – “religious
liberty” and “separation of church and state” – They are similar, but different!
Religious liberty is a theological concept rooted in Scripture. Separation of church and state is the method devised by the nation’s founders to implement the principle of religious liberty. Religious liberty comes before separation of church and state, both in historical sequence and in theological importance.

Put another way, religious liberty is God’s gift to humanity. Separation of church and state is the nation’s means of providing the political atmosphere which allows that gift to be expressed.

(Shurden, Four Fragile Freedoms)
In 1612 Thomas Helwys in England wrote A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity, and it was the first plea for complete religious freedom in the English language. Helwys boldly inscribed a handwritten note in a copy that he sent to King James I. Helwys reminded James that “the king is a mortal man and not God” and “therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects.” King James promptly put Helwys in jail where he died four years later in 1616.

In the document Helwys affirmed loyalty to the state, the limitations of the state, and the principle of religious liberty for all people. Helwys wrote, “Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertaines not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure” because “mens religion to God is betwixt God and themselves.”

When Baptists were a persecuted minority in England and Colonial America, it was easy for them to favor absolute religious liberty for every individual, and to insist on complete separation of church and state. Baptist witness was a driving force in putting freedom of religion in the Bill of Rights.

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

Two things were guaranteed: First that Congress will not favor, promote, or endow religion; and Second that Congress shall not impede, obstruct or penalize religion. Government would simply leave religion alone.

When government favors one religion or one religious practice, then all other religious practices are in danger.

In Tennessee where I attended public school, there was prayer and Bible talk in school. Usually it was Baptists or Methodists doing the talking. Catholics had parochial schools. Lutherans had parochial schools. Other Protestants in Knoxville treated public schools as if they were Protestant parochial schools.

I remember Mr. Peak starting every history class on Monday by asking a show of hands as he asked his set of questions.
   Who attended church once yesterday?
Who attended two services yesterday? Three? Four?

Baptists with Sunday School, morning worship, Training Union, and evening worship always got the most approval in that exercise. Did that enhance my faith? I don’t think so. I didn’t go to school to have church! As I look back on it, I realize that Jews in my history class had services on Friday, not Sunday. There were students who were militantly anti-religion. And my teacher was getting between us and our God, and between us and any rejection of God.

As Walter Shurden explains, “Religious freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar!” Baptists also extended their radical individualism to freedom from religious authority as well as freedom from government authority.

Personal religion that is not freely chosen and free from interference by others is religious oppression. Baptists join together freely and voluntarily to praise God, study the Bible, grow into discipleship, and witness to the world how Jesus has transformed our lives. And Baptists are free to leave, as well as free to stay. We lose a lot of Baptists that way, even though we also believe that a Christian without a church has lost his way.

Listen to our text for today in three versions:

**King James**: Romans 14:5 - One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

**NIT - New International Translation**: Romans 14:5 - One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

**Peterson**: Romans 14: 5 – one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

Peterson’s translation makes Paul sound like a Baptist!

Celebrate our mighty God with our invitation hymn, # 147, “How Great Thou Art.”

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**Sunday, August 15, 2010**

**Individual Soul Liberty – Religious freedom**

**Discussion Starters for Let’s Talk Time after Worship**

*Please add your own questions and comments*

What surprised you in the scripture reading or sermon today?

- What does religious freedom mean to Baptists?
- How does God’s freedom interact with human freedom?
- Why do Baptists support freedom of worship and thought for people who disagree with them?
- What seems to threaten freedom of religion and opinion in our society?
- What dangers do you see in total freedom?
- What other questions or comments do you have?
Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic
Summer Sermons 2010
Pastor Bill Salyers

Sunday, August 22, 2010

B Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom
A Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom
P Priesthood of All Believers – Soul Freedom
T Two Ordinances: Believer’s Baptism and Lord’s Supper
I Individual Soul Liberty – Religious Freedom
S Saved Church Membership
T Two Office of the Church: Pastor and Deacon
S Separation of Church and State

John 3: 1-18 (The Message, Eugene Peterson)
1-2 There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it."

3 Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom."

4 "How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?"

5-6 Jesus said, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

7-8 "So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God."

9Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?"

10-12 Jesus said, "You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God?"

13-15 "No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down
from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

16-18 "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

Acts sums up the events of the first Pentecost with this:

41-42 That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

43-45 Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

46-47 They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.


13-14 On the Sabbath, we left the city and went down along the river where we had heard there was to be a prayer meeting. We took our place with the women who had gathered there and talked with them. One woman, Lydia, was from Thyatira and a dealer in expensive textiles, known to be a God-fearing woman. As she listened with intensity to what was being said, the Master gave her a trusting heart—and she believed!

15 After she was baptized, along with everyone in her household, she said in a surge of hospitality, "If you're confident that I'm in this with you and believe in the Master truly, come home with me and be my guests." We hesitated, but she wouldn't take no for an answer.

May the Lord bless the hearing of the Word!

Can you be a church member without being a Christian? Yes! And many join a church without joining Jesus.

Throughout church history many church members were Christians in name only. One massive example: The emperor Constantine marched his army to the river and had the entire army baptized by a priest who used a leafy tree limb to sprinkle water over all of them as he said the baptismal formula. How many of them do you suppose had made a personal, life-changing decision to follow Jesus as a disciple? Most still worshiped Mithra, their Roman soldier’s god.
When the church began to baptize infants, the church created members, but not Christians. Danish Lutheran Soren Kierkegaard described the practice of infant baptism as the perfect way to destroy Christianity. After all, he said, if everyone is a Christian, then no one is a Christian. What really gets baptized in Christendom, where there is an established church, is not people, but the national or cultural way of life. So people imagine that being a good person and a good citizen makes them a real Christian. And that saves them from taking Jesus seriously!

**Can you be a Christian without being a church member?** No! You cannot be married by yourself. And you cannot be a Christian by yourself.

Can you be a secret Christian? A pastor invited a young man to become a Christian. He said, “I am a Christian already!” Then why don’t I ever see you at church or with other Christians. The young man replied, “I’m in the Secret Service.” That’s how we lie to ourselves!

From the beginning of the Baptist movement, Baptists have insisted on a redeemed, saved, born again church membership. Usually churches that strive for saved church members provide discipleship training before baptism or insist on discipleship training after baptism. Discipleship training has become the “Great Omission.” Dallas Willard in a book entitled “The Great Omission” explains that failure to “make disciples” as commanded in the Great Commission is the Great Omission. We don’t prepare people before or after baptism to be the kind of church members expected in the New Testament!

Before baptism Baptists expect a public confession of sin, a public profession of faith in Jesus, followed by a public witness through full immersion baptism resulting in a changed life.

Let me tell you about Hannah. Hannah lived in Hanover, Indiana. She was the wife of the funeral director in town. I went there to discuss a difficult funeral of a man who had committed suicide. While the funeral director was busy, his wife, Hannah, and I talked. Noticing that she was reading a book about Israel, I commented on it. Soon my interest in and knowledge of some Hebrew led her to close the book and turn our conversation into a very serious direction. Her husband had been a captain in the U.S. Army during World War 2. She met him in New York City and married him. Returning to his home in Hanover, Indiana, she became aware of his commitment to Jesus and membership in the local Presbyterian church. Hannah was a Jew. She went to church with her husband. It soon became clear that the church and the community expected her to become a member of that church. After talking with the pastor, Hannah joined and began attending regularly.

Soon she became angry and disillusioned with the church. “They misled me!” she said. “They told me nothing of what they believed. They made it seem like joining any other social group in town. Then they began talking about Jesus and what they really believed about Jesus. If they had told me that before I joined, I would never have joined. I was a Jew. I am a Jew. And I don’t believe what they believe. They made it seem trivial and said nothing to indicate that I would give up being a Jew. I am desperately unhappy!”
Christian in name only. **She joined for the social connections, not out of soul convictions!**

My great aunt Evelyn belonged to the Presbyterian church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since most of our family is very Baptist, I asked her why she joined a Presbyterian church. She said, “I studied the churches in town and that church offered me the best access to people who were important to my business.”

