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TEACHING BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES
TO THE CONGREGATION OF MOUNT ZION BAPTIST
CHURCH, WEST PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

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TEACHING BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES
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PREFACE

Through many years of Christian ministry, God has blessed me with a multitude of godly teachers, mentors, fellow-servants, and friends in Christ. In His providence, the Lord has also permitted me to serve in various ministry roles in a number of Christ-centered churches, both in America and Europe, each with loving congregations who made major imprints upon my life and ministry. For each of these individuals and ministries that shaped my spiritual development to this present hour, I give sincere thanks. Most recently, I offer heartfelt gratitude to the people of Mount Zion Baptist Church of West Paducah, Kentucky, who have actively supported and encouraged me in the development of this project and in the pursuit of my seminary work overall.

I also want to thank Dr. Albert Mohler, Jr., and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the strong theological training this institution afforded me. To my professors, Dr. Michael Wilder, Dr. Danny Bowen, and Dr. Wes Feltner, I give special recognition for their excellent instruction and passionate commitment to make God's church, the bride of Christ, more beautiful. My faculty supervisor, Dr. T. Vaughn Walker, provided gracious guidance and warm encouragement, and I offer him my deepest thanks as well.

God has furthermore blessed us with two wonderful children, Amanda and Bryan, whom I take delight in, along with their families. They also, perhaps without even knowing it, have made deep spiritual impressions on me. I love them and thank them for their inspiration to me over my years of ministry, including this academic milestone.

However, when all is said and done, my wife, Eve, the beautiful and gifted bride with whom God has blessed me, has been the one person in the world that I owe the

greatest debt of gratitude. Her steadfast love, inspiration, and encouragement has provided the light for me to minister the gospel, and to complete all of my ministry training, up to and including this project. God has led me in my efforts, but Eve has been the human force that has allowed me to bring it all to fruition. I am eternally grateful for her loving support in completing this ministry project—and throughout life!

Finally, to Christ alone goes the ultimate glory. My prayer is that God will use the contents of this project to spiritually strengthen and enlighten the congregation of Mount Zion Baptist Church, or any other church that may find it helpful in strengthening an appreciation for our Baptist heritage. For whatever spiritual fruit may thus come, we give all the praise to Jesus Christ. Soli Deo Gloria!

Wes Conner

Paducah, Kentucky

May 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a discipleship curriculum that taught the members of Mount Zion Baptist Church of West Paducah, Kentucky, to understand and appreciate their Baptist heritage.

Goals

Three goals helped to determine the overall effectiveness of this project. The first goal of this project was to assess the congregation's current knowledge of the origin, identity, and basic doctrinal distinctives of Baptist churches throughout church history. This assessment was accomplished by administering a questionnaire¹ to the congregation that measured their overall knowledge and understanding of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. This goal was considered to be successfully met when the church-wide questionnaire was completed by at least 65 percent of the Sunday morning adult attendees² and the results were tabulated, which yielded a clear understanding of the church's collective knowledge on the subject. This overall assessment provided a baseline on which was built an appropriate curriculum.

The second goal of this project was to develop a discipleship curriculum that addressed Baptist history and doctrinal distinctiveness. The curriculum was not exhaustive, but rather, presented an overarching view of church history from the time of

¹See appendix 1.

²Average Sunday morning adult worship attendance at MZBC is approximately 150.

Christ to the present day; the major schools of thought on the origins of Baptist churches; and the basic doctrines and polity that make Baptist churches distinct from other Christian traditions. This goal was measured by a rubric³ used by an expert panel of committed Baptist Christians from within the local community. This panel consisted of two Baptist ministers, each with a master's degree in ministry, and two professional educators, each with a master's degree in education or a related field. The panel reviewed the proposed curriculum for clarity, content, and biblical and theological soundness. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the "sufficient" or above level.

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of a select group of individuals from within the congregation by teaching the established curriculum in a nine-week series of lessons. The discipleship-training group consisted of not less than 20 volunteers from among the active adult church members of Mount Zion Baptist Church (MZBC), representing an approximate demographic cross-section of the congregation.⁴ These individuals took a pre-course survey⁵ that focused on subject matter from the course of study. Unlike the initial questionnaire given to the congregation at large, which asked general questions on Baptist history and distinctives, this survey contained specific information that was discussed in the program of instruction. After the completion of the nine lessons, the same survey was administered to the group participants. This goal was considered to be successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples indicated a positive statistically significant difference between the course pre-study small group survey and post-study small group survey scores of participants.

³See appendix 2.

⁴A demographic cross section of the congregation included approximately proportionate numbers from within the congregation of the following categories: men and women; individuals above and below age 45; and individuals with and without at least one year of college education.

⁵See appendix 3.

Upon successful accomplishment of goal 3, the intent was to incorporate significant portions of the prepared curriculum into a series of sermons designed to baseline all current members of MZBC with a working knowledge of Baptist heritage. Much of the material was further integrated into the church's class for new members. Collectively, these actions had the anticipated outcome of members knowing and appreciating what their Baptist ancestors passed down to them over the centuries. This last phase was not part of the formal ministry project, only a ministry-enhancing byproduct of the project.

Context of the Ministry Project

This project was accomplished through the ministry of MZBC of West Paducah, Kentucky, in the far western part of the state. Founded in 1843 as a pioneer mission on what was then part of the American western frontier, MZBC is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). It is situated on a major US highway in a semi-rural residential area, about seven miles outside of the city Paducah. The population of Paducah is about 25,000, but serves as the center of a wider micropolitan statistical area of about 100,000.

At the time of the project, MZBC averaged approximately 200 in Sunday morning worship, with about 125 in Sunday school and active and growing children's, youth, men's, and women's ministries. The church employs four paid staff members (a senior pastor [me], associate pastor of worship and children, office manager, and custodian), as well as two volunteer staff members (an associate pastor of evangelism and discipleship and a director of student ministries).

With an attractive twenty-eight-acre campus and well-maintained facilities, including a modern family life center, MZBC is well-situated for renewed numerical and spiritual growth, which it experienced abundantly from the mid-1980s through the early years of the twenty-first century. The church is located near one of the fastest growing areas of Western Kentucky, which offers countless opportunities for ministry. At the

time of the project, the congregation was undergoing a renewed vision for outreach and the members were praying that God would use these advantages to help the church reach many people for Christ in the community. The MZBC Mission Statement is as follows:

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to exalt God through sincere worship; to edify Christians through faithful Bible teaching and discipleship training; to evangelize non-Christians through passionate witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to exhibit Christlikeness through a positive Christian presence in our community.

Three factors relevant to MZBC and its distinct history had a direct bearing on this ministry project of teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. The first factor was related to the fact that during its peak years of influence, the major focus of the church was primarily evangelism, with a strong emphasis on the Great Commission's mandate for winning lost souls and growing the church. Annual revival meetings, church visitation and outreach programs, an active bus ministry for children, and other evangelistic endeavors were prominent in the life of the church, along with an accent on numerical growth. This effort was certainly biblical and commendable, yet in some ways the ministry of teaching and discipleship (especially in areas of doctrine, apologetics, and biblical content), also part of the Great Commission, was somewhat overshadowed to some degree. What seemed to be lacking to some degree included teaching the great doctrines of the faith and other important issues that define MZBC as a *Baptist* congregation. It was assumed that this condition was merely an oversight due to the aforementioned stress on evangelism. Nonetheless, the church had not received a lot of instruction on doctrinal issues, biblical exposition, and the distinctiveness of a Baptist heritage. As a result, it was estimated that the majority of current members of the congregation were not well versed in the church's spiritual heritage, nor did they have a firm grasp of their identity as Baptist believers, along with the many biblical doctrines that undergird that tradition.

A second factor relating to the ministry of the MZBC that bears on this project is the relatively "open" membership policy that the church had adopted over recent decades. With the major stress on evangelism (as described), many new converts joined the church via believer's baptism. In addition, many congregants from various non-

Baptist Christian traditions had become members of MZBC. An analysis of church records in the winter of 2016 indicated that 59 percent of new additions over the past 10 years came into membership either through believer's baptism (44 percent) or their statement of Christian faith (15 percent).⁶ Many of those coming into membership who were already professing Christians included individuals from Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, Christian/Church of Christ churches, United Methodist churches, and various non-denominational churches. Only 52 percent of new members over that ten-year period were transfers from other Baptist churches, while a substantial number of new members indicated no church affiliation prior to connecting with MZBC. These are indicators of a church with both broad appeal and evangelistic fervor, a positive fact for which the church leadership is grateful. However, no indications from recent years of a required or recommended course of instruction for new members included instruction on basic Bible doctrine or Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. Consequently, most members had little training in these critical areas of faith.

A third factor relevant to MZBC that related to this ministry project was one that is true of many Baptist churches across North America. It is clear to the keen observer that a growing segment of Baptist life in the twenty-first century seeks to minimize doctrinal issues and a distinct Baptist heritage—often in the interest of attracting a wider audience. An informal survey of several dozen prominent Baptist church websites revealed that many of them do not refer to a distinct Baptist heritage regarding the history, polity, operation, or doctrine of their congregation.⁷ Moreover, many Baptist churches today have clearly avoided the designation “Baptist” in their name. In the Paducah, Kentucky, area, one of the two largest Baptist congregations in the region replaced its former Baptist name with a generic religious designation (along

⁶Research that I performed in February 2016.

⁷Informal survey that I conducted, October 2013 through February 2014. This survey was not scientific.

with several other moderate-sized Baptist churches). Moreover, virtually all new Southern Baptist church plants in the Western Kentucky region have eschewed the name “Baptist” in their naming process. Proponents of this phenomenon have some compelling arguments for their position, yet it is nonetheless an indicator that at least some churches, which are in virtually all aspects “Baptist” in doctrine and polity, have *purposefully* distanced themselves from an overt association with the Baptist “brand.” The appropriateness or inappropriateness of this trend is beyond the scope of this project, yet it nevertheless points to the de-facto minimizing of *explicit* Baptist identity and its corresponding doctrinal heritage. In an open letter to Kentucky Baptist pastors in the fall of 2015, Ben Stratton, pastor of the Farmington Baptist Church (Farmington, Kentucky), and president of the 2015 Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) Pastor’s Conference, addressed this very issue. He wrote,

We [Southern Baptists] have overlooked the second half of the Great Commission and failed in “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). This has caused many in the current generation to forget our doctrinal heritage. *Our Baptist identity is in danger of being lost.*⁸

This condition, true in many Baptist churches in North America, is also a reasonably accurate portrayal of MZBC. Though it maintains the name “Baptist,” relatively few members are grounded in the knowledge of why that is so, and thus served as a final issue germane to this project.

These three factors relevant to the ministry of MZBC presented a clear need for this congregation to be instructed on their spiritual identity as Baptists and the distinctive biblical doctrines that define them as such. This project sought to directly address the current lack of knowledge on these issues.

⁸Ben Stratton, “President’s Letter” (program of the annual meeting of the Kentucky Baptist Convention Pastors’ Conference, Elizabethtown, KY, November 9, 2015), emphasis added.

Rationale for the Project

The contextual factors explained above indicate that MZBC was in need of a deliberate effort to teach the congregation about their spiritual heritage and the doctrinal distinctives that define them. First, because the preaching and teaching ministry for many years focused primarily on evangelism and practical Christian living—vital subjects to be sure—there was empirical evidence that the majority of the congregants neither fully understood nor appreciated their distinct spiritual roots as Baptist Christians. Many members were simply unaware of the important historical and doctrinal issues that define who they are as a community of believers. This fact is an important aspect of church life in light of Paul’s words to the young pastor Timothy when he wrote, “Give attention . . . to doctrine” (1 Tim 4:13).⁹

Second, because a significant percentage of new members had joined the congregation from non-Baptist traditions or from no Christian background (that is, new converts), this project pursued the promotion of a common spiritual foundation for the majority of members. Once successfully completed, the intention was that much of the instructional component of this project would become part of the church’s new member assimilation ministry. Once incorporated, the church leadership would be able to reasonably ensure that most people who join MZBC in the future will have a fundamental knowledge of the church’s heritage and basic doctrinal distinctives that define MZBC as a Baptist congregation.

Third, because *many* Baptist churches today have tended to deemphasize doctrinal teaching and spiritual ancestry, this project sought to address that omission—at least within *this* congregation. From a biblical perspective, the writers of Scripture often reminded Old Testament Israel how God worked and blessed in the “days of old” (especially in the psalms) as a means of instruction on how God would *continue* to work among His people. One example is Psalm 44:1-3:

⁹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version.

We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our fathers have told us,
The deeds You did in their days,
In days of old:
You drove out the nations with Your hand,
But them You planted;
You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.
For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword,
Nor did their own arm save them;
But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance,
Because You favored them.

In a comparable way, twenty-first century believers (Baptists as well as professing Christians from other faith traditions) also need reminders of what their own spiritual forebears have handed down to them over the centuries—both in what they passed on to subsequent generations as essential doctrine, as well as how they applied those beliefs to life. Writing on this very subject, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., has observed with great insight: “The urgency of this task cannot be ignored. In this generation, Baptists will either recover our denominational heritage and rebuild our doctrinal foundations, or in the next generation there will be no authentic Baptist witness.”¹⁰

In summary, the rationale for this project was rooted in the necessity of providing sound, biblical instruction to the congregation of MZBC on the very doctrinal distinctives and spiritual heritage that define it. It was deemed highly likely that every member of the congregation would ultimately benefit from the fruit of this project as congregants gained a greater understanding of essential doctrine and a better appreciation of their Baptist heritage.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Several key terms used throughout the project had specific, technical definitions. Those key terms for the purposes of this project are defined as follows:

Baptist(s). *Baptists* are people throughout history who formally self-identify as adherents of what are generally recognized as distinctive Baptist doctrines. These doctrines

¹⁰R. Albert Mohler, Jr., quoted in R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), ix.

generally include, but are not limited to (1) the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible in all matters of life and faith; (2) the deity and lordship of Jesus Christ; (3) the priesthood of all believers; (4) the granting of eternal salvation by God's grace and through faith alone; (5) two ordinances (not sacraments) of the church (baptism by immersion and communion); (6) the independence and autonomy of local churches; (7) regenerate church membership; (8) two offices of the church only (pastor/elder/bishop and deacon); and (9) the complete separation of church and state.¹¹

Baptistic. The word *baptistic* (or, Baptistic; but for this project I use the lower case form) technically means “of or relating to Baptists; *especially*: in accord with Baptist doctrines and practices.”¹² In general, the term refers to people, places, or things that pertain to or are characteristic of Baptist churches, people, and/or doctrinal distinctives, but that do not self-identify as “Baptist” in a formal sense.

Baptist distinctives. Distinctive means “serving to distinguish.”¹³ In this project, the term “Baptist distinctives” refers specifically to the “collective and unique theological heritage”¹⁴ of Baptist Christians. The specific distinctives taught in this project are discussed below.

Dissenting churches. David Cody explains,

The term Dissenter refers to a number of Protestant denominations—Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, Congregationalists, and others—which, because they refused . . . to conform to the tenets of the restored Church of England in 1662, were subjected to persecution.¹⁵

¹¹Frank S. Mead, Samuel S. Hill, and Craig D. Atwood, eds., *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 181-82.

¹²Merriam-Webster.com, “Baptistic,” emphasis original, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Baptistic>.

¹³Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., s.v. “Distinctive.”

¹⁴Norman, *More Than Just a Name*, 11.

¹⁵David Cody, “Dissenters,” The Victorian Web, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/dissntrs.html>.

For the purposes of this project, however, *dissenting churches* refers to any church or group of Christians who have opposed or disputed the religious edicts of state-sanctioned churches, councils, or other official religious bodies or organizations.

Three limitations were identified for this project. First, the willingness of at least 65 percent of the adult attendees of MZBC to participate in the initial congregational survey that measured their collective knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. To moderate the impact of this limitation, the questionnaire was available on two consecutive Sundays and posted on the MZBC website.

A second limitation related to the consistent attendance of the small discipleship group during the nine-week teaching series. Faithful attendance to the sessions was considered extremely important because the post-study small group survey was the primary tool used to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching. To help mitigate this limitation, all of the teaching sessions were recorded and made available to absentees on the MZBC website.

The third limitation was that the project was confined to a period of eighteen weeks. This timeframe, though restrictive, nevertheless gave adequate time to administer the required questionnaires and surveys; develop an appropriate curriculum; teach the material to a small group; and conduct the post-series evaluations.

In addition to the limitations, two delimitation were imposed on the project. The first delimitation was that the participants in the teaching phase were confined to only adult members of the congregation, plus a few other adults closely affiliated with the congregation. While it was desirable to include older youth and prospective church members, only adult members participated. Once the project was deemed successful, the church leadership determined that the older youth of the church and prospective members would participate in subsequent iterations of the program of study.

