

# Why Baptists are not Protestants

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# Baptists *are not* Protestants?

In the Western world, apart from Islam and eastern religions, people mainly are put in one of three religious groups. If you are not a Jew or a Roman Catholic, then automatically you are a Protestant. Consequently, Baptists are usually called "Protestants." However, this does not match the facts. Baptists never have been protestants.

The Protestant Reformation is usually dated from 31st October, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. However, this was only one of a series of acts that led to the open rupture with Rome.

An often unnoticed event, but of utmost importance, is the Second Diet (or Council) of Speier, March, 1529. This was a Roman Catholic Council for the purpose of taking action against the Turks and checking the progress of Lutherans and others who were not cooperating with the Pope. On 25th April, 1529, certain Lutheran princes appeared before this Roman Catholic Diet with a formal written protest against those matters in which the Diet went contrary to the Word of God and the Christian faith as they understood it. This protest was signed by Elector John of Saxony, Margrave George of Brandenburg, Dukes Ernest and Francis of Braunschweig-Liineburg, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt, and the representatives of fourteen imperial cities. The protest was designed to protect them from the decisions of this Council. It was a defensive measure. The celebrated church historian, Philip Schaff, makes the noteworthy statement, "From this protest and appeal, the Lutherans were called Protestants." (History of the Christian Church, Volume VII, p. 692). The same facts are stated in the Catholic Encyclopaedia (Volume XII, p. a95)

These Lutheran leaders, and a few Reformed, who made this appeal and protest at the famous Diet of Speier were speaking for themselves and not for Baptists, of whom they themselves said in their written statement, "All Ana-baptists and re-baptised persons, male or female, of mature age, shall be judged and brought from natural life to death, by fire, or sword, or otherwise, as may befit the

persons without preceding trial by spiritual judges." The Baptists then did not share in this protest and consequently cannot bear the name "Protestant." Here are three reasons why Baptists are not Protestants.

### **Historically,** Baptists Are Not Protestants

Protestants date from the sixteenth century. They are the Lutherans, the Reformed (i.e. Anglicans, Presbyterians, etc.) and others who were once Roman Catholics and left the Roman Catholic faith to start denominations of their own. The Baptists never left the Roman Catholic Church as did Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. They never left because they were never in! They did not begin their existence at the time of the Reformation but hundreds of years prior to the Reformation.

Baptists make no effort to trace a historical succession back to the age of the Apostles. Their only claim is that at every age in church history there have been groups that have held to the same doctrines that Baptists hold today. This is not to say that they were uniform in every teaching. These groups may or may not have been connected and they have been known by various names. Some of them were the Montanists (150A.D.), the Novatians (240A.D.), Donatists (305 A.D.), Paulicians (650 A.D.), Albigenses (1022 A.D.), and Waldensians (1170 A.D.). Historical records reveal that groups eventually were organised that took on the name Anabaptist as an official title. As such, "Anabaptist," came into prominence just before the time of the Protestant Reformation. It was not of, nor did it come out from the Reformation!

Full historical data immediately refutes the view that there was only one religious group - the Roman Catholic Church - until the time of Martin Luther. Anyone who claims this simply has not done his homework.

Historically, anabaptist was a name given by opponents who berated those holding to the Scriptural conviction that baptism should be of believers only. Anabaptists correctly believe those baptised at child birth or in infancy must be



baptised again (i.e. Scripturally for the first time) upon a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The prefix “ana” is from the Greek and means “again” as in re-baptise. The Scriptures teach that baptism, by full immersion, is ordered for one after they have experienced salvation. Salvation, as God's unearned, unmerited gift is given by the Holy Spirit to one (regardless of age) who has knowingly trusted Christ as their Saviour. Any such consenting individual, who previously received infant baptism, and requests "believer's baptism" after their conversion, would be an anabaptist regardless of church affiliation! Any group past, present or future that practices the same would be "anabaptist" as the Baptists of today, regardless of their name.