**Aunt Evelyn joined for the social connections, not out of soul convictions!**

A young man came during the invitation hymn during a revival I preached. We talked after the benediction. The question the pastor and I asked was, “Why do you want to become a Christian and join this church?” His answer was, "I can't find a job, and I hoped that this might get God to have someone hire me.” He was not kidding. The pastor offered to start a new Christian class to help him think more deeply about his faith. It is not about me or you. It is about Jesus and God’s Kingdom!

The New Testament gives us several models for understanding the Christian life. I want to talk about two of those models for a Christian life: **New Birth and Covenant of Marriage.** Both models struggle with the Great Omission of discipleship training.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. A secret admirer. Something happened between John 3 and John 19 when

**John 19: 39-42 Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus at night, came now in broad daylight carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. (Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus) took Jesus’ body and, following the Jewish burial custom, wrapped it in linen with the spices. (Peterson)**

It takes more than a birth to create a responsible adult. It takes more than a new birth to create a responsible Christian. Nicodemus was confused by the image of new birth. Nicodemus made the mistake of focusing on the event of birth instead of the process of growing up.

While in seminary I worked at night at Kentucky Baptist Hospital. One evening I clocked in at 11 o’clock, and before I had spoken to anyone I became aware of an excitement and tension in the air. You could feel it! On the psychiatric ward where I worked, I asked Richard Daniels what was going on. Richard explained that someone had discovered a baby in a trash can. The baby was now in the neonatal ward, and the entire hospital staff was anxious about the baby’s condition and chances for survival. **Someone birthed a baby and abandoned it without raising it!**

That baby is a parable of the new birth in many churches. We lead people to Jesus and then neglect to teach them how grow into mature disciples. Hannah in Hanover deeply resented the great omission of discipleship training that led her to compromise her Jewish faith.

The other New Testament model for a Christian life is the marriage covenant. The New Testament calls the church the “Bride of Christ.” In this culture, a “secret Christian” is like a
“secret marriage.” What’s the point of keeping a life changing event secret?

If becoming a Christian is like entering a marriage, the Great Omission comes when we confuse the wedding ceremony and the wedding vows with the married life. What kind of marriage would we have if we went to the altar and swore to love, honor, and cherish. Swore to forsake all others, keeping only to this love. And then went our separate ways as if nothing had changed?
The Four Spiritual Laws approach salvation like vows at a wedding. Confess your sinful condition. Accept that God has wonderful plan for your life. Trust Jesus to transform everything. Pray the sinner’s prayer. And you are saved! Once saved; always saved!

Once married; always married! Maybe not, because a marriage is built on commitment. It is living out the commitment that makes a marriage. A Christian life is based on commitment. It is living out the faith that makes a Christian.

And people who live out the faith are the kind of born again, saved people a Baptist expects its members to be.

Becoming a Christian is a lifelong process of becoming a disciple obeying all that Jesus taught.

To be a Christian, you start by taking Jesus very seriously. The faith is about Jesus and God’s Kingdom, not about you.

To be a Christian growing in discipleship, you continue by putting Jesus first in your life. First before self. First before family. First before country. First even before your survival. Jesus asked, “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

To be a Christian, you must belong to a local community of faith in which to grow in grace and service to God and to the world that God loves.

In the book of Acts, God added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Giving your heart and life to Jesus does not make you perfect, and God knows it does not make the other members of your church perfect. We need help to love our enemies; to pray for those who take advantage of us; to forgive so that we may be forgiven. We need help from fellow disciples walking the Jesus road to tell us honestly when we are out of step. We need help from the community of love and faith to accept and forgive ourselves when we lose our way. We need each other, for it is together that we find, understand, and serve Jesus!

I have decided to follow Jesus as a Baptist. Let’s invite others to join us on our journey.

# 602 “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus”
Benediction Followed by Watermelon Roast! With cake, cookies, bagels and other unroasted goodies. NOTE: No “Let’s Talk Time” during the Outdoor Service. Let’s Talk resumes on August 29, 2010.
Sunday, August 29, 2010

Baptist Believers – Baptists Acrostic
Summer Sermons 2010 – Pastor Bill Salyers

B Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom
A Autonomy of the Local Church – Church Freedom
P Priesthood of All Believers – Soul Freedom
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Biblical Authority – Bible Freedom

Qualifications of Bishops
1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Qualifications of Deacons
8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Let us hear the word with glad hearts.