The second delimitation was that the curriculum was necessarily limited in scope. There is a sheer mass of (often conflicting) material available on Baptist history

and doctrinal distinctives. In order to keep the curriculum to a manageable size and scope, a broad spectrum survey of Baptist history was covered, along with the most basic doctrinal positions that distinguish Baptists from other Christian traditions. Due to two of the most prevalent distinctive beliefs of Baptists (autonomy of the local church and individual soul liberty), it is often difficult to determine what actually can be called Baptist distinctive doctrines. Unlike most other Christian traditions, no authoritative creed, governing body, or official headquarters define specifically what Baptist churches are to believe and practice. In surveying the literature, there was a wide variance on what constitutes the identifying characteristics of Baptists. Some Baptist scholars say there are four, others cite as many as fourteen; one even states there are only two such distinctives. Baptist pastor Robert Breaker is representative of many Baptist leaders, however, when he summarizes the distinctives in an oft-repeated acrostic for BAPTISTS:¹⁶

B – Biblical Authority and The Lordship of Christ
A – Autonomy of the Local Church
P – Priesthood of Believers
T – Two Ordinances: Baptism and Communion
I – Individual Soul Liberty
S – Saved Church Membership
T – Two Offices: Pastors and Deacons
S – Separation of Church and State

The discussion of Baptist distinctives in this project was limited to this representative list.¹⁷

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project consisted of a pre-project congregation-wide questionnaire, a pre- and post-project small group survey, and a

¹⁶Robert Ray Breaker III, *Why I Am a Baptist* (Milton, FL: Breaker's, 2007), 5.

¹⁷For a fuller discussion of this topic, see chap. 3.

curriculum evaluation rubric.¹⁸

Three goals were set to verify the effectiveness of the project. The first goal was to establish the congregation's current level of knowledge regarding the origin, identity, and basic doctrinal distinctives of Baptist churches throughout history. Before any teaching was presented, a questionnaire was distributed to the congregation on two consecutive Sunday morning worship services (as well as made available on the MZBC website), with instructions on how to complete and return it.¹⁹ This instrument helped determine the congregation's general knowledge and understanding of basic Baptist history and doctrinal distinctiveness. Each person was requested to provide a unique four-digit personal identification code as part of the questionnaire to be used in later evaluation and follow-up efforts. The results of the questionnaire provided a baseline of information about the congregation's aggregate knowledge of their Baptist heritage and identity, and provided a reference point from which to build an appropriate curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when the questionnaire was completed by at least 65 percent of the church's Sunday morning adult attendees and the results tabulated.

The second goal of the project was to develop a nine-week series of lessons that covered a general outline of Baptist history and a discussion of basic Baptist doctrinal distinctives (as previously defined). A draft of the curriculum was presented to a panel of four trusted pastors and educators for their evaluation and approval regarding the clarity, content, and biblical support of the material. This goal was measured by a rubric that the panel used to evaluate the curriculum.²⁰ Proposed changes the group offered were incorporated into the teaching material as needed. This goal was considered to be met

¹⁸All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹⁹See appendix 1.

²⁰See appendix 2.

when a minimum of 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric scored at the “sufficient” or above level.

The third goal of the project was to teach the approved nine-week study to a select group of not less than 20 adults from within the MZBC congregation and/or closely affiliated with the congregation. The instruction was presented on a day and time appropriate to the schedules of the small group participants. At the beginning of lesson 1, the small group participants completed the pre-study small group survey, which further assessed their understanding of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives on a deeper level than the congregational questionnaire and focused on the actual content of the lesson series.²¹ As with the congregation-wide questionnaire, each participant was asked to provide a unique four-digit personal identification code to be used in later evaluation and follow-up efforts. The survey served as a data baseline of knowledge for the individuals actually participating in the course of instruction.

After the completion of the nine lessons, the same survey was administered to the small group members who participated in at least eight of the nine sessions (in person or through the available recordings of each lesson). A *t*-test for dependent samples was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching. A *t*-test for dependent samples “involves a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores.”²² It is considered the appropriate test statistic for the same group being surveyed under two different conditions.²³ The third goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the course pre-study small group survey and post-study small group survey scores.

²¹See appendix 3.

²²Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 91.

²³*Ibid.*, 189.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TEACHING BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

Introduction

American author Michael Crichton wrote in his fictional work *Timeline*, “Professor Johnston often said that if you didn’t know history, you didn’t know anything. You were a leaf that didn’t know it was part of a tree.”¹ In that sense, it is evident that Christians should know their godly heritage—how they fit in the “tree” of their spiritual ancestry. However, this idea is even more pertinent when considering that Scripture indicates in numerous places that the people of God should know *what* they believe as well as remember *those who went before them* in the faith. The thesis of this chapter, then, is that the Bible teaches that believers should know and understand Christian doctrine and the people, places, and events that have helped shape their spiritual heritage. This is true in the broadest sense within the professing church, though the focus in this project was on the distinctive history and doctrinal beliefs of Baptist Christians in particular. Numerous biblical texts could be used to provide the biblical and theological basis for this project, but a proper exegesis of Deuteronomy 4:1-4, Psalm 44:1-8, 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Ephesians 4:11-16, and 1 Timothy 4:1-11, give strong scriptural support.

Deuteronomy 4:1-40

The title of the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy is taken from the Greek Septuagint (LXX), translated as “This Second Law.” It contains a series of farewell discourses given by Moses, whose death was imminent, to the people of Israel as they

¹Michael Crichton, *Timeline* (1999; repr., New York: Ballantine, 2003), 85.

stood on the verge of entering the Promised Land (Canaan). Moses reinforces the gravity of the commandments God gave to the Israelites at Sinai—he strongly emphasized that obedience to them would be the basis of their success in the land Yahweh was giving to them. In preparing Israel to move forward, Moses thus called upon them to remember the past, and to recall God’s mighty hand in delivering them in the Exodus from Egypt. For it was in remembering what God had done in years past that would encourage them to move into the future, and that the Lord would continue to be with them. Peter Craigie writes, “Hence the book of Deuteronomy has to be understood in the context of the past history of the Israelites and the perspective of their future history.”²

It should be noted in this regard that the original audience of Moses’ discourses in Deuteronomy were the second generation of Israelites after the Exodus. They were now middle-aged adults, who were born in Egypt, and had participated in the Exodus as children and teenagers. More important, they were not part of the curse of death God placed on the adults aged twenty and older for their disobedience by not seizing the Promised Land a generation earlier (see Num 14:28-34 and Deut 1:24-40; note the exception of Joshua and Caleb from this judgment). In this group were also the children and youth who had been born *during* the forty years of wilderness wanderings. These were all now the adults of the nation, transitioning from Moses to Joshua as their national leader. For this audience, then, Moses recounts the importance of God’s laws and reminds the people of God’s mighty acts in their history. Christopher Wright designates Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43 as a “historical review followed by exhortations,”³ and states, “Because these speeches are presented as immediately prior to Moses’ death, they give

²Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 18.

³Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2.

the whole book a testamentary character that thus enhances the seriousness of its challenge to Israel.”⁴

That background sets the context for an exposition of Deuteronomy 4:1-40, which offers biblical support to the proposition that God’s people should be taught the history and doctrinal distinctives that define who they are. Up to this point in the narrative of Deuteronomy, Moses has recounted Israel’s history in outline form. He has reminded the people of God’s providential hand in their history. He has recalled God’s first command to enter the land of Canaan; the appointment of tribal leaders in the wilderness; Israel’s national refusal to enter the land; the defeats of King Sihon and Og; the division of the land for Israel; and God’s pronouncement to Moses himself that he would not enter the land. Craigie summarizes, “In the first three chapters of Deuteronomy, the address of Moses contains an account of the experience of God in history, set within a generally chronological framework.”⁵

Chapter 4 then opens, “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.” Moses is saying essentially, “You have heard again how God led your nation in the past, how He preserved you and prepared you, and now, building on that knowledge, understand what He wants you to do to fulfill the promises He gave to you about occupying the land.” Craigie explains, “Deut. 4 is in essence a miniature sermon on the covenant and the law, in which historical recollection is employed in a more general didactic fashion.”⁶ This speaks to the overarching principle that both *history* and *doctrine* are important touchstones in the lives of God’s people, both in the OT and the NT. Believers are warned from the failures and mistakes seen in

⁴Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 2.

⁵Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 128.

⁶Ibid., 129.

the history of Israel and the church, but they are also encouraged by the victories God gave. Moses is telling the people not to forget their history—to learn from both triumphs and tragedies of the past. In this light, he brings them to the importance of knowing God’s commands and obeying them. Building on the people’s knowledge of their religious history (what those who lived before them have done), he now admonishes them with doctrine (what they must know and do now). According to Wright, “The historical recollections now give place to urgent exhortation [beginning in chapter 4].”⁷

In verses 1-4, Moses urges the people both to *know* (“listen to the statutes and judgments”) and to *do* (“observe,” or “obey” [New Living Translation]) the laws and regulations that God has given them through Moses. It is not enough just to hear—or even to understand—biblical doctrine if one does not obey it and live it out. It can be accurately stated that if one does not live what he believes, it makes little difference what he believes. This idea is exactly Moses’ point in his opening exhortation. Moshe Weinfeld comments,

This section inculcates the obligation to observe the commandments of God. Scrupulous observance of the law, without the slightest deviation (v 2), will ensure life and inheritance of the land, in contrast to the ones who sinned with Baal-Peor just on the threshold of the promised land (cf. Num 25:1-5; Hos 9:10).⁸

It is understood through this passage that biblical doctrine is not malleable, to be changed and adapted to the times. Properly understood in their correct context, God’s commands and the clear teachings of Scripture are to be obeyed and followed by every generation of believers without deviation. Commenting on verse 2, Jeffery Tigay rightly observes, “This verse is generally taken as a blanket prohibition of abrogating any of the laws taught by Moses or adding new ones.”⁹ Therefore, in considering the benefit and mandate of

⁷Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 45.

⁸Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 5 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 199.

⁹Jeffery H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 43.

teaching church history and doctrine to Baptist believers of the twenty-first century, Moses' example here is a strong indicator of its importance.

The following verses of the passage build upon Moses' introductory remarks. In a remarkable sermon, which seamlessly blends both history and doctrine, he lets Israel know how they must live to gain God's favor and blessing. Verses 5-8 lay out the motivation for keeping God's laws.

Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?

Israel is a great nation because of its unique relationship with Yahweh; its laws are unique from other nations because they come *directly* from God Himself in divine revelatory language. Certainly, other nations in history have established and observed just laws that reflect the righteous nature of God. However, generally speaking, such laws are based either on God's general revelation in nature and/or conscience (for example, even ancient pagan nations had laws against murder and theft), or are derived from the ordinances God gave directly to Israel. In that sense, Israel was unique, and Moses reminds the people in Deuteronomy 4 to know the laws God gave them and to keep them—which formed the foundation of their beliefs and practices. Tigay writes, "Here Moses appeals for observance of the commandments because they are uniquely just and observing them brings about a closeness with God that is unparalleled among the other nations."¹⁰

The words of verse 9 are some of the most significant in the entire passage with regard to this chapter's thesis: "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren." Weinfeld is correct when he points out, "Because the *memory* of the revelation is *crucial*

¹⁰Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 44.

for national existence, it is most important that it be perpetuated throughout generations.”¹¹ That is, each generation must be instructed in what is believed and why—the appeal to know both history and doctrine. Craigie expands upon the vital necessity of this in the life of Israel, and by implication, to the modern day church as well. He posits that not only must history *and* doctrine be taught to each generation—but rather doctrine *in the context of* history:

Religious life did not consist, however, only in remembering the experience of God in the past [history]; memory, rather, functioned in order to produce the continuing obedience to the law of God [doctrine], which in turn would lead to the continuing experience of the presence and activity of God. Thus the Israelites were not to forget their experience of God and, in addition, they had a responsibility to teach others about it: *but you shall make them known to your children and your grandchildren.*¹²

The significance of the teaching role itself is emphasized in light of the fact that God commands Moses to teach the people these most important truths. Weinfeld writes, “Moses is thus considered the first great teacher of Israel.”¹³ Based on the importance of teaching seen in this text, one may extrapolate the principle that teaching correct doctrine in the context of history remains a critical task for the leaders of God’s people (the church) in the twenty-first century.

In verses 10-31, Moses gives a passionate warning against idolatry—the very thing that will cause them to lose their special relationship with Yahweh and what will cause Him to withhold His blessings on the nation. Even here, Moses appeals to history as he brings to mind Israel’s experiences at Horeb (Mount Sinai). Craigie states, “The details of the experience of God at Horeb/Sinai are recalled very vividly . . . and the memory of it was such that it became a common feature (usually a part of the prologue)

¹¹Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 203, emphasis added.

¹²Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 133.

¹³Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 200.

in many Jewish hymns and poetic passages.”¹⁴ Moses’ caution against worshipping anything or anyone other than Yahweh is summarized in verses 23-24:

Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Again, observers will see both history and doctrine interwoven and crucial to Israel maintaining its distinct role on the earth. If the people do not remember the great hand of God upon them (that is, their spiritual history and the beliefs and practices that came from it), then God will withhold His favor. Yet, as Israel’s history proved repeatedly, Yahweh is a compassionate God, and will always forgive and restore when His people evidence true repentance. “For the LORD your God is a merciful God” (v. 31). Finally, as Tigay explains, Moses concludes his sermon in verses 32-40 “with a final appeal to observe the commandments so that Israel may prosper and remain in the land.”¹⁵

In examining this text, the observer can clearly see that the laws of God for Israel were given in a literal, historic setting (Horeb), and they were given so that the Jewish people would have God’s blessings on them. Therefore, Moses emphasized in his discourse the importance of knowing the history of what God had done for them and the commandments He gave them that would be the source of continued blessing. The same principle is true in the church today. That is, God’s people of today, just as their OT counterparts, should know their unique spiritual history, traced from OT Israel, the life and ministry of Christ, the days of the early church, and through the centuries of church history. In fact, much of the spiritual history of the NT church traces back to the very events God inspired Moses to write about in Deuteronomy. Dillard and Longman emphasize that as they write, “Few books of the Old Testament have had as great an

¹⁴Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 133.

¹⁵Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 55.

impact on the authors of the New Testament as Deuteronomy. It is one of the four Old Testament books cited most frequently in the New Testament.”¹⁶

Just as Moses taught Israel their unique role in God’s economy, so the church must be taught their place in God’s plan of the ages as well. That cannot be communicated adequately in a vacuum, but must be relayed within the framework of history. Wright expounds,

Theologically as well as historically, a line runs from exodus and Sinai in our text to the incarnation and Easter events. What Yahweh (and no other god) had redemptively initiated in the history of Israel (and no other people), he brought to completion for the whole world in Jesus of Nazareth (and no other person). The uniqueness of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, and thereby as savior of the world, is grounded in the uniqueness of Israel itself and of Yahweh as God, for according to the NT Jesus embodied the one and incarnated the other.¹⁷

In summary, *what* Christians believe (doctrine) can be neither fully appreciated nor completely understood without a corresponding knowledge of *how* and *when* those beliefs were attained in the course of human and divine history. For Baptist Christians, that formulation would include the unique thread of identity forged by their spiritual forebears over the course of many centuries. Deuteronomy 4:1-40 thus provides a strong biblical example of why teaching the unique history and doctrinal distinctives of Baptists is a worthy and necessary pursuit.

Psalm 44:1-8

Even most beginning Bible students know that the book of Psalms is a collection of songs and poems written for OT Israel, but has continuing significance for the NT church as a primary sourcebook of spiritual poetry, prayers, and praise to God. Even though the church does not largely sing the psalms today (with some exceptions), they were originally composed to be accompanied by music. Artur Weiser provides a succinct

¹⁶Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 105.

¹⁷Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 57.

summary of the Psalms: “The Psalter has been called ‘the hymn-book of the Jewish Church,’ and that with some justification, for it contains various features which point to the cultic use of the psalms in the worship of the Temple and especially in the synagogue service in late Judaism.”¹⁸ The psalm chosen to support the thesis is Psalm 44, specifically verses 1-8. An exegesis of this text supports the thesis by demonstrating that the songs/hymns of ancient Israel taught the people that God expected them to remember and cherish their history and heritage. This spiritual principle carries over into the NT dispensation as well. That is, God’s people of today should also comprehend and revere their spiritual heritage as members of the body of Christ. This psalm is an example to the church of that belief. In fact, Derek Kidner, citing Thomas Cranmer’s Great Litany, refers to this psalm “as a Christian inheritance, not merely an Israelite relic . . . the psalm itself rests its case on the continuity to be expected down the generations of God’s people.”¹⁹ The first part of Psalm 44 is one biblical example of how the inspired writers of Scripture often emphasized God’s hand in history and that the people of God were not to forget how the Lord worked on their behalf through the centuries.

Scholars are divided on the exact circumstances that occasioned the writing of Psalm 44. Based on suppositions posited by some of the early church fathers, many commentators place the writing at the time of the Maccabean wars of the second century BC. Others diverge. Weiser contends, “Such a dating is possible, but not cogent”²⁰ and Kidner opines that “a pre-exilic date [is] more likely than not.”²¹ The particular historic occurrence is not germane to the current discussion, though it is clear from a

¹⁸Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 21.

¹⁹Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 186.

²⁰Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, 354.

²¹Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 186.

consideration of the entire twenty-six verses that Psalm 44 is a song of lament after a national defeat in battle. Yet, the first part of the psalm—the portion under review—is a reminder of the nation’s history, and how God had brought great victories in the past. This remembrance provided a measure of solace in light of the current bleakness. It is this opening portion of the psalm that supports the proposition that it is important for believers to be reminded consistently of their spiritual legacy.