Purposely introducing non-Baptist testimony into our discussion gives witness to the great antiquity of Baptist people. The Polish Cardinal Stanilaus Hosius (1504 - 1579), was a Roman Catholic prelate who had as his life work the investigation and suppression of non-Catholic groups. By Pope Paul IV he was designated one of the three papal presidents of the famous Council of Trent. Hosius carried on vigorously the work of the counter-reformation. If anyone in post-reformation times knew the doctrines and history of non-Catholic groups, it was Hosius. Cardinal Hosius said in 1524, "Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1,200 years, they would swarm in greater number than all the Reformers" (Letters Apud Opera, pp. 112,113). Note carefully that this knowledgeable Catholic scholar has spoken of the vicious persecution Baptists have endured, that he clearly distinguishes them from the Reformers, and that he dates them 1,200 years before the Protestant Reformation.

It is also evident that the Baptists were not Protestants because they were fiercely persecuted by the Protestant Reformers and their followers. Uncounted thousands of them lost their goods, their lands and their lives in these persecutions. On 9th March, 1526, the Zurich Council decreed "that whosoever re-baptised should be drowned." Konrad Grebel, a leader of the Swiss Anabaptists, was spared this fate only because he died in prison for his faith in 1526. Felix Manz was not so fortunate. Trussed up like a turkey, he was tossed into the River Limmat by the Zurich authorities and drawn from a boat until drowned on 5th January, 1527. His wife met the same fate. Noted Baptist leader Balthauser Hubmaier was burned alive at the stake in Vienna 10th March,

1528. Three days later his wife was drowned by being thrown over the Danube bridge with a stone tied to her neck. The facts abundantly attest that historically Baptists are not Protestants.

## **Doctrinally,** Baptists Are Not Protestants

The viewpoint that Baptists share common doctrinal ground with Protestant groups is not an accurate reporting of the facts. There are six striking differences.

1. Baptists believe with all their hearts that God's Word alone is sufficient for faith and practice. We read, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine ..." (2 Timothy 3:16). Various Protestant denominations have creeds, catechisms, and assorted doctrinal standards which so define them.

A local Bible-believing church, that calls itself Baptist, is not under any obligation to any denominational creed, catechism, or other standard. Though some local Baptist churches may independently have instructive teaching materials and some form of a confession of faith for its members, no individual church is under any obligation to adhere to some enforced statutes, in order to be called a Baptist Church. Baptist churches, by their nature, are independent, self-governing, local assemblies that hold to the Bible alone for their standard.

2. Baptists believe that Christ, and only Christ, is the LORD and head of the Church even as the Scripture says, "Christ is the Head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23). He is Administrator, Overseer, Director, Supervisor and Controller of the affairs of the Church on earth (Revelation 1:10-20). Baptist churches are spiritual democracies whose head is Christ. There is no man, council, synod, presbytery nor any ecclesiastical machinery among our churches that has the oversight of Baptist churches.

Baptists have no denomination in the sense of an organisation that controls local congregations. Each local church is autonomous and accountable only to Christ, who is its Head. A Baptist church, while fellowshiping with congregations of

like faith and practice, has no headquarters in Rome, Utah, New York City or Canterbury. Its headquarters is in Heaven.

3. Baptists believe from their hearts in a free church in a free state. Christ plainly taught that the state and the church each had its own realm when he said "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Baptists are vigorously opposed to union of state and church and believe that a state controlled church is a wretched excuse for Christianity and a plain departure from Scripture.

The stated purpose of government is political; the business of the Church is spiritual. Neither ought to interfere in the realm of the other. From the beginning, Baptists have been separatists who advocate soul liberty of the individual. That is the ability to worship God according to the conscience without the control or dictates of state or church.

4. Baptists believe strongly in individual accountability to God because the Scriptures clearly teach that "everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). We recognise one High Priest or Mediator between God and men, and that is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). A priest cannot answer for you; a church cannot answer for you to God. Godparents cannot make reply in your behalf.

Each born-again believer is privileged to approach God, pray to Him, worship Him freely and fully at any time. We need no human intermediary because we have direct access to the Father through Christ (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Hebrews 4:15,16). Because God has no grandchildren, no one ever enters heaven because of what his parents believe. No one is saved, or experiences a right relationship because of his identification with or membership in any religion. He alone will give account for himself to God. Protestants generally do not hold this Scriptural doctrine.