Two preacher jokes to start with. A young man went to London and told Charles Spurgeon that God has told him to come preach in Spurgeon’s Tabernacle. Spurgeon asked when they young man had talked with God about this assignment. He replied, “Just last week.”

“Well then, I have news for you. I have just talked with God, and he told me under no circumstances was I to allow you to preach here!” God’s call needs the discernment of God’s people.
A young man in Kentucky went to his Baptist deacons and informed them that he had a vision and a call from God. They listened carefully as he described the unusual clouds that clearly formed the letters “G” and “P.” “God is telling me to ‘Go Preach!’” he exclaimed. Impressed, the deacons arranged for him to preach on Sunday. After the sermon, the deacons met with the young man and announced, “We have considered the story of your call to preach and we have listened to your sermon. It is our discernment that God has called you, but not to preach. The ‘GP’ meant ‘Go Plow!’” People can claim a calling form God to preach, but it is the Baptist church that discerns the validity of the call and the appropriateness of the gifts to preach before ordaining that person to the gospel ministry!

Ministry is what the people of God do together. All the people are ministers. So why have Baptists made an issue of only two scriptural office in a New Testament church? The simple answer is that early Baptists could find only two ordained offices in the New Testament. A more important answer is that early Baptists thought pastors and deacons had important gifts and work. But their gifts gave them no special authority or power. Baptists feel free to choose or create the “offices” they ordain, and insist on choosing who fills those ordained offices. Pastors lead, but are not moderators. Pastors lead, but are not treasurers. Baptists thought that too much power in the hands of clergy creates problems for the church and its mission. For Baptists the local church was a spiritual democracy, not governed by priests or kings.

The basic meaning of “pastor” is “shepherd.” Lutherans like the term Pastor, since their preachers started out as German Shepherds. (Apologies to Lutherans and my incredulous wife).

“Pastor” as “shepherd” occurs frequently in the Old Testament and depending on your translation, only once in Ephesians. Prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah often spoke unkindly of the Shepherd-Leaders of Israel, kings and priests, condemning them when they led Israel away from God. Ezekiel wrote (chapter 34, Peterson):

1-6 God's Message came to me: "...prophesy against the shepherd-leaders of Israel. ... Tell those shepherds, 'God, the Master, says: Doom to you shepherds of Israel, feeding your own mouths! Aren't shepherds supposed to feed sheep? ... you roast the lambs, but you don't feed the sheep. You don't build up the weak ones, ... don't go after the strays, don't look for the lost. You bully and badger them. And now they're scattered every which way because there was no shepherd—scattered and easy pickings for wolves and coyotes. ... My sheep scattered all over the world, and no one out looking for them!

The New Testament uses other words for leaders: shepherds of the flock, elders of the family, teachers of the faith, apostles of the gospel, and sometimes overseers or bishops of the local community of faith. Pastors and shepherds were accountable for the instruction and welfare of the sheep, but they were not to take advantage of the sheep! In the sixth chapter of Acts the apostles clearly described their duties.

1-4 During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—"Hellenists"—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care
of the poor. So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word."

That is where deacons came in. If pastor means “shepherd,” you might be interested to know that “deacon” (Greek dikainos) can be translated as “servant” or “slave.” Deacons were freed the apostles to preach and teach the Word of God by taking over the task of caring for the poor and making sure no one in the community of faith went hungry. Deacons were chosen as servants and ordained as servants. They were trustees of the communities resources and responsible for responsible and fair application of those resources to the needs of the community.

In the New Testament apostles were appointed first by Jesus, and after that they were appointed and ordained by local churches. The church at Antioch ordained Barnabas and Paul as apostles. Then Antioch ordained Paul and Silas as apostles. Also in the New Testament apostles and elders, pastors deacons often were women. We could do a fascinating Bible study on women leaders in the early church!

You see, the earliest churches truly believed Paul’s insistence in Galatians 3 that:

28-29 In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises.