In considering the first eight verses, one sees that they easily break into two distinct sections. Verses 1-3 speak of God’s mighty acts of deliverance and blessing to the nation in times past, followed in verses 4-8 by a joyous confidence that it was indeed God Himself who had intervened on Israel’s behalf; and that fact therefore was cause for rejoicing and continued confidence in Him. The use of language that alternates between the first person singular (“I, me, my”) and the first person plural (“we, us”) may indicate that this song was perhaps recited/sung in an antiphonal fashion. Peter Craigie and Martin Tate suggest that it was possibly an alteration between the king and the people.²² Whether this is so, or whether this styling was strictly a literary device as other commentators propose, is not relevant to the content *per se*. However, it does point to the corporate nature of this psalm—it was for all the people, over against the psalms that were of strictly a personal nature, such as, for example, Psalm 23 or Psalm 51. This reinforces the notion that the content was to be taught to Israel as a whole, which suggests that teaching biblical and church history (what God has done in and through spiritual ancestors), and the corresponding doctrinal truths that arise from it, are not just for those who wish to pursue it, but rather for all believers.

Examining verses 1-3, one sees how important it was for the Israelites to know their history and the great acts God had done on their behalf. Verse 1 reads, “We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did in their days, In

²²Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 331-32.

days of old.” The following verses remind the people that God made them victorious over their enemies—it was “Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance” (v. 3) that saved the nation. Kyle Yates writes, “By oral tradition, as well as in the sacred Scriptures read publicly at the religious festivals, the mighty deeds of God in times of old have been preserved. This sense of history is frequently seen because God is best known by what he has done.”²³ Frequently and consistently, God’s people, Israel, would hear of their history. They would rejoice and marvel at God’s providential hand in their affairs. The unknown psalmist here praises the power of God in past circumstances, knowing that in the present calamity such knowledge would serve as a basis for future confidence. Commenting on these verses, Weiser makes the case pointedly:

History assumes a different perspective when seen by faith; it is not the victories achieved by force of arms or the heroic deeds of warriors crowned with glory . . . they are completely overshadowed by the acts of God who, emerging from the background of history, makes Himself known to eyes of faith as the One who really shapes the course of events.²⁴

The living God is the God of history and it is evident that God’s people of the OT knew their religious history. The duty of Christians in the church today surely is to seek nothing less.

Moving on to verses 4-8, Willem VanGemeeren states, “This section begins with an emphatic confession of God as the Great King: ‘You are my King and my God.’ . . . Yahweh was also the commander of Israel’s victories [and] He had facilitated Israel’s victory over the enemies (vv. 5, 7).”²⁵ Knowing these things, the people were expectant that God could give them the same deliverance even now in the face of the current calamity. The remainder of Psalm 44 (vv. 9-16) actually becomes a lament that,

²³Kyle M. Yates, Jr., “Psalms,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 511.

²⁴Weiser, *The Psalms*, 356.

²⁵Willem A. VanGemeeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 389.

in the present circumstance, God had *not* delivered the nation. Much like the account of Job, God had allowed the nation to suffer defeat for His own purposes. Yet, that does not diminish the example that the opening verses provide. Namely, that the people knew what God had done in the past (history), and that knowledge provided hope for future deliverance. Perhaps the great Charles Spurgeon put it best in his exposition of Psalm 44:

Note that the main point of the history transmitted from father to son was the work of God; this is the core of history, and therefore no man can write history aright who is a stranger to the Lord's work. It is delightful to see the footprints of the Lord on the sea of changing events, to behold him riding on the whirlwind of war, pestilence, and famine, and above all to see his unchanging care for his chosen people. Those who are taught to see God in history have learned a good lesson from their fathers, and no son of believing parents should be left in ignorance of so holy an art. A nation tutored as Israel was in a history so marvellous as their own, always had an available argument in pleading with God for aid in trouble, since he who never changes gives in every deed of grace a pledge of mercy yet to come. The traditions of our past experience are powerful pleas for present help.²⁶

Those who do not know their spiritual heritage are in many ways short-changed from living the full experience of faith God desires for His people, which is the primary lesson that Psalms 44:1-8 teaches in support of the thesis.

First Corinthians 10:1-11

The epistle of 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul in about AD 55-57 to the Christians at the Roman city of Corinth, located in Greece about fifty miles west of Athens. His purpose in writing was to correct a number of spiritual deficiencies and controversial issues in the church there. The concerns Paul addressed centered on challenges of everyday living of the Christian life. These included issues such as divisions within the congregation, lawsuits among believers, eating meat offered to idols, the communion table, marriage and divorce matters, spiritual gifts (including the gift of tongues controversy—how the Corinthians were misunderstanding and even abusing the gift of languages) and the doctrine of the resurrection. Though Paul deals with a number

²⁶Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1871), The Spurgeon Archive, "The Treasury of David: Psalm 44," accessed October 21, 2014, <http://spurgeon.org/treasury/ps044.htm>.

of theological issues—perhaps most notably his teaching on the resurrection in chapter 15—this NT epistle is in the main a practical manual for Christian living.

To set up the discussion of the focal passage (10:1-11), the context must be set by going back to chapter 8 where Paul deals with the issue of food offered to idols. Paul instructed the Corinthians that while nothing was inherently wrong with eating food used in the worship of idols (“we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one,” 8:4b), the larger issue was that mature Christians dare not offend the conscience of a weaker, immature believer, who may see eating such food tantamount to worshiping the false gods themselves. Nevertheless, apparently some of the Corinthian Christians continued to eat the food, some even attending the idolatrous temples to do so. Therefore, Paul was not finished dealing with this matter, as will soon be seen. After a lengthy discussion on the need for Christian believers to serve others, and to discipline themselves so that God might use them to do so (ch. 9), he moves into chapter 10 with an admonition not to make the mistakes of OT Israel, who at times did not follow God’s instructions for them. Paul extracts several examples from both Exodus and Numbers to make his points.

This pericope (10:1-11) gives another example of how a biblical writer used a combination of history and doctrine to instruct God’s people; in this case, the NT church. The idea Paul brings out is that the church needs to do more than just *know* its spiritual history—or even come to *appreciate* it—but in fact to *learn* from it so that its lessons may be applied to current life circumstances. It is noteworthy that Paul obviously tied the current church at Corinth to the spiritual heritage of Israel in chapter 10. On this point, C. K. Barrett writes, “[Paul] considers that his Gentile readers were now, as Christians, so completely integrated into the people of God that they shared with Jews a common

ancestry.”²⁷ Richard Hays adds,

His Gentile converts, he believes, have been grafted into the covenant people (cf. Rom. 11:17-24) in such a way that they belong to Israel (cf. Gal. 6:16). Thus, the story of Israel is for the Gentile Corinthians not someone else’s story; it is the story of their own authentic spiritual ancestors.²⁸

These biblical scholars enlighten an understanding that those who have gone before in OT Israel, the NT era church, and the generations of Christians since the NT are all rightly considered “spiritual ancestors.” Through Paul’s illustration in this text, one can deduce that it is incumbent upon believers in Christ to know their spiritual history because it contributes significantly to their walk with God.

Furthermore, the concept of learning one’s religious history is not always a positive endeavor. In the case at hand, in 1 Corinthians 10, the historical occasion to which Paul refers is clearly a negative event—Israel’s idolatry. Verse 5 poignantly indicates the negativity of the event: “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” Yet, even in the negative historical illustration, Paul writes, “Now all these things became our examples” (v. 6) and “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition” (v. 11a). A careful exposition of this passage reveals how Paul used this unpleasant incident from history to teach a constructive message for the present and future.

Two underlying themes influence Paul’s cautions in 10:1-11. On the one hand, Gordon Fee argues, “Paul concludes his apostolic defense and returns to the matter at hand, the insistence of some of their number on attending the cultic meals in the pagan temples . . . [and] the problem of idolatry, especially in the form of eating in the idol’s presence.”²⁹

²⁷C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 220.

²⁸Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 160.

²⁹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 441.

In addition, Craig Blomberg opines that the real issue in chapter 10 was the “danger of failing to exercise strict self-control in the Christian life (9:24-27).”³⁰ It is likely that Paul had both of these concerns in mind as he wrote—the former as the immediate local concern, but the second as the universal principle to be applied in a larger context. Whatever the case, Paul clearly uses an illustration from history to press home his point concerning the doctrine of righteous living. Again, one sees the prominent role of history as it relates to present-day obedience to God.

Numerous deeper theological discussions may be generated by an examination of this passage. These might include, among others, the understanding of the phrase “baptized into Moses” (v. 3) and its relation to Christian baptism (if any); the spiritual significance of Paul saying that the Israelites “all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink” (v. 4) and its relation to Christian communion (if any); and the true meaning of the “Rock that followed them . . . was Christ” (v. 4). These issues, while important and worth pursuing, are nevertheless beyond the scope of the purposes here. Therefore, our focus will be on Paul’s primary thesis that the things that happened to Israel in the historical setting of their Sinai experience are in some way to be “examples” to the followers of Christ (vv. 6, 11) today. Fee expresses this aspect of the passage well when he states, “The nature of the following argument suggests that they [the Corinthians] were well aware of the *data* of the OT text; Paul wants to make sure they do not miss the *significance* for their lives.”³¹

The text can be divided into two parts. First, verses 1-5 depict OT Israel as having great privileges and blessings from God, yet still failed to “obtain the prize” (9:24-27) and fell into idolatry and the accompanying judgment for doing so. Second, verses 6-11 apply the historical event directly to the lives of the Corinthians, and by

³⁰Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 191.

³¹Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 443, emphasis original.

extension to the entire church of Jesus Christ. Amalgamating the entire content of verses 1-11, Anthony Thiselton provides an excellent overview of what Paul is portraying:

At the heart of this section lie issues about the status and interpretation of scripture for the church, where the OT remains definitive for a mixed congregation from a predominately Gentile background, but where a distinctively Christ-related lens enables the scripture to speak and to be heard with a fresh voice.³²

From this viewpoint, one sees that the OT speaks directly to NT believers with a “fresh voice” but one can also fairly posit that the entire experience of church history may speak to today’s believers as well. Both the positive and negative aspects of spiritual ancestors may be seen through many examples, just as Paul sought to do here—but only if one has a knowledge of such events.

In the text under consideration, Paul is warning the Corinthians through the OT events to which he appeals. In the first section (vv. 1-5), he describes the four privileges Israel had in Sinai that did not assure them of God’s continued blessings if they did not honor Him. The Israelites experienced (1) God’s miraculous delivery through the Red Sea, (2) the presence of Yahweh guiding them in the form of the pillar of fire and the cloud, (3) the miraculous provision of food in the desert (manna and quail), and (4) the supernatural supply of water. All of these events were manifestations of God’s immediate presence with the children of Israel in days gone by. Hays writes, “The important point in verses 1-4 is that Israel—whose legacy the Corinthians have inherited—experienced powerful spiritual signs of God’s favor and sustaining power.”³³ Yet, verse 5 says God was not pleased with most of them because of their irresponsible conduct in turning away from God despite His abundant blessings to them. In verses 7-10, Paul tells how they turned to idolatry, immorality, testing God, and complaining to

³²Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 719.

³³Hays, *First Corinthians*, 161.

Him. Barrett reminds that “Israel’s privilege did not guarantee Israel’s moral or religious security,” therefore, “Let the Corinthians take warning.”³⁴

In essence, some in Corinth were thinking that because they were saved and inherited the blessings of being in the body of Christ, they could dabble in and around pagan temples and eat the food offered to idols with no concerns or worries. After all, they reasoned that “an idol is nothing” (8:4), so they need not worry because they have that knowledge. Through his appeal to Israel’s history, Paul was saying, as expressed by Hays, “Just because you have received spiritual blessings . . . do not suppose that you are exempt from God’s judgment.”³⁵ Blomberg adds, “None of the miracles guaranteed that the children of Israel would reach the Promised Land” and thus “Paul exhorts the Corinthians to learn from this example.”³⁶

From these undesirable examples (Blomberg calls them “exemplary warnings”³⁷), Paul goes on to preach a positive message on the doctrine of righteous living. At the least, the outcome of heeding his words would produce positive spiritual results. It is apropos at this point to bring to mind the famous quotation by George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”³⁸ Paul thus powerfully admonishes the Corinthians to learn from the past mistakes of their spiritual “fathers:” (1) do not lust after evil things “as they also lusted” (v. 6); (2) do not be idolaters “as were some of them” (v. 7); (3) do not commit sexual immorality “as some of them did” (v. 8); (4) do not tempt (question) Christ “as some of them also

³⁴Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 223.

³⁵Ibid., 162.

³⁶Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 192.

³⁷Ibid., 195.

³⁸National Churchill Museum, “National Churchill Museum Blog: Those Who Fail to Learn from History,” November 16, 2012, accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/blog/churchill-quote-history/>.

tempted” (v. 9); and (5) do not complain “as some of them also complained” (v. 10).

Paul summarizes why he spent the time to explain these events from the distant past to the Corinthians. He sums up his rationale in verse 11: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”³⁹ These examples from history were recorded for those who live at the end of the age of grace so that Christians today will not live as the people did in the cases Paul cited, but rather live holy lives that please God—truth for both Corinth in the first century and for the church at large in the twenty-first century. Thiselton calls these OT “examples” (NKJV) “formative models” for the church, stating, “Israel was to shape faith and conduct” for God’s people in each succeeding generation.⁴⁰ Hays reinforces this idea:

From the privileged perspective of the new eschatological situation in Christ, Paul rereads the Old Testament stories and finds they speak in direct and compelling ways about himself and his churches, and he concludes that God has ordered these past events “for our instruction.”⁴¹

Numerous other warning examples may be gleaned from both Scripture and church history that may produce similar results. The bottom-line assessment from 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 is that it is a biblical mandate to teach the spiritual history of the church and apply the lessons they teach about biblical doctrine and practice, whether the historical observations are negative examples to warn (as in 1 Cor 10) or positive examples to follow. In the application to this ministry project, it is reemphasized that Christians must know the history of those who went before them if they are to learn and apply the lessons, to both embrace the right and shun the wrong.

³⁹A clearer understanding of Paul’s words may be found in The New Living Translation (NLT) rendering of v. 11: “These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.”

⁴⁰Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 746.

⁴¹Hays, *First Corinthians*, 162.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The epistle to the Ephesians was addressed to the church in the city of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). Though some scholars make arguments against Pauline authorship of Ephesians, there are no strongly compelling reasons to dispute that Paul wrote it, probably around AD 60-62. Based on a number of considerations, it has been suggested that, even though it was addressed to the Ephesians, this letter was perhaps an encyclical that circulated among the early churches. In that vein, Carson recognizes, “There is no unanimity in understanding the letter’s [specific] aim. . . . [However] it is an important statement of Christian truth that may well have been greatly needed in more than one first century situation.”⁴² Some of those truths include, among others, the riches and blessings of redemption, salvation by grace alone, the unity and oneness of all believers, and spiritual warfare. This section of Ephesians deals with Christ’s gifts to the church and their purpose, especially in light of the aim to provide a biblical foundation for teaching Baptist history and doctrine. This exegesis supports that aim by recalling that believers are to become mature in Christ by learning true doctrine and not being led astray by error.

In a general outline of Ephesians, one thing is clear: the book is divided into two distinct sections. Chapters 1-3 are doctrinal, conveying a number of theological issues. Then, chapters 4-6 are practical, and focus on the realistic living out of Christian doctrine in everyday life. When reaching chapter 4, one clearly sees the break and change in emphasis. Harold Hoehner provides a succinct transitional explanation:

Clearly, the first three chapters concentrate on doctrine and the last three on practice. . . . The conduct of believers that Paul addresses in these last three chapters is based on the knowledge given in the first three chapters. In other words, the revealed mystery of the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ into one new person has practical ramifications for life here on earth.⁴³

⁴²D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 311.

⁴³Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 500.

In light of that transition, chapter 4 opens with Paul's appeal to unity in the church among believers. Verses 4-6 say, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." He then devotes verses 7-10 to discussing Christ's incarnation, His exaltation, and, how, as Head of the church, Christ has bestowed "gifts" upon the church. Verse 8 reads, "Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'" The details of this section are not part of the current discussion, but they lead into an analysis of verses 11-16. Peter O'Brien sets the stage:

Christ now sets out to accomplish the goal of filling all things by supplying his people with everything necessary to foster the growth and perfection of the body (v. 13). Having achieved dominion over all the powers through his victorious ascent, he sovereignly distributes gifts to the members of his body.⁴⁴

Paul lists the "gifts" in verse 11: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." A fuller exploration of spiritual gifts would require a look at several other passages of NT scripture, primarily 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. A proper examination of the spiritual gifts would indicate that every believer in Christ has at least one gift, and that the gifts are given sovereignly by God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12), though obviously under the supervision of God the Son (Eph 4). Moreover, "the manifestation of the Spirit [i.e., a spiritual gift] is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Cor 12:7). In other words, everyone in Christ has at least one gift so that the entire body of Christ may be built up. Coming to Ephesians 4:11-16, Harold Hoehner explains, "The central point of this portion is the distribution of gifts to the church which are given to unify the church."⁴⁵ Ephesians 4:7 speaks of each believer receiving a gift, verses 8-10 quote from Psalm 68, applying the words to Christ's authority to give spiritual gifts, and then verses 11-16 give four specific

⁴⁴Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 297.