5. Baptist people furthermore have always held to baptism as following belief. None of the Protestant Reformers held this Bible teaching. In the Scriptures, faith and repentance always preceded baptism. On the day of Pentecost, Peter plainly told the people, "Repent and be baptised" (Acts 2:38). This obviously

means that there is no infant baptism since infants are incapable of repenting. No unbelievers are to be baptised. The Reformers followed Rome in their teaching on baptism. Baptists have held steadfastly to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles on this point.

Unlike most Protestants, who pour or sprinkle, believers' baptism is by full immersion. Sometimes, it is correctly referred to as dipping, because the body is submerged, thereby symbolising the Saviour's death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:4,5).

(6) Baptists, on the basis of Scripture, have always held to a regenerated, saved, converted, born again church membership, that is a membership that is made up only of people who give a credible profession of faith in Christ. In the Apostolic church, only those who became believers, those who received the Word of God and who had repented of their sins, were baptised and received as church members (Acts 2:41). There was no automatic or formalistic membership in apostolic churches nor is there in Baptist churches today. A converted church membership is an important Biblical principle.

From the review of these simple points it is more than clear that doctrinally Baptists are not Protestants.

### **Practically,** Baptists Are Not Protestants

A few simple observations indicate that the Baptists differ radically from Protestants on a number of points.

The Protestant groups look to some human being as their founder, often even taking their name from a man. The Lutherans arise with Luther. The Reformed look to John Calvin. The Presbyterians were founded by John Knox. The Methodists openly acknowledge John Wesley as their founder. Who founded the Baptist churches? Here is a historical question worthy of serious investigation. It is impossible to find any one man who gave rise to Baptist churches. Rather, if

we would name human founders, we must look back to Peter, Paul, James and John.

We differ from Protestants in our birthplace. Lutherans come from Germany, the Reformed from Switzerland and the Netherlands, the Presbyterians from Scotland, Anglicans from England, but Baptists would have to give Palestine as their place of origin.

Furthermore the creed of Baptists is not the Augsburg Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession, but the simple Word of God. So it is impossible to identify Baptists. as Protestants.

Baptists have never been linked with Protestants and have never been identified with the Roman Catholic Church. Through the years before and after the Reformation, they have maintained their identity and been faithful to the Scriptures. Real Baptists hold to the plain teaching of Christ and the Apostles. For these God-given doctrines they have been willing to die. Hanz Denk, a sixteenth century Baptist, said' "Faith means obedience to the Word of God, whether it be unto life or unto death." For many it was death'

In Rottenburg, in Reformation times, there were 900 executions of Baptists in less than ten years. These deaths were often vicious and cruel. The sentence for one Baptist believer, Michael Sateler, read, "Michael Sateler shall be delivered to the hangmen, who shall take him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue; he shall then throw him on a cart and twice tare his flesh with hot tongs; then he shall bring him to the city gate and there torture his flesh in the same manner." This was the way Sateler died in Rottenburg on 21st May, 1521 - His wife and other women were drowned, and a number of the men were beheaded.

## **The Price of Unity**

Twentieth century theologians have streamlined Christianity by reducing all the virtues to one - unity. In our generation the most respectable "ism" is ecumenism. Few people discern that there is a false unity as well as a true unity and that each is purchased at a staggering price.

False church unity, which is the most popular kind, is purchased with freedom as the price. Gospel liberty is obliterated and liberty of conscience becomes impractical, if not impossible. The communion of saints is forfeited for a communion of committees. The minority speaks for the mass and the conscience of the individual Christian is by-passed for the consensus of a committee.

This kind of church unity is also attained at the price of truth. Those who major on mergers tend to believe very little, and after merging believe still less. They are more noted for their compromises than their convictions' Their spiritual discernment having been dulled, they move in a doctrinal dusk that calls non-churches churches and regards unbelievers as believers. In the mania to merge, fixed truths become forgotten tenets.

The church unity is also costly! It is to be obtained not by compromise, but by conflict. The faith must not be diluted, but defended (Jude 3) . It may cost a man his unscriptural creed and his man-made catechism' This kind of unity flows from a humility which is willing to reject human tradition and subject itself to divine truth, as stated in God's Holy Word. This unity is described by the words, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" Ephesians 4:5). The beginning of this unity is one Lord. The basis of this unity is one faith (doctrine). The badge of this unity is one baptism.







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