

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR THE NIGERIAN
BAPTIST CONVENTION CHURCHES IN OGBOMOSO

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ABSTRACT

This project examines “Baptist Distinctives and Its Challenges for the Nigerian Baptist Convention Churches in Ogbomoso.” The primary aim of the project is to show that the origin of Baptists distinctives have their sources from the Bible. This is the reason why the distinctives are otherwise called Biblical Distinctives of Baptists. Baptists were known to be the people of the Book, the Bible. The challenge that is rife in the Nigerian Baptist Churches in Ogbomoso today is that, most people who bear the name Baptist no longer know the ideas it stands for. If asked to name the characteristic teachings of their group, most merely observe that their churches perform baptisms by immersing rather than sprinkling or pouring. Increasingly, church members display an astonishing lack of knowledge about just what Baptists believe. Sadly, that ignorance is too often shared by Baptist leaders. The Baptist story is colorful and exciting, filled with victory and defeat, sacrifice and success, agreement and dispute. Baptists differ in many ways, but they generally concur on basic beliefs and practices which flow freely from the Bible. All of the great doctrines that Baptists teach and practice comes right out of the Bible. Baptists believe that Israel was the church of the Old Testament. However, something changed with the cross and resurrection of Jesus and with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. That change deeply affected the constitution, purpose, membership, and order of the church. General titles that lack identification, such as “Christian” or “Christ” and churches labeled “community” or “nondenominational,” leave much room for ambiguities and misunderstandings. The name “Baptist” is understood through its distinctives. Baptists should be confident that when their name is heard, no ambiguities are left in defining what they stand for. Certain Biblical distinctives have distinguished the doctrinal position of Baptists and help members maintain the Baptist position of their church, preventing digression into unscriptural positions.

5.2 Conclusion

The Baptist story is colorful and exciting, filled with victory and defeat, sacrifice and success, agreement and dispute. Baptists differ in many ways, but they generally concur on basic beliefs and practices which flow freely from the Bible. All of the great doctrines that Baptists teach and practice comes right out of the Bible. Baptists believe that Israel was the church of the Old Testament. However, something changed with the cross and resurrection of Jesus and with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. That change deeply affected the constitution, purpose, membership, and order of the church. Therefore, one cannot simply appeal to God's people in the Old Testament to establish the pattern for the church in the New Testament. Baptists insist that only the New Testament may be used to establish the doctrine and structure of the church.

The genuine distinctive that sets Baptists apart from many other groups of Christians is this: Baptists consistently affirm the absolute authority of the New

Testament in all matters of church faith and order.¹⁸² Thus Baptists are different from most other Christians because they restrict their doctrine of the church to the New Testament. They also differ from many other Christians in the way that they apply the teachings of the New Testament to church faith and order. One Baptist writer has expressed the principle in the following words.

It is assumed that the outward institutions of the Christian religion are of God, and that, therefore, their form and order as delineated in the New Testament, are of divine obligation. The Bible presents a definite and final constitution of the church, the ordinances, and the ministry, and is on these subjects the sufficient guide and the only authority; no man may set aside, alter, or supplement the divine model there given.¹⁸³

As long as Baptists remain true to these core convictions, they will not only endure but also thrive.

5.3 Recommendations

Having seen that the most distinguishing difference between Baptist and other denominations is the cultivation of interest in the interpretation of the Word of God and the earnestness in searching the Scriptures with a persistence purpose to follow where they lead. Baptists distinguished themselves in conforming to the principles of Jesus Christ as delineated in the New Testament. The source of the core convictions of Baptist, which is their distinctives, is the Bible as documented in the New Testament. And having observed the challenges posed by these distinctives, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

(1) Call to go Back to the Bible

First of all, Baptists are people of The Book. But that has been a problem. There is the need to look at what the nature of religious authority is. There has been so much bickering about what the Bible means, using words like “infallible,”

¹⁸² Kevin, Bauder. Baptist Distinctives And New Testament Church Order. (Illinois: Regular Baptist Press, 2012) 20

¹⁸³ Hezekiah, Harvey. The Church: Its Polity and Ordinances. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1879) 13.

“inerrant,” “guide,” “sole authority,” etc., Baptists have a real vocabulary problem about what to do with Scripture. Baptists need to think again about how Scripture interacts with religious experience and with the God-given gifts that lie within; the powers of reason that the Holy Spirit energizes within individuals’ minds and personalities. What will a Bible Christianity look like? Baptists ought to be concerned about this. The Bible used to be a sure sense of authority for Baptists, the people of The Book. It has become instead a battleground with different arguments coming from different schools of thought.

(2) Renewal of associational principle

There is need to renew the associational principle and begin to enlarge it and expand it. This could happen as love is shared among members. Jesus said, “A new command I give you : Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”¹⁸⁴ One of the geniuses of early Baptists was their ability to reach out and find people of like faith and order, and expand the horizons of the Gospel.

(3) Need to Read Baptist Culture

There is need to read Baptist’s culture. Baptist are reading and writing a lot about themselves, and the culture is evolving very rapidly. A relevant denominational tradition, many observers have said, is going to be one that will be able to read its culture and understand how to relate to the real issues and the real people who are living in the world and the communities around them. “For the Baptist model of Church in Ogbomoso, and consequently of theological mentality and spirituality to which it gives rise, cannot but reflect the cultural and social value of the age it lives

¹⁸⁴ John 13:34-35.

in.”¹⁸⁵ Human rights should not be just the province of the United Nations. But it really caught the church short. Is it not the time that Baptists say a little bit more about the rest of the agenda of human rights than just about their religious liberty? In a pluralistic setting today, what better time to begin to understand the other great religions around Ogbomoso and how Christianity can, in peace and justice and mercy, interact with Muslims and the Traditionist and all the variety.

(4) Learn anew the Baptist distinctives

There is need to learn anew what the Baptist distinctives are. That old list of Baptist distinctives may need some revision because in this generation what it means, and needs to mean, to be a Baptist might be very different. The only way to revise those distinctives is by talking with each other as Baptist in Ogbomoso. There is need to restore Baptist commitment to evangelism and mission in a new paradigm. There is the need to find ways to work together as Baptists in Ogbomoso and its environ with a view to having a sense of commitment, of ownership personally in the Great Commission.

(5) Act boldly

Going down the historic lane, Baptists were very bold like the disciples in Acts. 4:13. Baptists around today are being intimidated. Intimidated by a sense of less education, intimidated by declining numbers in membership, intimidated by authoritarian leadership that silences debate. It's time for Baptists to behave like Baptists and act boldly, not as hooligans but as the people of the Book, who love Jesus Christ and are committed to obey Him as He (Jesus Christ) is witnessed everywhere in proclamation of His message through the power of the Holy Spirit.

(6) Be Christian at Every Posture and Avoid Party Politics in Churches

¹⁸⁵ Campbell-Johnston, Michael. In the Foreword of The Way of Living Faith, written by Segundo Galilea. (USA: Harper and Row, Publishers Inc., 1988) vii