If all are equal, then all are equally qualified to accept God’s call to leadership and to do what other followers of the Jesus Way did without regard to race, servitude, or gender! Like their Lord, Paul and the earliest church were radically inclusive and radically egalitarian providing equal access and equal opportunity to everyone in the community of faith.

In the earliest house churches, wealthy Roman women were served communion by slaves from a neighbor’s estate. Brilliant Jewish preachers like Apollos who knew only the baptism of John the Baptists, were tutored in the faith by women like Priscilla until they got the gospel right. Not everyone agrees with me, but it is entirely possible that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by a woman, possibly by Priscilla, a fellow apostle with Paul. Hebrews reads like the curriculum Priscilla used to explain the faith more fully to a newly Christian Jew needing to get up to speed on the full gospel of Jesus.

Pastors and Deacons clearly were two offices in New Testament churches. Leadership in the church also resulted from gifts of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians we read of many gifts shared among the members of the Body of Christ by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4 the Word says:

He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

Let me suggest a way of understanding the early Baptist insistence on two ordained offices. For
a number of years I was on the Easter Seal national staff as management consultant to the Easter Seal nationwide network of rehabilitation facilities. As a consultant I learned as much as I taught. Here’s one important thing I learned. Organizations make changes to fix problems. The problems go away. Then the changes don’t really fit the new situation now that the problem is gone, so the fix becomes a new problem.

Until things become desperate, organizations fear change more than failure. So it takes a long time for people to agree to the next change. Baptist churches often seek a pastor as different as possible from the one who didn’t work out well. Then you have the pendulum problem. If the pendulum swings too far in one direction, it will surely then swing too far in the other direction. A radically different pastor may not be the best solution. A spiritual focus relationships between pastor and people might be a better solution. Let’s face it: church, like evangelism, is about relationships.

Martin Luther and other reformers in the Protestant Reformation wanted to take the church back to its New Testament roots. Martin Luther lived from 1483 to 1546. By 1609 when the first Baptist church was formed in England, the Reformers had drifted into a way of being church that was often as arrogant, centralized, and controlling as the Roman church they meant to reform. Two many priests, bishops, archbishops, monks, and ways of staffing and being church that once again repressed free worship, free exercise of religion, free choice of faith.

So Baptists meant to simplify things by insisting on two offices: pastor and deacon. Life is what happens when you are paying attention to other things. As Baptist churches grew, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, so did Baptist church staffs. The demands of large churches led to trustees as well as deacons. Along came Sunday School, which originally started to give literacy opportunities to child workers in the British industrial revolution, and then became Christian education. Where do you find a “Sunday School Superintendent” in the New Testament?

Other ways of serving the poor and administering churches led many Baptist churches away from ordaining deacons. Some even elected, but did not ordain deacons, often including women as deaconesses. The first Baptists might worry that we have strayed from the New Testament if they saw how we do church today. **Living the spirit of New Testament freedom in Jesus is more Biblical than finding a proof text for every church practice!**

Here is an important witness from the earliest Baptists. Pastors are not holier, smarter, or better leaders than other church members. Even with an educated clergy, everything a pastor knows is available to any church member accepting the discipline of discipleship. Ordinances of the church are the responsibility of the congregation, and a Baptist church can authorize any of its members to administer baptism, preside at the Lord’s table, preach the Word on Sunday, visit the sick, and comfort the troubled. Ministry is what churches do, with or without a pastor. The support work of a deacon as defined in the book of Acts can be delegated to any member of the church to enable others to preach and teach the word.

We ordain people to the gospel ministry in recognition of gifts they have and the calling they claim. I’ve listened to some of you teach Sunday School, and I know that this church could delegate preaching to some of you with confidence that it would be done well! Let’s look again at
that list of gifts in Ephesians:

*He handed out gifts of*

  *apostle,*
  *prophet,*
  *evangelist,* and *pastor-teacher*

*to train Christ’s followers in skilled servant work...*

All of them could be ordained, but none of them have to be ordained to exercise the gifts God has given them. The Pastor-Teacher is most like a Player-Coach. Skilled at living for Jesus, the person with a Pastor-Teacher gift must also be skilled at teaching others how to live the Jesus way. The Spirit can give that gift to any of us. I’ve seen it in our Sunday School!