⁴⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 538.

gifts and their role in the body of Christ. While in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, the spiritual gifts are the abilities to perform various ministries in the church (e.g., helps, administration, mercy, and so forth), regarding Ephesians 4:11, F. F. Bruce explains,

Here the “gifts” are the persons who exercise those ministries and who are said to be “given” by the ascended Christ to his people to enable them to function and develop as they should. It is not suggested that such “gifts” are restricted to those that are specifically named; those that are named exercise their ministries in such a way as to help other members of the church exercise their own respective ministries (no member is left without some kind of service to perform).⁴⁶

Verse 11 lists the specific “gifts”: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” A lengthy exposition of what each one of these gifts (individuals) mean and their significance for the church is outside the parameters of the current analysis of this text, but the consensus of conservative scholarship on each gift is duly noted.

“Apostles” were official delegates of Jesus Christ, including the Twelve plus several others mentioned in the NT. They were carefully selected individuals who heralded the gospel, established new congregations, and opened up new parts of the world for the Christian message in the early days of the church. “Prophets” had divine authority to utter new revelation directly from God. The NT prophets were generally considered in the same light as their OT counterparts. Prophets communicated divine messages. Though cogent arguments can be made that the gift of apostle may still exist in the form of pioneer missionaries who open new areas untouched by the gospel, and the gift of prophet may be alive today in the man who preaches God’s Word, it is largely held that neither of these gifts exist today, at least in their original sense. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul states that the individuals who had these gifts were part of the “foundation” of the church, along with Jesus as the “cornerstone”: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been

⁴⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 345-46.

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19-20).

Continuing the list of Ephesians 4:11, next is “evangelists,” those who simply preached the gospel—though that designation need not apply exclusively to itinerant preachers who traveled from place to place. Paul encouraged Timothy, as a pastor, to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5). Then finally, comes the “pastors and teachers” of verse 11. Debate continues on whether this phrase designates one or two gifts. Hoehner summarizes the discussion: “Because one article is used for both these gifted people, scholars have debated over the centuries as to whether they represent two different gifted persons or one person with a combination of two gifts.”⁴⁷ Without an in-depth discussion, it is simply noted that, though the term “pastor” *per se* is used only here in the NT, it is an image that refers to the task of shepherding in the NT and this gift/office is used several times in this manner (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet 5:2, John 21:16). In the NT sense, the term “pastor” is used synonymously with the terms “bishop/overseer” (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1) and “elder” (1 Tim 4:14, 5:17, 19), and implies that these are the primary spiritual leaders of the churches. Concerning “teachers,” there seems to be sufficient NT evidence to identify them as a separate gift in the church (1 Cor 12:28, Gal 6:6, Heb 5:12, Jas 3:1). Hoehner’s conclusion on this issue is that “it seems that these two gifts, pastoring and teaching, are distinct although it could be said that all pastors should be teachers but not all teachers are pastors.”⁴⁸

With regard to the thesis of the importance of teaching history and doctrine in the church, the *identity* of these gifted individual is not as important as their *function*. In delineating the essential role of the gifted persons Paul lists, Bruce suggests,

The apostles, as an order of ministry in the church, were not perpetuated beyond the apostolic age, but the various functions which they discharged did not lapse with

⁴⁷Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 543.

⁴⁸Ibid., 545.

their departure, but continued to be performed by others—notably the evangelists and the pastors and teachers listed here.⁴⁹

Their function is found in verses 12-15. These gifted individuals are given to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (v. 12); so that Christians may mature in the faith (v. 13); and that

we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ. (vv. 14-15)

O’Brien explains,

These [gifts] in v. 11 are deliberately emphasized since they provide the church with the teaching of Christ for the edification of the body (v. 12) and for the avoidance of false teaching (v. 14). They enable the others to exercise their own respective ministries so that the body is built to maturity, wholeness, and unity.⁵⁰

In the endeavor to establish the necessity of teaching proper doctrine, two points are noted from this passage: (1) the teaching/preaching/shepherding ministry of the church by its gifted leaders is what will produce maturity in the saints and accomplish the work of the ministry, as pointed out in verse 11; and (2) the maturity thus attained will keep the saints from falling prey to false teaching, as discussed in verse 14. With regard to the first fact, verse 12 indicates that gifted individuals are given so that they will equip other believers to do the work of the ministry, to the end of building the body of Christ. Though some opposition to this view has arisen in recent years, it remains the predominant interpretation of verse 12. As Andrew Lincoln puts it, “All believers are to be brought to a state of completion, and it is the ministers Christ has given who are the means to this end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership.”⁵¹ The teaching of correct biblical doctrine, as held to by the saints down through the history of the church (“the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” as Jude 3 puts it), is

⁴⁹Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 346-47.

⁵⁰O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 298.

⁵¹Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 254.

an indispensable task for church leaders in every generation. Teaching the distinctive doctrines of God's Word will lead to the building up and maturity of God's people, as verses 14 and 16 instruct.

Regarding the second point, teaching correct doctrine will furthermore prevent God's people from falling prey to false teaching. Verse 14 reads, "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting." "Every wind" indicates all kinds of false teaching—everything opposed to the truth of God's Word. False teachers will use trickery, deceit, and scheming to lead Christians astray. Hoehner explains that false teachers "confuse the immature believer who lacks a proper understanding of God and his Word. . . . Consequently, it is of utmost importance for believers to follow God's plan for edification of the body through the gifted people provided for this purpose."⁵² What then can overcome the false teaching Paul warns about? The counterfeit is best rejected by fully knowing the genuine article. Consequently, the urgency of teaching doctrine cannot be overemphasized in the contemporary church. O'Brien summarizes the passage:

The exalted Christ has given gifts to the church so that by building his body immaturity and instability will increasingly be left behind. The ministry was given not only to enable the church to grow but also so that it would be able to resist any forces that might corrupt or destroy it.⁵³

Accurate teaching of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives, as this project proposed, thus appeals to this passage of Scripture for biblical support. As Baptist believers better understand biblical doctrine and more fully appreciate their Christian history and heritage, they will be less likely to fall victim by the "wind" of false teaching.

⁵²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 564.

⁵³O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 308.

First Timothy 4:1-11

Last, in biblical support for the importance of teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives, this section turns to Paul's first letter to the young pastor, Timothy. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome; he was probably released about AD 62. Paul's protégé in the ministry, Timothy, was with Paul in Rome, and after his release from prison, the two of them made their way to Ephesus. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with many of the issues arising in the budding church there, while he Paul went to minister in Macedonia. Then, about AD 63-64, Paul wrote a letter to his young co-worker to encourage him in the ministry at Ephesus, as well as to give apostolic instructions to the whole congregation there. Ralph Earle writes, "First Timothy, Titus, and Second Timothy—probably written in that order and commonly called the pastoral [*sic*] Epistles—form a rather closely knit unity."⁵⁴ First Timothy 6:1-11 is some of Paul's most compelling instructions to Timothy and the Ephesian church, and these verses further establish the fact that teaching sound doctrine is a mandate for leaders in the NT church.

First Timothy 6:1-11 can be broken down to two easily identified sections. First, in verses 1-5, Paul continues his admonitions against false teachers that he has dealt with previously in the epistle. In subdividing this section, Philip Towner suggests that verses 1-3 "categorize the heresy in general and specific terms," and verses 4-5 "substantiate Paul's counterassertions [to the false teachers]."⁵⁵ Then, in verses 6-11, Paul urges Timothy to teach sound doctrine to others in order to avoid doctrinal error himself and to discipline himself further to become a good minister of Christ.

In dealing with false teachers, Paul first says it should be no surprise that they have arisen within the church. The Holy Spirit had already warned that they would appear. Verse 1a says, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart

⁵⁴Ralph Earle, *1 Timothy*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, J. D. Douglas and Richard P. Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

⁵⁵Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 286-87.

from the faith.” Paul refers to an explicit prophecy by the Holy Spirit that in “latter times” some will fall away from the Christian faith. Paul does not tell how “the Spirit” said this—whether by prophetic words of Jesus or something revealed to Paul or another prophet; yet, *how* this word came is not nearly as important as from *whom* it came. God Himself revealed the certainty of apostasy by revelation of the Holy Spirit. As God revealed this inevitable truth, He said it would be “in latter times.” William Mounce comments, “At first glance it appears that the phrase . . . ‘in the last times,’ refers to some time in the future, especially since the verb is a future tense. . . . However, a closer examination shows that Paul sees Timothy and himself as being presently in the last times.”⁵⁶ Most conservative commentators agree that the NT writers used the phrases “last times,” “latter [later] times,” and “last days” to describe the entire era between the first advent and the second advent of Christ. For example, in his comments on the term “last days,” Patrick Fairbairn writes, “And about the gospel age, it would appear that the expression, with some slight variations . . . had become appropriated generally to the [entire] period or dispensation of Messiah.”⁵⁷ In commenting on Peter’s use of the term “last days” in Acts 2:17, Darrell Bock opines, “What Peter is really saying here is that the coming of the Spirit is the beginning of ‘those days.’ An era of righteousness will conclude them, and that era comes with the day of the Lord.”⁵⁸ Discussing the 1 Timothy passage, Gordon D. Fee writes of “the later times”: “Christian existence always belongs to the later times, already begun with the Advent of the Spirit.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 234.

⁵⁷Patrick Fairbairn, *I and II Timothy, and Titus*, Classic Commentary Library (1874; repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 362.

⁵⁸Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 112.

⁵⁹Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 101, emphasis original.

Thus, Timothy and the church at Ephesus were already in the “last days” or “last times.” Paul says that God has given a caution that some will abandon the faith in these times. It was already happening in Paul’s day—much of 1 Timothy deals with it, as in these verses. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he wrote about this apostasy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned to fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

Paul’s warning to Timothy is very specific in 1 Timothy 4:1a: “Some will depart from the faith.” The Greek word for “depart” is *apostasia*, which means “rebellion, abandonment.”⁶⁰ The English word for those who abandon the faith is “apostate,” and the idea is a willful and purposeful departure. It means someone who once professed Christ but has now “departed” from that profession to a state of disbelief, denial of Christ, and an embrace of false teaching. It should be noted that an apostate never was a *true* believer. Towner explains, “It refers to the false teachers and to those who are accepting their doctrines. And in this acceptance is rejection of ‘the faith,’ understood as the sum total of the Christian way.”⁶¹ Paul then says that those who apostatize are “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (v. 1c). “Giving heed” means they give assent and cling to the false teaching. Jude says these apostates are “sensual [carnal, worldly-minded] persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit” (Jude 19). Furthermore, the apostates are “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (v. 1d). “Doctrines of demons” does not mean teaching *about* demons, but rather what *demons themselves* teach. The Bible teaches there is a spirit world, with the angels of God who are good angels, and angels of Satan who are demons. Scriptures teach that these demons work to influence every area of society, seeking to influence governments of the world

⁶⁰William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 97.

⁶¹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 289.

and fill society with moral pollution. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that the origin of all false doctrines and the origin of all false religion is ultimately demonic (1 Cor 10:19-20). Additionally, demonic forces try to infiltrate the church with teaching that leads people away from the Word of God. Mounce writes, “Here it is revealed that at the root of the Ephesian heresy lie Satan and his demons, leading people astray and teaching his own doctrines.”⁶²

Of these apostate teachers, Paul adds, they are “speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (v. 2). In other words, these kinds of teachers will not be sincere men (or women). One would expect the “doctrines of demons” to be obvious unless it is remembered that apostates once pretended to be genuine believers. They go on “speaking lies” without remorse because they have “their own conscience seared with a hot iron.” The Greek word for “seared” (*kauteraizo*)⁶³ is where we get the English word “cauterize.” The idea here may refer to the hardening, numbing, or callusing of the “conscience” so that the person does not know right from wrong. However, as an alternative, Fee opines,

It is possible that [Paul] intends to suggest that their conscience carries Satan’s brand. . . . This seems to be more in keeping with the context. By teaching in the guise of truth what is actually false, they have been branded by Satan as belonging to him and doing his will.⁶⁴

In light of the evidence and the context (as Fee points out), this the likely interpretation is that these false teachers teach the doctrines of demons and bear the mark of Satan upon them due to their lies. Towner reminds that the doctrines they teach are in stark contrast to the truthful and authoritative doctrine of the apostles.⁶⁵

⁶²Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 236.

⁶³Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 426. The word can mean either “brand with a red-hot iron,” or simply, “sear.”

⁶⁴Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 98.

⁶⁵See the full discussion in Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 290.

In Paul's day, the false doctrine he describes was centered on issues of marriage and diet. Paul said apostate teachers were "forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods" (1 Tim 4:3). This verse indicates the content of the immediate heresy was asceticism, which taught that the way to spirituality was self-denial. The false doctrine of asceticism indicated that favor with God was earned by refusing marriage (probably including all things associated with marriage, such as sexual contact and having children⁶⁶), as well as by strict dietary rules. Asceticism ultimately led to the creation of monasteries and other attempts at complete separation from the world. Earle explains that asceticism taught that "all physical pleasure is sin . . . [and] holiness was identified with asceticism."⁶⁷ Several commentators reveal this ascetic teaching was a part of the wider heresy of Gnosticism, or at least elements of proto-gnosticism.⁶⁸ Various forms of ascetic teaching have plagued the church for centuries, even into modern times. In verses 3b-5, Paul refutes the ascetic teaching of abstaining from certain foods, and he elsewhere taught on the sanctity and goodness of marriage (1 Cor 7; Eph 5, etc.). In essence, Paul is refuting the Ephesian heresy by saying God Himself approves of both food and marriage as two of His good gifts to humankind.

For the purposes of the present discussion, the actual content of the heresy Paul warned against is secondary in the sense that the subject matter of false teaching can and does change over the course of time. However, Paul's instructions to Timothy in verses 6-11 are relevant in every age of the church. In verse 6 he commands Timothy, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished

⁶⁶Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 238.

⁶⁷Earle, *1 Timothy*, 145.

⁶⁸See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxx-lxxi; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 7-10; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 26-28, Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 430-34; and Fairbairn, *I and II Timothy, and Titus*, 172-75.

in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” Though it is debated, “these things” perhaps refers not just to the immediate context of verses 1-5, but back to *all* of the prior instructions Paul has given to Timothy in the letter. Mounce writes, “Paul is probably thinking of the entire epistle up to this point. If Timothy continues to teach about law, grace, salvation, and conduct in the church, he will continue to be a good servant.”⁶⁹ The emphasis seems to be on Timothy’s mandate to “teach” the apostolic doctrine. Towner, correctly observes, “It is by passing on the apostle’s teaching that he will demonstrate his ‘excellence’ . . . as a ‘servant of Jesus Christ’ (NRSV).”⁷⁰

What follows in verses 7-10 is an appeal to Timothy to avoid all false teaching and to pursue godliness by all means necessary. Again, an exposition of these verses, though important, goes beyond the immediate treatise; yet, in summing up the immediate paragraph, Paul reiterates the importance of teaching correct doctrine when he commands Timothy again, “These things command and teach” (v. 11). Timothy is to teach correct biblical doctrine and expose the false by his continual striving to “command” and “teach” what Paul has passed on to him. The verbs Paul uses here are in the present imperative—to constantly command and teach. As George Knight explains, “The apostle of Christ (1:1) commands the servant of Christ (4:6) to continually command . . . (present imperative) that which the apostle has communicated.”⁷¹ Mounce adds an accurate summary of the section ending with verse 11:

In light of the silly myths of the heresy, the goal of godliness, and the living God in whom Timothy has hoped, Paul once again encourages Timothy to stand firm in his preaching: he must continue commanding the opponents to cease teaching their heresy, and he must continue to teach true doctrine.⁷²

⁶⁹Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 248-49.

⁷⁰Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 303; see also Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 257.

⁷¹Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 204.

⁷²Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 257.

In accepting the Bible as God's Word for today, the command to teach sound doctrine surely carries over into the twenty-first century church. Any pastor, teacher, or preacher of God's truth remains under an ancient mandate to teach what is right, true, and holy, which will make him "a good minister of Jesus Christ" (v. 6). This principle, then, provided the final biblical underpinning for the goal of teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. In the light of historical realities, right doctrine will help Christians of the modern day church become more firmly grounded in what they believe and why they believe it. This was true in Paul and Timothy's day, and it remains true today. Relying heavily on Paul's command to teach correct doctrine served as a major theological underpinning of this project.

Summation

In 1964, the late Herschel H. Hobbs, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a true statesman, esteemed scholar, and Baptist pastor, wrote, "It is one thing to believe. It is quite another thing to know what and why one believes."⁷³ The focus of this project had as its overall aim a desire to address that very issue. Too many Baptist Christians today are taught neither about the doctrines that have historically defined Baptist churches, nor about the noble history of their Baptist forebears, who, through great trial and sacrifice, stood true to God's Word and ensured a godly heritage was passed down to their descendants. This project sought to help God's people known as Baptists understand more fully their heritage and to articulate more confidently the uniqueness of their beliefs from the Holy Scriptures. In pursuit of this goal, the biblical passages examined from both the OT and NT (Deut 4:1-4; Ps 44:1-8; 1 Cor 10:1-11; Eph 4:11-16; and 1 Tim 4:1-11) provided an exegetically consistent and biblically sound theological foundation for the major objectives of this project.

