

Why Baptists Are Not Protestants

by Vernon C. Lyons

Editor's note: Baptists did not start with John Smyth in 1609 as Wikipedia and most publications claim. As Vernon Lyons will show, Baptists (and those Christians holding to Baptists tenets of faith) can trace their roots to the Church of the New Testament.

People are usually 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 October 31, 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 event of utmost importance, but often unnoticed, is the Second Diet (or Council) of Speier, April 25, 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. 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 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-Luneburg, 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 Schaaf, 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 Encyclopedia (Volume XII, p.495).

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 Anabaptists and rebaptized 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 benefit 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, 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. These groups may or may not have been connected and they have been known by various names. There were the Montanists (150 A.D.), the Novatians (240 A.D.), Donatists (305 A.D.), Albigenses (1022 A.D.), Waldensians (1170 A.D.), and the name Anabaptists came into prominence just before the time of the Protestant 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.

I wish to purposely introduce non-Baptist testimony to the great antiquity of Baptist people. Cardinal 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 says, "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. Konrad Grebel died in prison in 1526. Felix Manz was drowned by the authorities at Zurich in 1527. Noted Baptist leader Baithauser Hubmaier was burned alive at the stake in Vienna March 10, 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 seven 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..." (II Timothy 3:16). Various Protestant denominations

have creeds, catechisms and assorted doctrinal standards. Baptists hold to the Bible alone.

2. Baptists believe that Christ and only Christ is the Head of the Church even as the Scripture says, "Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23). There is no man who has the oversight of Baptist churches. Baptists have no denomination in the sense of an organization 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 earthly headquarters. 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. All of the Protestant Reformers fastened state churches upon their followers.

4. Baptists believe strongly in individual accountability to God because the Scriptures clearly teach that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). A priest cannot answer for you, a church cannot answer for you to God. God-parents cannot answer for you. No one is saved because of what his parents believe. No one is saved because of his identification with any religion. He will account for himself to God. Protestants generally do not hold this scriptural doctrine.

5. Baptist people furthermore have always held to believers' baptism. 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 baptized" (Acts 2:38). This obviously means that there is no infant baptism since infants are incapable of repenting. No unbelievers are to be baptized. The Reformers followed Rome in their teaching on baptism. Baptists have held steadfastly to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles on this point.

6. Baptists, on the basis of Scripture, have always held to a regenerate 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 baptized and received as church members (Acts 2:41). There was no automatic or formalistic membership in apostolic churches nor in Baptist churches today.

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 hark back to Luther. The Reformed look to John Calvin. The Presbyterians were rounded by John Knox. The Methodists openly acknowledge John Wesley as their founder. Who rounded 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 came from Germany, the Reformed from Switzerland and the Netherlands, the Presbyterians from Scotland, Episcopalians 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 hangman, 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 May 21, 1527. His wife and other women were drowned and a number of the men were beheaded.

Baptists are not Protestants but hold tenaciously to the original precepts and practices of Christ and the apostles. Baptists believe the pure Word of God to be sufficient authority on all matters. Baptists reject all human religious traditions and practices that have originated since the time of the apostles.