In our church we need to identify those with the gift of evangelism. Evangelists are folks who can form winsome relationships to invite others to join us in living the Jesus way. In most churches the most effective evangelists are not pastors, but members who build loving, caring, winsome, inviting relationships that lead others to see Jesus in a new light.

Joseph D. Ban, American Baptist scholar and leader, wrote, “By our baptism we are ordained to be evangelists.” That is the most important ministry in our church, and it belongs to all of us. As Player-Coach the Pastor-Teacher trains, enables, and supports us in our ministry as evangelists building transforming relationships with everyone we know. Ministry is our job. Our pastor’s job is to help us succeed as daily followers of Jesus.

If all of us are not functioning as disciples of Jesus and ministers of God, exercising the gifts given to us by God’s Spirit, the best pastor in the world won’t turn us around! By forming a strong community of faith, we can turn each other around, and even help a pastor who might lose the way.

This is our challenge as we expect our new pastor! This is how Dorothy Lane American Baptist Church becomes God’s church for this community and this age! God be with you as we follow Jesus together as a community of faith practicing its spiritual democracy together! Hymn # 232 “God Be With You.”

**Sunday, August 29, 2010**

**Individual Soul Liberty – Religious freedom**

**Discussion Starters for Let’s Talk Time**

*Please add your own questions and comments*

- What surprised you in the scripture reading or sermon today?
- What does “Office of the Church” mean to Baptists?
- What concern did having only two offices address?
- What authority do Baptists give pastors with ordination?
- How can Baptists best practice their ministry as priests and evangelists?
- What questions do you have about women leaders in the New Testament?
- How has this series on Baptist Believers changed the way you understand Baptists?
- What other questions or comments do you have about today’s sermon or about the series?
Some Resources for Baptist History and Beliefs

The books in this list are not the only books I have consulted for the series of sermons on Baptist Beliefs, but all the books in this list are part of my personal library. Reading about Baptists requires that you know who does the writing or publishing. You will find reliable books on Baptists published by Judson Press and Smyth & Helwys Publishers. Both those publishers stand in the true Baptist tradition of people with open minds and open Bibles. (Neither minds nor Bibles work well when closed.) The Baptist History & Heritage Society website is also a source of dependable Baptist witness, and its executive director, Bruce Gourley, provides important leadership for free thinking Baptists. Resources marked with an asterisk were especially helpful in preparing the sermon series.

My discussion questions always start with: What surprised you in the scripture reading or sermon today? This is not an idle question. It has led to interesting discussion in every Let’s Talk Time. Not only do I expect my listeners and readers to be surprised, I also expect myself to be surprised every time I read or hear Scripture, sermons, and commentary. God’s Spirit gives us fresh ears for every listening and awakens fresh, often unexpected responses as our personal experience and renewing commitment filter God’s word to us as if for the first time.

<p>| <em>The Baptist Identity</em>: Four Fragile Freedoms, Walter B. Shurden, Smyth &amp; Helwys, 1993 |
| <em>Why I Am A Baptist</em>: Reflections on Being Baptist in the 21st Century, Cecil P. Staton, Jr., Editor, Smyth &amp; Helwys, 1999 |</p>
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<th>Title</th>
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<td><em>Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: The Church</em></td>
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<td>Wesley L. Forbis, Editor</td>
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Wendy Morris, American Baptist, is a good friend and passionate about children.
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<td>Developing Your Small Church’s Potential</td>
<td>Carl S. Dudley &amp; Douglas Alan Walrath</td>
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**SOME HELPFUL WEB SITES**

  *This sermon series will be published on the BH&HS web site as a resources for others.*
- [http://www.allaboutbaptists.com/](http://www.allaboutbaptists.com/) - Well a LOT about Baptists if not ALL
- [http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/) - An important, very progressive group of Baptists
- [http://www.thefellowship.info/](http://www.thefellowship.info/) - Cooperative Baptist Fellowship - Moderate Baptists in the South

**billsalyers@sbcglobal.net** - Home 937-399-2279, Cell 937-206-8842  
The conversation does not have to end. Please contact Pastor Bill Salyers if you have questions, comments, or want to know more about us amazing Baptists.