⁷³Herschel H. Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman, 1964), 7.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL, AND PRACTICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING BAPTIST HISTORY
AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

Introduction

A foundational premise of this project was that learning spiritual heritage would encourage and equip Baptist Christians not only to appreciate and embrace their spiritual heritage, but also to identify and oppose doctrinal error as well as stand against the cultural drift away from biblical morality. Having established the biblical and theological underpinnings of this project, attention turns to other factors that bear on the importance of teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives to a local Baptist congregation.

It is without exaggeration to say that many—if not most—Christians who belong to Baptist churches today do not know *why* they belong. There are many superficial reasons for which professing believers attach themselves to congregations that identify with the Baptist heritage (whether or not they use “Baptist” in their name). Some may become members of these churches because of family tradition—“if being Baptist was good enough for grandpa, it’s good enough for me.” Others may have been reared in a Baptist church from infancy or childhood and when they become older simply ask, “Why change?” Still others may find the local neighborhood church a Baptist one and attach themselves to it out of convenience, thinking, “One church is as good as another.” Certainly dozens of other reasons may be given. Addressing the lack of knowledge of modern day Baptists as to why they are such, Gary Schmidt forthrightly declares, “It is a fact that Baptists today are ignorant of their own past.”¹

¹Gary Schmidt, *Contend for the Faith* (Victoria, British Columbia: Providence Strict Baptist Assembly, 2001), 21.

In contradistinction to the present-day reality, British pastor and author Jack Hoad rightly discerns,

The Baptist heritage is an immensely rich record of the grace of God in preserving a biblical church witness throughout the centuries of the Christian era. . . . This heritage is a treasure which Baptists ought to esteem highly but which they are in danger of losing outright in these critical times.²

John T. Christian, Baptist pastor and scholar of yesteryear, writes, “It is a right royal history they [Baptists] have. It is well worth the telling and the preserving.”³

Contemporary Southern Baptist theologian R. Stanton Norman warns, “We must guard against losing our ‘Baptist identity.’ Our distinctive beliefs do matter.”⁴

Undoubtedly, many Baptist Christians *do* know why they are Baptist and not part of another Christian tradition, yet multitudes do *not* know why—or, at best, are vague as to why. Further adding to the reality of the situation is the fact that believers in Christ today are living not only in a post-Christian age, but with the recent advent of so-called “emerging” and “relational” churches, as well as the advent of many parachurch ministries, are entering what many observers describe as a “post-denominational” era as well, where church polity and doctrinal issues are deemphasized or are altogether jettisoned. Concerning this state of affairs, John S. Hammett states,

Some realize they have little denominational identity and see that as a good thing. . . . [This attitude is] characteristic of our postdenominational era and of evangelical Christianity as a whole, which has largely identified with transdenominational parachurch groups. One such group, Promise Keepers, even identifies denominationalism as a sin akin to racism.⁵

²Jack Hoad, *The Baptist* (London: Grace Trust, 1986), 1.

³John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists: Together with Some Account of Their Principles and Practices* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1922), 3.

⁴R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 3.

⁵John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 19.

These phenomena arising within professing Christianity have added to the lack of understanding—or even concern—about the *type* of church of which many Christians become a part. Hammett continues, “Most Baptists, and even many Baptist pastors, have never thought through the biblical rationale for historic Baptist views and practices . . . [and] most Baptists are unaware of their ecclesiological heritage.”⁶

Many Baptist pastors, teachers, and leaders see the need for a corrective to this situation. R. Stanton Norman explains, “If we lose our distinctive identity, the word *Baptist* will become a vacuous concept designating nothing more than a certain building located at a certain place.”⁷ Such counteractive measures will certainly begin with proper teaching on Baptist history and distinctives. John A. Broadus (1827–1895), distinguished preacher, scholar, and denominational leader, as well as one of the eminent “Four Founding Fathers” of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, emphasized this need in *The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views* in 1881. In that short, though scholarly, work, he stated,

The people who allow themselves to be called Baptists differ widely from large portions of the Christian world, and are persuaded that their own views are more scriptural, more in accordance with the Saviour’s commands. They must therefore feel themselves required to *teach* these things as well as others.”⁸

Attention is hence turned to establishing the extra-biblical—though not unbiblical—support for this project.

Holding Fast

In preparation for the dark days that would come to Great Britain at the outset of World War II, the British government prepared a series of motivational posters that were intended to raise morale among the populace and keep them focused on surviving

⁶Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 21.

⁷Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 4.

⁸John A. Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881), 2, emphasis original.

wartime danger when it struck the nation—which, of course, it did. Perhaps the most famous of these was the one that read “Keep Calm and Carry On” in plain white lettering on a red background with the British crown logo at the top. Though it is unknown how many of these posters were actually seen by the public, the sentiment they portrayed was certainly taken to heart by the British people as they persevered through the war to eventual victory, despite the horrendous losses of life and property. In a similar way, this project was designed to help Baptist believers in Christ ignore the spiritual threats around them in the modern world and seek to learn, understand, and hold tenaciously to the distinct faith their Baptist ancestors have bequeathed to them.

Baptist Christians have historically stood for what they describe as New Testament Christian faith. To be sure, Baptists hold in common with other orthodox Christians belief in many biblical teachings—the Trinity; the Virgin Birth, deity, and bodily resurrection of Christ; salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone; and the inspiration of the Scriptures, to name a few. However, Baptists have also traditionally held to a number of *distinct* biblical doctrines that have set them apart from other Christian traditions. A single doctrine in and of itself does not characterize Baptists (despite the false claim that baptism by immersion would qualify as such), but the unique *collection* of beliefs that Baptists hold *are* distinctive. No other Christian tradition holds to all of them in the same way Baptists do. Everett C. Goodwin summarizes it thusly, “Regardless of the time and circumstances in which Baptists have found themselves, some basic, fundamental beliefs have tended to shape and direct what Baptists have done, individually and together.”⁹

However, perhaps not surprisingly given the Baptist tradition of autonomy with no ecclesiastical governing body, the distinctives themselves are often elusive in attempts to fully articulate. In preparation for this project, well over one hundred works

⁹Everett C. Goodwin, *Down by the Riverside: A Brief History of Baptist Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2002), 72.

on Baptist doctrine and history were consulted and very few identified the exact same list of Baptist distinctives. Even though difficult to pin down, Dean Anderson explains that his 2010 study of various Baptist scholars disclosed a general consensus on the distinct Baptist doctrinal positions:

The writers [surveyed] categorize, group, and number the distinctive [Baptist] beliefs in a variety of ways, so that some, such as John Broadus, identify as few as four, while others, such as Winthrop Hudson, list as many as fourteen. [Steuart McBirnie, as seen later in this chapter, essentially narrowed it down to two.] An analysis of their definitions and explanations, however, suggests that the majority of the writers tend to point to the same small core of doctrinal beliefs as those that are distinctively Baptist.¹⁰

Anderson names the consensus essential Baptist distinctives as (1) biblical authority, (2) soul competency, (3) regenerate church membership, (4) congregational polity, (5) a symbolic view of baptism, and (6) religious liberty.¹¹ As mentioned in chapter 1, Breaker summarizes the distinctives in the oft-repeated acrostic for BAPTISTS: (B) biblical authority, (A) autonomy of the local church, (P) priesthood of all believers, (T) two ordinances (baptism and communion), (I) individual soul liberty, (S) saved church membership, (T) two church offices (pastor and deacon), and (S) separation of church and state.¹² One can easily see how these two—representative of several other listings—actually cover the same basic doctrinal beliefs, just expressed in roughly different ways. A combination of these two listings was used in this project to present the Baptist distinctive doctrines. In embracing Baptist distinctives, Broadus reminds that “it is not necessarily an arrogant and presumptuous thing in us if we strive to bring honored

¹⁰Dean Anderson, *A Sacred Trust: Sermons on the Distinctive Beliefs of Baptists* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2010), 6.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 8.

¹²Robert Ray Breaker III, *Why I Am a Baptist* (Milton, FL: Breaker’s, 2007), 5.

fellow-Christians to views which we honestly believe to be more scriptural, and therefore more wholesome.”¹³

Multitudes of Baptists in centuries past held to these distinguishing New Testament doctrines with great fervor and commitment, believing them to be firmly grounded in the Word of God. Broadus writes, “Their faithfulness to those doctrines was a means of obeying their Lord in all matters and bequeathing to future generations the truths of the faith that had been entrusted to them.”¹⁴ Many were persecuted, tortured, and risked life, limb, and property for holding to and preaching these distinct Baptist beliefs. Untold multitudes of Baptists and other baptistic Christians were tortured and imprisoned for not falling in line with the established churches and/or the civil governments connected to those churches. Thousands were put to death—by the sword, at the stake, on the pyre, and, with sneering contempt, by drowning (in cruel mockery of the Baptist doctrine of New Testament believer’s baptism). Despite its critics and detractors since its original publication in 1563, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*¹⁵ has nevertheless been largely hailed by the New Testament church as a generally reliable account of the suffering and deaths of multitudes Christian martyrs from the time of Christ until the time of its printing. A mere cursory examination of this Christian classic reveals the rage of Satan against the people of God and the unspeakable horror they endured for the name of Christ—countless thousands being Baptists. It should also be noted in this discussion—and Baptists need to know this important historical reality—that, as W. J. Burgess writes, “Baptists have always been the persecuted, but never the persecutors.”¹⁶ Schmidt

¹³Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists*, 5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563; repr. Blacksburg, VA: Wilder, 2009).

¹⁶W. J. Burgess, *Baptist Faith and Martyrs’ Fires* (Little Rock, AR: Baptist Publications Committee, 1964), 411.

explains, “Christians over the centuries have been killed and imprisoned for what we now call Baptist distinctives. It is imperative for Baptists today to know these things so that God might be glorified in his people.”¹⁷

As Baptists of the twenty-first century learn that their spiritual ancestors were willing to suffer and even die for the beliefs that define Baptist churches, it is more likely that they will be encouraged to evaluate or reevaluate the doctrinal distinctives that define their congregation. In doing so, it is also probable that they will better appreciate that certain beliefs are of vital importance and do indeed matter. The challenge of Paul’s words is to “test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess 5:21), so that, as the writer of Hebrews penned, “The things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12:27).

Anderson writes,

Baptists have a heritage and a legacy, a faith and an identity, that others have suffered and died to hand down to us. As valuable and important as it is, though, and as much as our Baptist forefathers endured to establish it, we are always just one generation away from extinction. If one generation fails to practice and pass down that legacy, it can be lost to all of the succeeding generations.¹⁸

This project was essentially an attempt to not let this be the generation that fails Baptist descendants in the generations to come, should the Lord tarry His return. Therefore, this project sought to “keep calm and carry on” the heritage deposited by Baptist ancestors.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Virtually all writers on the subject of Baptist doctrinal distinctives list at, or near, the top the consistent historical emphasis on believing the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice for Baptist Christians. Goodwin states, “From their earliest beginnings, Baptists have held Scripture (the Bible) to be the highest source of understanding and the

¹⁷Schmidt, *Contend for the Faith*, 2.

¹⁸Anderson, *A Sacred Trust*, 20.

most authoritative guide for belief.”¹⁹ As many Baptist scholars have indicated with regard to their own distinctives, “We are not a creedal people.” That is, the various historic statements of faith and “creed-like” confessions among Baptists have always been secondary to the Bible itself as the ultimate statement of Baptist beliefs. Roy T. Edgemon writes,

John Leland, a Baptist pastor who heavily influenced the writing of religious freedom into the [United States] Constitution, advised that the minute we develop a creed, we will have developed a cult that will stand between us and God. Therefore, he said, there should be one creed in Baptist life, the Word of God, and no other. That advice was wise in those days and is wise today. Truth and freedom are in the Word of God.²⁰

The pages of Scripture themselves bear testimony that the Bible is true and the only sufficient guide for time and eternity. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa 40:8). The Lord Jesus Christ said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The apostle Paul called the Bible “the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15), and the apostle Peter declared it to be “the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet 1:23).

In perhaps the Bible’s most comprehensive statement on its own complete adequacy (2 Tim 3:16-17), Paul penned the immortal words, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” In that classic Scripture text, Paul explained for the church of Jesus Christ that the Bible is “profitable” (Greek *ōphélimos*, helpful, serviceable, advantageous) for “doctrine” (i.e., what is right); for “reproof” (Amplified Bible: “reproof and conviction of sin;” i.e., what is not right); for “correction” (i.e., how to get right); and for “instruction in righteousness: (i.e., how to stay right). The New Living Translation captures the spirit of Paul’s words: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and

¹⁹Goodwin, *Down by the Riverside*, 73.

²⁰Roy T. Edgemon, *The Doctrines Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Convention, 1988), 19.

to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” It is this conviction that the Word of God is completely able to guide God’s people that has been a beacon of Baptist life for centuries.

A familiar English expression attributed to the greatly admired physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton is, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants,”²¹ indicating his great insight into scientific matters was only possible because he learned from other great minds who preceded him. And so it is with modern-day Baptists with reference to the Baptist forebears and their strict commitment to God’s Word in generations past. When Baptist Christians learn that they stand on the shoulders of men and women firmly committed to the Bible as God’s Word, it is presumed that they will be more likely to recognize their own responsibility to know the scriptures and to speak out for its truthfulness and sufficiency for their own lives today. L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles explain,

Historically, Baptists have built their theology from a solid foundation. Holy Scripture was taken to be God’s infallible revelation in words. What God said, Baptists believed. No creed held them together. . . . Scripture has been the cornerstone, the common ground, the point of unity.²²

Though Baptists did not publish formal creeds, they did establish certain historical confessions as a means to articulate generally, what they stood for. These confessions included John Smyth’s *Declaration of Faith* (1611), the *London Confession* (1660 and 1644), the *Declaration of Faith* in Philadelphia (1742), and the *New Hampshire Confession* (1830)—each of these gave prominence to the Baptist dependency on the Bible as the sole authority of faith and practice. This recognition of the Bible as the supreme guide to faith is embedded as Article I in the Baptist Faith and Message of the

²¹Isaac Newton, “Isaac Newton Quotes,” BrainyQuote, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/i/isaacnewto135885>.

²²L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 4.

Southern Baptist Convention in 1925, 1963, and 2000. W. A. Criswell wrote in 1979, “As in our day, so in our past, there has been a strong trust and acceptance on the part of Baptist people for God’s Book. Baptists are a diverse people, but they are bound together by their common faith in Christ as he is revealed to us in Scripture.”²³

It was part of the intent of this project to demonstrate the historical importance and legacy of those who passed down to Baptists a love and reverence for the Word of God—and the Word of God alone—as the source of Baptist belief and practice. This emphasis was designed to help modern-day Baptists understand that Baptists are not now, nor have ever been, a creedal people, but a people of God’s Book alone, and why that standard is of such importance in a day when the Bible is routinely mocked and marginalized in Western culture.

Always Ready to Give an Answer

“The Christian church today needs a history lesson,” declares evangelical historian John Fea.²⁴ He goes on to say,

The past has the power to stimulate us, fill us with emotion, and arouse our deepest convictions about what is good and right. . . . The church needs to be inspired by the way people have fearlessly, through the Holy Spirit’s leading, proclaimed and lived the gospel. . . . By learning their stories, we gain insight into how to live faithfully.²⁵

This inspiration is available in spades among Baptist believers, owing to the rich, yet often complex, nature of their history. Baptists indeed have a diverse story—one brimming with heroes of the faith—and their leaders should teach them about their past. Brian Brewer writes,

Now more than ever Baptists need to understand their past, not as family heirlooms viewed sentimentally on occasion but otherwise safely stored in their attic, but

²³Bush and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, xi.

²⁴John Fea, *Why Study History? Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 32.

²⁵*Ibid.*

rather as an integral part of who they are today. Specifically, Baptists must recover and maintain their distinctive beliefs in order to reach the postmodern world for the gospel.²⁶

Yet, for the most part, Baptists today remain largely ignorant of their spiritually vibrant past. Thankfully, not all Baptist leaders have failed in this regard, but this is an area of great deficiency among most Baptist and baptistic churches of the twenty-first century. Moreover, as Brewer explains, even though “occasionally books are published and Sunday school lessons are written on this topic, it has been difficult to turn the tide on our own increasing ignorance of our own tradition and its tenets of faith.”²⁷ Part of this project attempted to correct this lack of knowledge within the congregation.

The actual history of Baptists is largely not even agreed upon by scholars, church historians, and other researchers—neither now nor in the past. Often now only in the realm of academic pursuit, there was a time when Baptists in general knew a great deal about their history and the distinctive beliefs that defined them. Once the unique doctrines and practices that Baptists have historically held are identified (as discussed previously), it is important to further show how these distinctives developed in historical context, as well as the tenacity with which their Baptist forebears held them. Though not all Baptist and baptistic peoples of past generations held these beliefs with perfection (they were human), they nonetheless, in the aggregate, held them to the point that a historical stream of baptistic distinctives (at least to some degree) can be comprehended for those who honestly examine the historical record.

When seeking to trace Baptist history, two caveats must be offered to those whom a teacher seeks to instruct. First, students must recognize that the spiritual ancestors of Baptists today were not always identified by the label of “Baptist.” The name itself, as an identity of a specific community of Christian believers, can be traced back only to

²⁶Brian C. Brewer, ed., *Distinctly Baptist: Proclaiming Identity in a New Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2011), xii.

²⁷*Ibid.*, xiii.

about the seventeenth century. However, one must understand that the distinctive beliefs to which modern Baptists hold can be traced to groups found further back in time before the name itself was first applied. That is, various Christian groups in different periods of history before the seventeenth century held most essential Baptist doctrines, but were known by other names. Second, due the fact that Baptists and their historical precursors were, due to their insistence on autonomy and regenerate church membership, more often than not held to be “heretical.” Because of this fact, they were often persecuted by the established state churches and civil governments (as explained). This situation reinforces the argument that much of the writings of the more primitive baptistic Christians are not found in great abundance. This may be due either to the confiscation and destruction of their writings (they were “heretics” after all), or perhaps because the austere living conditions that persecution brought would not support circumstances suitable for very much theological writing by the leaders of these churches. Baptists have historically almost always been part of the dissenting churches (identified briefly in chapter 1). Understanding these stipulations enables Baptists to more fully recognize and appreciate why there is not a clear consensus on the facts of Baptist history as opposed to other Christian traditions, which generally have great clarity regarding origins and historic timelines.²⁸

In *The Baptist Heritage*, historian Leon McBeth writes, “The *modern* Baptist denomination originated in England and Holland in the early seventeenth century. Baptists emerged out of intense reform movements, shaped by such radical dissent as Puritanism, Separatism, and possibly Anabaptism.”²⁹ This is the standard statement of Baptist origins as adopted by many church historians today, with the course of “Baptist history” flowing

²⁸For example, the Roman Catholic Church originated with Roman Emperor Constantine in c. AD 313, the Lutheran Church with Martin Luther in 1521, the Church of England with King Henry VIII in 1534, the Methodist Church with John Wesley in 1784, and so on.

²⁹H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 21, emphasis added.

from that seventeenth-century fountainhead. Moreover, very few would dispute the veracity of that viewpoint—with the understanding of the key word, *modern*. This verifiable truth is indeed the historical genesis of the *modern-day* Christian denomination of Baptists, specifically known by that name. Going further, however, McBeth acknowledges that several other theories of Baptist history exist within the professing church. He provides a general sketch of the major views:

Over the past centuries historians have advanced four different explanations to account for the origin of Baptists, or four different ways of looking at Baptist history. These views are given here not because they possess equal value, but to help complete the picture of Baptist beginnings.³⁰

Without extensive comment, the four basic view are as follows:

1. Baptists grew out of the English Separatist Movement of the seventeenth century, essentially one of the many groups formed during the Protestant Reformation.
2. Baptists were heavily influenced by the Anabaptists who came before them. That is, they were part of what many term “The Radical Reformation.”
3. Baptists are part of a line of believers, not always known as Baptists, but existing under many names, yet who held to generally New Testament biblical teachings (i.e., Baptist distinctives) across the centuries from the time of the early church into modern times. This has been called by some the “Spiritual Kinship View.”
4. Baptists today are the visible representation of a succession of Baptist or baptistic churches down through the ages. This differs from number 3 in the sense that it was not just a *doctrinal* kinship with previous generations that was important, but an actual visible *succession* of organic New Testament churches that can be traced to apostolic times. This is also known as the “Landmark” view.

With Baptists being as independent and free-thinking as they are (recalling the distinctive of soul competency), many variations and extensive overlap among and within each of the various views. However, McBeth, who is a basic proponent of the seventeenth century view of Baptist origins, concedes that the true origins of baptistic or “Baptist-like” people must certainly predate the modern denomination. He summarizes,

The most reliable historical evidence confirms that the Baptist denomination, *as it is known today* [emphasis added] originated in the early seventeenth century. This does not mean, however, that Baptist *viewpoints* [emphasis in original] did not exist before that time. Those who hold the Baptist faith believe their distinctive doctrines, such as salvation by grace through faith, a “gathered church,” believer’s

³⁰McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 49.

baptism, authority of Scripture, and religious liberty, reflect the doctrines of New Testament Christianity. The seventeenth-century Baptists did not *invent* [emphasis in original] these doctrines; they *rediscovered* [emphasis in original] and articulated them afresh for a new era. By preferring the English Separatist explanation of Baptist origins, one need not reject totally the insights of other positions. Enough evidence exists to confirm that many of the distinctive [Baptist] views mentioned above surfaced from time to time before the Reformation era.³¹

In its approach to Baptist history, the teaching component of this project generally utilized the Spiritual Kinship View (listed as view 3). A number of Baptist scholars of the past have held this view, perhaps most notably Thomas Armitage (1887), H. C. Vedder (1892) and Thomas Crosby (1738)—the man considered by many to be the earliest serious Baptist historian. To elaborate briefly, Strouse explains that this interpretation posits that there exists a discernable

spiritual kinship between present day Baptists and those of the past because of doctrine and practice of the New Testament. . . . This view advocates there have been NT churches in every century practicing Baptist doctrine. Although this lineage is not necessarily visible [i.e., Landmarkism], the pedigree of Baptists is a doctrinal and spiritual one.³²

Though this view was the foundational approach for the teaching in this project, each of the four theories were given sufficient explanations as well as even-handed critiques.

Yet, no matter which view is held—however far back in human history Baptists are purportedly identified—it is vital to understand the context and historical background of the men and women who held to these distinctive Baptist doctrines. This knowledge provides a richer and deeper nuance of understanding of who Baptists are and why it is important to hold on to the doctrines and practices passed down to modern Baptists—often at a very high price of blood and treasure. By grasping intellectually and emotionally their history and doctrinal distinctives, Baptist Christians of today can more readily explain *why* they are members of a Baptist church and not some other. In other words, when Baptist believers have a firm understanding of what has historically and consistently

³¹McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 61.

³²Thomas M. Strouse, *I Will Build My Church: The Doctrine and History of the Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 2001), vi-vii.

defined their unique Christian tradition, they will be more ably equipped to answer those who would oppose or question their identification with a Baptist (or baptistic) local church. They certainly should not do so with a prideful spirit or haughty attitude (“Baptists are better”), just that they could articulate to others that they have logical and principled reasons why they have chosen to identify with the noble name of “Baptist.”

Though certainly not a one-to-one correspondence of subject matter, the *spirit* of 1 Pet 3:15 (Amplified Bible) informs this discussion: “Always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it courteously and respectfully.” Hammett deftly summarizes this part of the discussion: “To the question, ‘Why are you a Baptist?’ a well-informed Baptist will reply, ‘because I interpret Scripture as teaching Baptist positions on the traditional ecclesiological questions.’”³³ However, only by *teaching* these principles will Baptist believers be equipped to assert such truths confidently, with boldness, and clothed in humility. This project, in part, sought to address this issue.

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

In *Why I Am a Baptist*, Tom Nettles writes of the importance of Baptists understanding their unique heritage and beliefs—especially regarding the doctrine of the church:

This book arises from the unshaken conviction that unless one has believed in the redemptive work of Christ as set forth in the Bible, and has been driven to such belief of an experimental acquaintance with his or her sin and helplessness, he will bear the wrath of God eternally. With less importance, but just as truly, it expresses the conviction that *the purest expression of the gospel and its manifestation in church order is found in historic Baptist doctrine and ecclesiology*.³⁴

The apostle Paul declared that the church of the living God was “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). If the New Testament church is to be the foundation and

³³Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 20.

³⁴Tom J. Nettles and Russell Moore, eds., *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: B & H, 2001), 18, emphasis added.

repository of God's truth in each succeeding generation, it is essential that the people of God have a right view and understanding of the church.

In this regard, much of professing Christianity has adopted a number of notions of what the church is, which are not fully supported by Scripture. Correspondingly, the requirements for and obligations of church membership have also skewed away from a biblical basis in many instances.³⁵ On the other hand, Baptists largely have historically taught and practiced an ecclesiology that reflects that of the New Testament. That is, that the church is the body of Christ; made up only of regenerate, baptized (by immersion) members; and that its primary purposes are to exalt Jesus Christ and carry out Christ's Great Commission to evangelize the world. Church history professor Shawn D. Wright correctly observes, "The New Testament church was baptistic, holding to regenerate church membership and to the baptism of believers only."³⁶ Explaining the march of such baptistic churches throughout history, Strouse writes,

Christ's ekklesia is 'a society of immersed believers actively engaged in exalting Jesus Christ and His Word, in practicing the two New Testament ordinances and in carrying out the Great Commission, and that it has always been in contradistinction to and at variance with the Jewish, the pagan, and the Romish sacral society mindset.'³⁷

James Leo Garrett, Jr. adds,

Most of the beliefs that have ever been claimed as Baptist distinctives are ecclesiological in nature; for example, regenerate church membership, believer's baptism by immersion, various forms of close or strict Communion, congregational polity and autonomy, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and so forth.³⁸

³⁵Infant baptism as a means of church membership is but one prominent example of this phenomenon.

³⁶Shawn D. Wright, "Five Preliminary Issues for Understanding the Ordinances," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 86.

³⁷Strouse, *I Will Build My Church*, ix-x, emphasis original.

³⁸James Leo Garrett, J., "Forward," in *Baptist Foundations*, ix.

In other words, when it comes to a thoroughly New Testament understanding of the nature and purpose of the church of Jesus Christ, Baptist teachings have most closely conformed to scriptural teachings on the ecclesiological questions.

In opposition to this biblical doctrine of the church have risen at least two extreme theological falsehoods. On the one hand, Roman Catholicism and its various Orthodox cousins believe the sprinkling of an infant shortly after birth initiates one into the Christian faith and thus, makes one—at least at some level—a “member” of the church. Thus, the Catholic Church

implements its discipline over all the baptized, through a traditional sacramental system, governing the progressions of life from cradle to grave. Essentially, in this way the church presses the insistence upon every baptized child that he is ‘in’ [the church] unless he insisted on being “out,” and the sacramental system was designed to strengthen his piety through which he might hope for salvation.³⁹

In practice, most Protestant denominations have, at various levels and with different shades of meaning, also brought the practice of paedobaptism and church membership of infants and children into their doctrine and practice as well. These traditions have served to obfuscate the biblical meaning of baptism and church membership—that, essentially *everyone* who has been baptized is in the church and can be counted among the community of faith. This teaching is in direct contradiction to the straightforward instruction of the New Testament, which Baptists have almost universally accepted over the centuries—that only professing believers are candidates for baptism and thus church membership.

On the other hand, and also in contradiction to New Testament teaching, is the trend in recent decades, proffered in many segments of Christianity, that baptism and church membership are not actually important at all. In writing on this subject, Jonathan Leeman discerns the trend with dismay:

³⁹Theopedia, “Church Membership,” accessed March 25, 2015, http://www.theopedia.com/Church_membership.

Now there are even evangelical movements that drop church membership out of the picture entirely. They say just show up . . . or not. One evangelical leader celebrates the dawn of the “Revolutionaries” who have somehow decided that *being the church* means *not joining a church*. Instead, these revolutionaries find their own spiritual resources on the Internet and in informal gatherings.⁴⁰

In light of his inquiries on the issue, John S. Hammett adds, “Church membership and church discipline have fallen on hard times in the past hundred years, especially in the North American context.”⁴¹ In a growing number of settings, he says, “Traditional ideas of church membership are questioned, if not abandoned.”⁴² Many contemporary Christian groups often treat formal membership and baptism as optional issues (at best) or totally denigrate the concept of church membership (at worst). Brett McCracken poses the rhetorical questions that frame the issue:

Have Christians in America bought into individualism to such an extent that we’ve downplayed the church’s fundamentally communal identity, both in our practicing and articulating of Christianity? Have we rallied around the banner of “individual rights!” to the extent that we are now in a weak position to claim that some individual rights must be given up for the sake of Christian communal expression? Does the ubiquity of seeker-sensitive, have-it-your-way, just-me-and-Jesus Christianity in America make it hard for us to claim that religious groups and institutions are as (or more) legitimate manifestations of religion than individuals worshipping in their own preferred way?⁴³

Part of the problem with the cavalier, individualized approach to being part of the body of Christ is the emphasis on a personalized type of faith. Though not a Baptist, Kevin DeYoung rightly observes that the Western church already has a tendency to be overly independent:

In the West, it’s one of the best and worst thing about us. We are free spirits and critical thinkers. We get an idea and run with it. But who’s running with us? And are any of us running in the same direction? [Church] membership states in a

⁴⁰Jason Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 14, emphasis original.

⁴¹John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, eds., *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 7.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³Brett McCracken, “The Freedom to Be a Christian College,” *Biola Magazine*, Fall 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://magazine.biola.edu/article/14-fall/the-freedom-to-be-a-christian-college/>.

formal way, “I am part of something bigger than myself. I am not just one of three hundred individuals. I am part of a body.”⁴⁴

This tracks precisely with the biblical description of the church as the body of Christ (Rom 7:4; 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12; Heb 10:10).

In contrast to both of the unscriptural views outlined, Baptists—and their spiritual forebears—have almost universally accepted a New Testament ecclesiology (as described). Therefore, as Baptist Christians better understand the historic Baptist teaching on the church, they are more likely to reject the aforementioned “individualized” Christianity of the twenty-first century and commit more firmly to the church as the body of Christ—just as the New Testament instructs. This, in turn, makes stronger Christians and energizes local New Testament churches to be more effective in carrying out The Great Commission.

In Christ Alone

I. J. Van Ness served as the influential Editorial Secretary of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1900-1917. In a concise, though highly useful, volume intended for teaching Baptists about their distinctive beliefs, he wrote the following over one-hundred years ago:

There have been many efforts to put the Baptist principles in one single sentence. Some would put obedience to Christ as this all inclusive principle. This is not far wrong. . . . Obedience to Christ means that we obey every command of his, therefore, and that we obey it in the way in which he would have it obeyed. . . . Another way of putting much the same truth is to make the fundamental Baptist principle the Lordship of Jesus. It proclaims Jesus as the divine King, and that he has the right to be sovereign over us. He is the Lord, and as the Lord, he has the right to direct.⁴⁵

In agreement with I. J. Van Ness, and towering above everything else Baptists may believe—both historically and in biblical orthodox Baptist churches today—is an

⁴⁴Kevin DeYoung, “Why Membership Matters,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2009/09/29/why-membership-matters/>.

⁴⁵I. J. Van Ness, *Training in the Baptist Spirit* (Nashville: Sunday School Board Southern Baptist Convention, 1914), 21-22.

undying allegiance and commitment to Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God. In an excellent short work on Baptist distinctives, Steuart McBirnie states that a

clear and complete statement of Baptist doctrine can be made in two sentences of five words each. . . . [1.] Baptists believe in the ‘all-sufficiency of Christ’ (Eph. 1:20-23). [2.] [Baptists believe] in the ‘absolute authority of the Scriptures’ (II Tim. 3:15-17). It is by following these two statements utterly and completely that make Baptists believe, organize, promote, and preach as they do.⁴⁶

Regardless of which particular theory of Baptist history one holds, the historical record is clear that Baptists (and their spiritual forerunners) were men and women with a singular allegiance to Jesus Christ. In his classic work on Baptist history and doctrine, Henry Vedder puts it at the top of the list of characteristics that define Baptist people:

The cardinal, the fundamental principle of Baptists is loyal obedience to Jesus Christ. This they conceive to be the essence of Christianity. To be a Christian is not to have had a certain ‘experience,’ not to believe a certain creed, not to perform a prescribed round of rites and observances, but to obey Christ.⁴⁷

Most of the early scholars dedicated to seriously researching Baptist history echo this principle almost unanimously. Here is a sampling:

1. Duncan (1855): “Faith and hope in Jesus as the Son of God, as Saviour of the world, and as the Lord of the Kingdom of Heaven, was the root and kernel of their [primitive Baptists] Christian life.”⁴⁸
2. Ford (1861): “*Baptists!* The flag that floats over you is Jesus *only*; the principles that govern you have the authority of Jesus *only*.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶William Steuart McBirnie, *Instruction in the Baptist Faith* (San Antonio: Naylor, 1955), 1-2.

⁴⁷Henry C. Vedder, *The Baptists* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1902), 8.

⁴⁸William Cecil Duncan, *A Brief History of the Baptists and Their Distinctive Principles and Practices, From the “Beginning of the Gospel” to the Present Time*, 2nd ed. (New York: Edward H. Fletcher, 1855), 166.

⁴⁹S. H. Ford, *The Origin of the Baptists, Traced Back by Milestones on the Track of Time* (Nashville: South-Western, 1861), 174, emphasis original.

3. Taylor (1873): “There are certain fundamental principles which [Baptists] hold, and have ever held, and which have largely characterized them as a people: Christ Jesus, the sole Lawgiver in spiritual things.”⁵⁰
4. Armitage (1886): “Their [Baptists] love to Christ held their action responsible to him, and made its final results safe.”⁵¹

More recent scholars follow suit in this analysis. Goodwin will suffice to synopsise many contemporary authors on the subject of Baptist history and doctrine:

Baptists in general have always been a Christocentric people. That is, Baptists believe that Christ is Lord, exemplar of life, and living evidence of God. Early Baptist writings focus heavily on the nature and roles of Christ. Early Baptist expressions . . . assert that Christ is the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully human, and therefore in the most specific sense, the incarnate deity.⁵²

When Baptist Christians more fully understand that the refrain of their spiritual ancestors was consistently “in Christ alone”—that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and only Savior—they will be more likely to reject the modern spirit of religious relativism and casual Christianity. In most cases, they will be challenged to commit to undivided allegiance to Christ alone. In fact, Norman goes so far as to say *all* Baptist distinct beliefs are all wrapped up in a supreme allegiance to Christ: “I contend, as do most Baptist, that our theological distinctives are our attempt to hear and obey the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ as he speaks to the church through the New Testament.”⁵³

Knowing more about this distinct article of faith of their Baptist forefathers and foremothers will not only strengthen the individual Christians within Baptist and baptistic churches, but will go a long way in strengthening the churches themselves. In fact, without passing down a strong commitment to Jesus Christ among professing believers, as Baptists in generations past certainly did, the continued effectiveness and

⁵⁰George B. Taylor, *The Baptists: Who They Are and What They Have Done* (Philadelphia: The Bible and Publication Society, 1873), chap. II, 7.

⁵¹Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, & Company, 1886), 6.

⁵²Goodwin, *Down by the Riverside*, 76.

⁵³Norman, *The Baptist Way*, 8.

viability of many Baptist churches will be in extreme doubt. Anderson writes, “A church that fails to know and value its Baptist identity [including this unreserved commitment to Christ] becomes subject to error and false teaching and loses that heritage for which its Baptist ancestors were willing to suffer and die.”⁵⁴

Summation

The foregoing principles formed the historical, theoretical, and practical issues related to this project of seeking to teach Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. It was a biblical—and highly practical—endeavor. As McBirnie opines, “The Baptist Faith should be anchored to the New Testament, for that is exactly what it is—a New Testament faith! Yet it needs to be *explained and taught* so simply that all our people become grounded in that faith” (emphasis added).⁵⁵ Clearly, if Baptist Christians are not taught the particulars of their heritage and doctrinal identity, they will neither know them nor embrace them. The sad truth is that over the last 100 years or so, as Hammett states, “Baptists as a whole seem to have forsaken many of their historic positions, with little awareness of the slippage.”⁵⁶

As a concluding thought—in order to avoid any misconceptions—it needs to be again stated clearly that this project of teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives was by no means an attempt to suggest that Baptist Christians are in some way superior to born-again Christians of other traditions. The Bible teaches that all believers are equal in Christ (Gal 3:28). Moreover, it certainly cannot be demonstrably supported that the average Baptist church-going believer is necessarily any more spiritually minded or kingdom focused than other professing Christians. Hammett writes

⁵⁴Anderson, *A Sacred Trust*, 3.

⁵⁵McBirnie, *Instruction in the Baptist Faith*, vii.

⁵⁶Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 21.

that Baptist surely do not intend to suggest in any way to be “arrogant, or presume that Baptists have a monopoly on truth, or imply that Baptists are the only true Christians.”⁵⁷

However, it *is* hoped that the Baptist believers who participated in this project now have a better understanding and appreciation of their unique heritage within the stream of Christian history, and will consequently embrace that heritage and seek to carry it forward into this generation and beyond. Noel Smith reminds his readers in the mid-twentieth century that

Baptists are a people. They have an historical identity. They have an historical image. Their doctrines, principles, and practices are rooted in the apostolic age. . . . Baptists today are believing, teaching, preaching, and practicing the truths that were taught, preached and practices two thousand years ago. It gives me a feeling of stability to reflect that I, as a Baptist, am in the stream of this long continuity of faith and practice.⁵⁸

The objectives of this project sought to fit within the spirit of that message.

⁵⁷Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 20.

⁵⁸Noel Smith, quoted in Neal Weaver and James Combs, eds., *Our Biblical Baptist Heritage* (Shreveport, LA: Eagle, 2004), 197-98.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY USED IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

Overview

This ministry project was conducted on the campus of Mount Zion Baptist Church in four phases over eighteen weeks, beginning February 28, 2016, and ending June 26, 2016. Phase 1 (weeks 1-2) was a two-week preparation period where a questionnaire on general knowledge of Baptist history and distinctive doctrine was administered to the congregation. I used information drawn from the completed questionnaires to assist in the development of an appropriate curriculum for the teaching phase of the project.

During phase 2 (weeks 3-5), the curriculum was developed and the members of the small discipleship group to whom the curriculum was to be taught were selected and registered for the class sessions. The teaching portion of the project comprised phase 3 (weeks 6-17). The pre-study small group survey was conducted and each lesson was covered on a weekly basis throughout this phase of the project. Phase 3 ended with the administration of the post-study small group survey, which yielded results related to the effectiveness of the teaching.

Finally, in phase 4 (week 18), a *t*-test was conducted, which revealed the validity and usefulness of the training curriculum in achieving its stated goals. Initial decisions about what portions of the curriculum would be incorporated into the church's yet-to-be-developed new members course were also made in phase 4. Among other topics necessary for new members to know (assurance of salvation, importance of worship, and so forth), a basic overview of the Baptist distinctives and history was incorporated into the new class. Ideally, it will be offered as a six-week class, three to four times annually,

depending on the number of new members with which the church may be blessed. Details of each phase are outlined in this chapter.

Identifying the Need

Based on the criteria established in chapter 1, the need for the congregation to know its Baptist heritage and distinguishing doctrines at MZBC were obvious. The issue was how to best approach the problem and seek a solution. After the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary approved chapters 1-3 of the project, and the Ethics Committee sanctioned the proposed research instruments, the project began.

Phase 1: Preparation Period

During phase 1 (weeks 1-2), MZBC members were asked to complete the pre-project questionnaire, which evaluated the basic knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. The questionnaires were returned, evaluated, and tabulated and the results provided a baseline of the congregation's aggregate knowledge on the project's topic, which in turn assisted in building an appropriate curriculum.

Congregational Questionnaire

First, there was a need to quantify where the congregation at-large stood regarding this perceived lack of knowledge, which quantification would guide in the creation of an appropriate teaching curriculum to address the need. Therefore, on Sunday, February 28, 2016, the adult members of MZBC were asked to complete a questionnaire, which helped to evaluate the congregation's overall understanding of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives.¹ The questionnaire consisted of ten multiple-choice questions on basic Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives; five opinion statements about learning Baptist history and doctrine, which employed a Likert scale that measured six responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree;" and a section

¹See appendix 1 for the congregational questionnaire.

that allowed the participants to add personal thoughts or further opinions of the subject matter. The survey was available in paper copy for two consecutive Sundays and also posted on the church website in order to try to maximize participation.

The established goal was to see the church-wide questionnaire completed by at least 65 percent of the Sunday morning adult attendees (about 150 people). The survey was anonymous, but it requested that the respondent provide a four-digit personal identification code (to be used only if needed to clarify certain data or give follow-up interviews, and provided the participant voluntarily self-identified their private code). Most of those who completed the questionnaire provided the code, but the codes were never formally used in the progression of the project. The total number of questionnaires turned in represented about 48 percent of the adult members of the congregation, which was assessed to be sufficient to yield a generally clear understanding of the church's collective knowledge on the subject. Furthermore, the congregation's aggregate score of 53 percent indicated that the initial assessment of the congregation's lack of understanding in this area was, in fact, reasonably accurate. That is, the congregation's cumulative knowledge of why they identified as Baptists, or attended a Baptist church, was relatively weak. A total of 12 (about 19 percent) of the returned questionnaires indicated 3 or fewer correct answers, and only 3 indicated more than 8 correct answers (about 5 percent). However, in the opinion section of the questionnaire (Likert scale ratings), almost all of the responses about the importance of learning about the Baptist heritage were in the "agree" or "strongly agree" choices, with a few "agree somewhat" opinions. Of the 310 potential choices on the Likert scale ratings of the questionnaire, only 4 selections were on the disagreement side of the scale (1 percent).

Two respondents seem to have captured the prevailing mindset of the congregation in this regard. Respondent A wrote, "After going through the questionnaire, I realized I still have a lot to learn about the Baptist history and its doctrine. I was raised Baptist and have never known another denomination. Thus, I feel it is important for me

to learn these even at my age now.”² Respondent B wrote, “We need to know where we have been before we fully appreciate where we are going and why we are going [there]. Baptist[s] need to know what their roots are and what we believe to be true. Education in truth prevents deception.” These clearly articulated opinions are representative of the majority of comments submitted on the surveys.

Selection of Small Group Participants

As stated in chapter 1, one of the goals of the project was to teach the small group study to a select group of not less than 20 adults from within the MZBC congregation or adults closely affiliated with the congregation. After much consideration about the most appropriate way to select the participants of the study, an “open” sign-up sheet was posted at the church’s Information Center as the most expeditious way to recruit the learners. The voluntary sign-up method reduced the need to “button-hole” individuals who may not have had either the time or interest in committing to a twelve-week classroom-style study.

As it turned out, 35 adults signed on to participate in the study, with 30 finishing the instruction, and 20 completing both the pre- and post-study surveys with sufficient usable data for statistical purposes. Initially there was some concern that the voluntary sign-up approach to filling the class might skew a representative demographic cross-section of the congregation in one direction. However, that unease was overcome when, demographically, the study group was reasonably representative of the congregation as a whole, which generally tilts toward upper middle-age suburbanites and semi-rural residents. Of the 30 students who completed the study, 12 were male and 18 female; 19 had some college or were college graduates (including 3 with master’s degrees), 11 had a high school education; and about half were under age 55 (with age 50 being the approximate median age of the congregation). Three individuals who eventually

²Respondent A was in the 56-65 age group.

completed the course of study were not members of MZBC, but were all nonetheless closely affiliated with the church.

Phase 2: Developing the Curriculum

Phase 2 (weeks 3-5) was designated for curriculum development and evaluation. In the first two weeks of phase 2, the teaching curriculum was developed. It was submitted to the curriculum evaluation panel, whereupon I made final edits to the curriculum, incorporating suggested changes from the panel.

Initial Stages

Once the congregational questionnaires were turned-in, tallied, and evaluated, they provided the information needed to help establish the curriculum. Based on numerous books, articles, and other research material gathered both from the James P. Boyce Centennial Library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and my personal library, combined with my years of ministry experience, an original curriculum was organized, written, finalized, and printed for use in the teaching phase of the project. Initial research on the curriculum began upon the seminary's approval of chapters 1-3, but was organized and drafted after the completion and evaluation of the congregational questionnaires.

Curriculum Evaluation

The written curriculum was surveyed and evaluated by the expert panel, as described in chapter 1. The panel consisted of four trusted individuals, representing both the academic and ministry fields. Of the two academic evaluators, one was a local high school English teacher with a Master of Arts degree in education, and the other was a professor of at the local community college who possesses a Master of Science degree. The ministers consisted of a local Baptist pastor and the director of missions for our local Southern Baptist association of churches. Both of the pastoral curriculum assessors hold

Master of Divinity degrees.

The established goal of the curriculum evaluation was to have a minimum of 90 percent of the indicators on the evaluation rubric at the “sufficient” or above level. This goal was achieved as all but three ratings were given “exemplary” evaluations; the three others were rated “sufficient.” Only one comment was offered with a “3” (“sufficient”) score, for the criterion, “Each lesson contains points of practical application to the Christian life.” This “3” score was accompanied by the following comment: “I’d like to see the inclusion of a couple of really practical charts, like ‘How to Choose a Good Church’ or ‘When It’s Time to Leave a Church.’” While a useful observation, it was determined that including such charts was beyond the scope of the project’s goals. Other comments provided by the expert panel mostly concerned grammar, sentence structure, formatting, word choice issues, and many of these recommendations were incorporated into the final curriculum as deemed necessary.

Lessons Finalized

The final lesson series for the project was entitled “Being Baptist,” and consisted of nine class sessions conducted over a twelve-week period.³ The lessons covered the basic doctrinal distinctives of historic Baptists (as described), as well as a very brief overview of Baptists throughout church history from the apostolic era through modern times. Proverbs 20:28 was selected as the theme verse for the entire series: “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.” This Scripture suggests the importance of recognizing the spiritual heritage passed down to modern-day Christians from their spiritual ancestors. In addition to the formal written teaching curriculum,

³See appendix 4 for the course schedule.

student outlines were developed for each lesson.⁴ Table 1 shows the lesson titles, main topics, and primary scripture references used for each lesson in the teaching series.

Table 1. “Being Baptist” lesson titles, main topics, and primary Scripture references

Session	Lesson Title	Main Topic(s)	Primary Scriptures
1	Course Orientation & Overview	Introduction Rationale for Course	Deut 4:1-40; Ps 44:1-8; 1 Cor 10:1-11; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Tim 4:1-11
2	Pre-Study Small Group Survey & “The B-I-B-L-E, Yes That’s the Book for Me”	Pre-Study Small Group Survey Administered Biblical Authority The Lordship of Christ	2 Tim 3:16-17; Phil 2:9-11
3	“You’re Not the Boss of Me”	Autonomy of the Local Church Priesthood of Believers	1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5-9
4	“Down by the Riverside & At the Table”	Two Ordinances: Baptism & Communion	Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26
5	“In Christ Alone”	Individual Soul Liberty Saved Church Membership	1 John 2:27; Acts 2:41-47
6	“Three’s a Crowd”	Two Offices: Pastor & Deacon Separation of Church & State	Phil 1:1; Matt 22:21
7	“Who Are These People?”	Baptist History Overview (Part 1)	N/A
8	“Baptists as ‘Baptists’”	Baptist History Overview (Part 2)	N/A
9	Course Wrap-Up & Post-Study Small Group Survey	Post-Study Small Group Survey Administered Final Review Final Question & Answer Time	

Phase 3: Implementing the Small Group Teaching

The instruction was planned to be presented on a day and time appropriate to the schedules of the small group participants. Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. was decided upon as the best time for the learners who signed up for the teaching endeavor. This was at the same time as the regular Sunday evening worship service of MZBC, but small

⁴See appendix 4 for the student outlines.

groups had met during this service time in the past, so meeting during this timeslot was not unprecedented. One of the associate pastors of the church conducted the normal Sunday evening worship time for the people not participating in the small group study. Twelve weeks were allotted to conduct the nine-week curriculum and one week follow-up session in order to allow for public holidays, unfavorable weather conditions, emergency situations, or other unanticipated events that may have potentially caused the cancellation of one or more weekly class sessions. In actuality, the curriculum was incorporated into eight specific weekly lessons, and the planned one-week course wrap-up session. The anticipated twelve weeks were nevertheless required to complete the project due to no class meetings held on the weekends honoring Mother's Day, Memorial Day, and Father's Day.

Each teaching session followed essentially the same format. The group study convened in the largest Christian education classroom at MZBC, and generally lasted about seventy-five minutes. Students were seated at tables with up to six people per table in order to encourage feedback and discussion during appropriate times. Student outlines were provided at each session and PowerPoint slides that highlighted the main points of the material were projected onto a screen. The environment was intentionally designed as a group Bible study format as opposed to a seminar-style arrangement or a typical Sunday school classroom setup. Each session began with prayer, ended with a brief question and answer session, and then closed in prayer.

It was stressed repeatedly throughout the course of study that the lessons were designed to teach about unique and honorable Baptists heritage, not to in any way disparage other true Christians who may belong to other faith traditions. It was also accentuated that the gospel, believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, is the *most* critical issue for any person, not which particular church they attend. Nonetheless, it was also emphasized that the Baptist heritage and belief structure is God-honoring and

biblically-based—concepts that modern Baptists should know, and not be reticent to embrace and share.

Session 1

The first session of “Being Baptist” (“Course Orientation and Overview”) was held on Sunday, April 10, 2016, with 29 students in attendance. This introductory session of the course of study had the stated goal “to set forth the biblical and historical reasons why learning the doctrinal distinctives and history of Baptists are important to those Christians who are part of the Baptist faith tradition.” It was explained that the study would offer a broad overview of Baptist history, helping each person develop a better appreciation of his or her Baptist heritage. The course would also provide a summary of the distinctive doctrines that identify Baptist Christians as such. It was relayed to the students that, after taking this course, they would be able to better answer the question, “Why are you a Baptist?”

This lesson gave the biblical foundations of why it is important to know and understand what members should believe as Christians in general, and why we identify in particular as Baptist Christians. Several biblical texts were examined that highlighted the biblical rationale for knowing a faith group’s unique history and doctrine, including, Deuteronomy 4:1-40, Psalm 44:1-8, 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Ephesians 4:11-16, and 1 Timothy 4:1-11.

In conjunction with biblical issues, the classroom instruction included discussions about the growing segment of contemporary Baptist life that seeks to minimize doctrinal issues and a distinct Baptist heritage—almost to the degree that a distinct Baptist identity may be in danger of being lost, according to several prominent Baptist leaders. This state of affairs was stressed further as the results of MZBC’s own congregational survey were revealed, which showed a striking lack of knowledge of basic Baptist distinctives and identity within the MZBC congregation.

Lesson 1 further emphasized that the “Being Baptist” study could not possibly cover the entire scope of Baptist history and distinct beliefs. It was explained that this course of study would cover the subject matter from a broad perspective, and was intended to give learners from within our local Baptist congregation a basic understand of what Baptists believe, why they believe those things, and a brief historical sketch of the men and women who held to these basic beliefs throughout the history of the Christian church.

A general outline of the entire course of study was explained. Part 1 was entitled “The Baptist Doctrinal Hallmarks” (Distinct Doctrines); and part 2 was “The Baptist Distinguished Heritage” (Distinct History). In addition, the acrostic “BAPTIST” was introduced, which served as a memory aid throughout the entire series. The acrostic spelled out the distinctive doctrines that Baptists have traditionally embraced:

B – Biblical Authority and The Lordship of Christ
A – Autonomy of the Local Church
P – Priesthood of Believers
T – Two Ordinances: Baptism and Communion
I – Individual Soul Liberty
S – Saved Church Membership
T – Two Offices: Pastors and Deacons
S – Separation of Church and State

Finally, session 1 called for those enrolled in the “Being Baptist” course to make a commitment to stay connected with the group until the conclusion of the study. It was explained that providential circumstances could potentially require that some of them drop out of the study, but there were certain expectations of attendance and participation for those committing to participate. Though no one was asked to sign it, the “Group Member Expectations” was given to each learner and it was emphasized that the guidelines contained therein were an important part of the program.⁵

⁵See appendix 4 for the “Group Member Expectations.”

Session 2

Session 2 was entitled, “The B-I-B-L-E, Yes that’s the Book for Me,” which dealt with the “B” in the acrostic BAPTISTS: Biblical Authority and the Lordship of Christ. This session convened on Sunday, April 17, 2016, with 26 learners. The goal for session 2 was two-fold: (1) to administer the pre-study small group survey, measuring the students’ baseline knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives; and (2) to emphasize the historic Baptist belief in Scripture alone as the basis for doctrine, as well as the recognition of the lordship of Christ as a direct and necessary correlation to that belief. Approximately twenty minutes of the session was set aside for carrying out the pre-study small group survey.

The teaching portion of this lesson emphasized that churches can be identified both by their history and by their doctrinal beliefs. Therefore, by looking for “New Testament model churches” in the twenty-first century, we should be able to identify those churches by their doctrines and practices. New Testament churches today will essentially embrace what the Lord’s churches of the first century A.D. embraced. It was explained that, while Baptists hold many Bible doctrines in virtually the same way as other evangelical Christian traditions, to seriously study Baptist distinctives is to nevertheless conclude that the beliefs and practices held by the vast majority of Baptist churches today can be traced directly to the New Testament. In that light, an honest evaluation of churches today demonstrated that Baptist (and baptistic) churches are those that consistently demonstrate the closest adherence to New Testament teachings and the practices adopted by the apostolic church.

While many Christian churches hold some of the positions that Baptists hold to varying degrees, it was emphasized that only Baptists hold all of them as a “package” (to a greater or lesser extent). In the course of the lesson, it was further stressed that God-honoring Baptist Christians do not claim to be the *only* ones who hold biblical truth, or are obedient Christians, but they sincerely believe Baptist churches of today are the closest churches to adhere to what the ancient New Testament churches believed and

practiced. The fact that not all Christian churches are strictly “New Testament churches,” as Baptists understand that term, does not mean that Baptist Christians cannot have good and godly fellowship with other true Christians. Baptists seek to be united as brethren in Christ with others who are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). However, instruction in this lesson accentuated the fact that sincere Baptists cannot *approve* of any non-biblical teachings that other Christians may embrace.

With that introduction, the first distinctive, biblical authority, was addressed, with its corresponding embrace of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the One who is the theme and main subject of the Bible. The primary Scripture reference for the distinctive of biblical authority was 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” A brief survey was given about various sources of authority relied upon by some prominent Christian denominations. This synopsis included an explanation of the authority some professing Christians give to creeds and confessions, church tradition, human pronouncements, reason and logic, experience, and in some cases authoritative writings beyond the Bible. Several specific examples were offered.

In contrast, it was explained that Baptists believe that the Bible alone is their authority for all matters of faith. Historically, the unifying principle among Baptist churches and people has never been a human leader, official creed, or denominational hierarchy, but rather a common allegiance to the whole Bible and its authority alone. This belief does not imply that Baptists do not have certain statements of faith based on scripture that identify what they believe in capsulized form (such as the Southern Baptist Convention’s *Baptist Faith and Message*, for example). Rather, in contrast to binding creeds and confession required of other Christian traditions, Baptists hold that no human statement or article of faith is binding on anyone’s conscience. Practically speaking, it means that no member of a Baptist church is ever required to subscribe allegiance to any

authoritative statement, other than the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. An overview of the doctrines of inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration were given as part of the instruction, as well as a discussion of the divine content of the Bible and the importance of holding to the Bible alone as the final authority for faith and practice.

Session 2 ended with a discussion of the lordship of Christ, which is the sister doctrine to biblical authority. Philippians 2:9-11 was the key Scripture passage:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It was explained that the lordship of Christ was a necessary part of any discussion on the doctrine of the supreme authority of Scripture because the Bible at its core is all about Jesus. Several scriptural examples were presented as affirmations of this truth. The session ended with a brief survey of how Jesus Christ is presented in picture, type, prophecy, or other representation in every book of the Bible, both Old and New Testament.

Session 3

Sunday, April 24, 2016 was the date for session 3, “You’re Not the Boss of Me,” with 30 students attending. This lesson covered the Baptist distinctives corresponding to the “A” and the “P” in the BAPTISTS acrostic: Autonomy of the Local Church and Priesthood of Believers. Again, a dual lesson aim was presented, and focused the discussion on the two doctrinal distinctives under review: (1) to describe the New Testament teaching about the independence and autonomy of each local congregation and how that differs from many Christian denominational organizations today; and (2) to explain New Testament teaching about the priesthood of each Christian as opposed to a professional clergy structure, which minimalizes or eliminates individual priesthood as described in the New Testament.

The first section of instruction was about the autonomy of the local church, one of the most easily recognized Baptist distinctives, when viewed by others. Though thousands of Baptist churches affiliate with certain conventions, fellowships, and/or associations, in reality, *every* Baptist/baptistic church is an independent, self-governing, autonomous body of believers. This distinctive is in total contrast to most other Christian denominations. First Timothy 3:15 was the highlighted Scripture: “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The lesson emphasized that Baptists believe that the government of a local church is controlled by the principles of the lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the priesthood of all believers, and that each local church is a “self-contained” body (that is, sovereign in and of itself) and cannot be controlled by any outside denominational organization, board, hierarchal system, church, or person.

In conjunction with autonomy, there was a brief discussion on the most prominent forms of church polity in existence today: the hierarchical/episcopal model, the presbyterian model, and the congregational model. Though not exclusive to Baptists, they nevertheless believe that congregationalism is the proper polity for Christian churches because it is the form of governance most readily recognized in the New Testament. Congregational church government was explained to be the New Testament model that naturally goes hand-in-hand with local church autonomy. With these facts, it was explained that, technically, there is no such thing as “The Baptist Church” in the sense of “The Roman Catholic Church or “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” for example. In truth, there are only “Baptist churches” because each Baptist church is sovereign and not part of a centralized denomination, even if affiliated with a fellowship of churches (such as the SBC).

The second part of the instruction in session 3 focused on the priesthood of believers. First Peter 2:5, 9 were the verses that emphasized this doctrine:

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

An exposition of this topic explained that Baptists hold to the biblical teaching that all believers are priests before God. Every Christian has direct access to God through Christ, yet the priesthood of all believers is exercised within a committed community of fellow believers—fellow priests who share faith in Jesus Christ. The contrast between the priesthood of believers and sacerdotalism (the system comprised of a special priesthood within Christianity) was explained, then shown how sacerdotalism is unbiblical.

An important teaching point about the priesthood of believers was stressed, in that it has sometimes been interpreted to mean that a Christian may believe whatever he so chooses and still be considered a loyal believer. However, this doctrine does not give license to misinterpret or explain away anything clearly taught in the Bible. It was taught that the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in no way contradicts the biblical understanding of the role, responsibility and authority of God-called local church pastors and other leaders to properly teach the Scriptures and lead the local church. Therefore, Christians must not see the priesthood of the believer as a ticket to “private interpretation” of the Bible, or a license to pick and choose what to believe. In the New Testament church, there must always be accountability. Peter’s words, “you are a holy priesthood,” is a biblical expression meaning that believers have the privilege of going directly to God for prayer, forgiveness, and direction, without the need of another mediator. It also means that Christians are directly accountable to God for the activities of their lives, and that all Christians are equal before God.

Session 4

The fourth session met on Sunday, May 1, 2016, with 30 learners attending. Session 4 was entitled, “Down by the Riverside and at the Table,” and addressed the Baptist distinctive represented by the first “T” in the BAPTISTS acrostic: Two

Ordinances—Baptism and Communion. The two lesson aims were (1) to describe the New Testament teaching about believer’s baptism by immersion and its significance to New Testament Christians; and (2) to explain the biblical doctrine of Communion, or The Lord’s Supper, including its nature, meaning, elements, and participants.

Before the two Baptist ordinances were explained, a brief discussion was held on the differences between an “ordinance” and a “sacrament.” It was explained that a sacrament is a formal religious act, or rite, conferring a specific grace from God on those who receive it. Most Protestants observe the sacraments of baptism and Communion. In contrast, the definition of an ordinance is simply an authoritative rule, law, decree, or command. In ecclesiastical terms, an ordinance is solely an action that the Lord Jesus Christ commands His church to observe as part of the worship and allegiance of His followers. Biblically, the concept of an ordinance is found in the words of Jesus in the final part of the Great Commission: “Teaching them [the believers] to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). An ordinance, therefore, is a symbolic rite setting forth primary facts of the Christian faith and required of all believers. There is no indication in Scripture that the performance of an ordinance in any way imparts special grace upon the participant. Therefore, while Baptists accept baptism and Communion as commands from the Lord, they reject the characterization of them as sacraments, and accept them as ordinances only. This distinction was widely unknown to most of the students attending this session.

The first ordinance discussed was baptism. The key Scripture reference was Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

The small group instruction emphasized that the New Testament teaches what Baptists have traditionally called “believer’s baptism”—the total immersion in water of people

capable of making a conscious decision to trust Christ. Though baptism is not essential for salvation, it is commanded in Scripture (an ordinance) to be a step of godly obedience, and is also generally necessary for membership in a local New Testament (Baptist or baptistic) church.

A brief historical survey of baptism in the New Testament was presented from its origins with John the Baptist, through the accounts of believer's baptism in the book of Acts, and further references to baptism in the epistles. This survey was followed by a conversation regarding the only proper candidates for biblical baptism. The discussion brought up the fact that some Christian churches teach that it is important for infants or small children to be baptized. Yet, it was pointed out that even a cursory study the New Testament reveals unmistakably that every recorded baptism was of a person old enough to hear the gospel message, believe it, and receive it by an act of their own free will. In other words, it was demonstrated that New Testament baptism is for believers only, which is why Baptists consistently use the term "believer's baptism" to describe this ordinance.

During the instruction on baptism, several other related issues were discussed. It was explained that Baptists practice baptism by immersion only, because that is the proper definition of the New Testament word *baptizō*, and it was the practice of the New Testament church. Baptism by immersion also uniquely symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, as well as dying to the old life and rising again to new life in Christ. The learners were further informed that authentic Baptists reject the false teaching called "baptismal regeneration"—where a person is baptized as the means of having their sins washed away. Baptismal regeneration is not a biblical doctrine. Nonetheless, Baptists do believe that proper baptism *is* a command from the Lord—it is not an option—for a true believer in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, an open-minded conversation occurred about the generally held Baptist belief that water baptism is the rite of entrance into local church membership. Believer's baptism is a real, though symbolic, act that reflects the truth of Spirit baptism,

or salvation, which brings a person entrance into the body of Christ, the universal church. It was additionally explained that only a local New Testament church, not individual ministers, has the authority to administer scriptural baptism. This local church authority to baptize may be given to anyone in the congregation of whom the church approves, though in practice this is usually reserved for pastors and other ordained ministers (and/or sometimes deacons).

Instruction for session 4 continued with the second biblical ordinance to which Baptists hold: Communion, or The Lord's Supper. First Corinthians 11:23-26 served as the key biblical text:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

It was explained that as baptism signifies *union* with Christ, which happens once, the Lord's Supper pictures *Communion* with Christ, which is continual, and thus this ordinance is observed frequently.

Again, like baptism, it was emphasized that Communion is not a sacrament, conferring special grace on those who receive it (as discussed). Furthermore, Baptists reject the teaching of both *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation* as non-biblical teachings. These doctrines, held by Catholics and some Protestants in varying degrees, teach that the elements of Communion mystically transform into the "real" body of Christ (*transubstantiation*), or into the "real" presence of Christ (*consubstantiation*). Baptists would reject any teaching that treats Communion as anything other than a memorial supper, given by Christ to His church as a means of recalling His death on the cross for the sins of those who call upon Him. Like baptism, Communion is for those who have been saved. Again, like baptism, Jesus does more than just invite Christians to observe the Lord's Supper—He commands it. Communion is designed to be a time of worship, a

remembrance of Christ's death, and a sign of the New Covenant in Christ, as Jesus Himself explained in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul reiterated in 1 Corinthians.

In concluding session 4, the learners participated in a spirited debate about some of the practical considerations regarding the observance of Communion. Topics discussed were about the elements used in Communion (unleavened versus leavened bread; fermented wine or grape juice); the participants allowed to be served (does one have to be baptized first, or be walking in a "worthy manner"); the frequency of serving Communion (how often); and whether a Baptist church should offer open, closed, or close Communion. It was explained that the independent nature of Baptists causes deviations from church to church on these issues, but none of these differences affect the basic Baptist understanding that Communion is strictly an ordinance that is a remembrance of Christ's death until He comes again.

Session 5

After a break for Mother's Day weekend, the fifth session of "Being Baptist" met on Sunday, May 15, 2016, for the lesson, "In Christ Alone." This session was devoted to the Baptist distinctives represented by the "I" and the "S" in the BAPTISTS acrostic: Individual Soul Liberty and Saved Membership. The class had 27 group members in attendance. The lesson aims for session 5 were (1) to emphasize the historic Baptist belief that every individual has the absolute right before God and man to decide for himself what to believe, or not believe, without coercion or force from any outside source or power; and (2) to explain the biblical view that membership in a New Testament church consists only of persons who have *individually* confessed Jesus Christ as Savior, been scripturally baptized, and expressed a willingness to follow Christ's teachings.

The first part of the lesson dealt with the biblical doctrine of individual soul liberty, which means that every individual has a God-given right to choose what his conscience or soul dictates is right, as long as his choice does bring harm or interfere with the rights or beliefs of others, and he is responsible to God alone for his choices. In other

words, matters of conscience should not to be forced upon any person against his will. The key Scripture for this portion of the lesson was 1 John 2:17: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

The lesson emphasized that, historically, whenever a person’s right of individual conscience or choice has been violated, Baptists have stood for the freedom of the individual. Whenever civil governments, religious institutions, or authoritative individuals have sought to use power or coercion to restrict an individual’s desire to worship (or not to worship), Baptists have historically defended the individual against the power of the state, religion, or person. In discussing soul liberty, the students were reminded from Scripture that God created individuals, not masses or groups. Therefore, the doctrine of individual soul liberty or soul competency is firmly rooted in Scripture. The instruction affirmed that the Bible clearly reveals that human beings are created as individuals; God ministers to Christians as individuals; men and women make choices in life as individuals; men and women are taught as individuals; God sees people as individuals; and God will ultimately judge both saved and unsaved people as individuals. In essence, it was pointed out that soul liberty simply means that everyone has the right to approach God and serve God—even to reject God—as a matter of individual choice. The principle of soul liberty is also the foundational pillar upon which rests the concepts of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, other Baptist concepts discussed in a later lesson.

A lively dialogue among the students elicited interesting thoughts regarding some of the cautions relative to individual soul liberty. Discussions centered on the fact that not all individual choices people make are “correct” according to God’s Word, and this must be recognized by Baptists who espouse soul competency. This discussion stimulated cross-talk about some beliefs extant today that obviously stand against biblical teaching, such as postmodernism, an “all roads lead to God” ecumenism, and a millennial

generation philosophy of “what works for you is always okay.” In fact, it was pointed out that Baptists strongly disagree with many beliefs, practices, and worship forms—even within professing Christianity. Yet belief in soul competency nevertheless teaches that every individual has the *right* before God to choose to believe what he desires, even if others disagree with him. A final discussion in the first part of the lesson emphasized the principle that harm done to others in the name of soul liberty is incompatible with a biblical understanding of this doctrine. The students understood that radical Islamic terrorism would be a real-world example of this phenomenon.

As a natural follow-up to soul liberty, the second period of instruction centered on the doctrine of saved church membership. The primary Scripture presented to highlight this topic was Acts 2:41-47:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Saved church membership (also called regenerate church membership) follows the New Testament pattern and means that membership in a New Testament local church consists *only* of individuals who have openly and consciously confessed Jesus Christ as Savior. This act of faith is properly followed by believer’s baptism (by immersion), which is both a symbolic representation of being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at salvation, as well as the public rite of local church membership. Initially in the lesson was an examination of the two-fold biblical understanding of the term “church” as found in the New Testament. A brief explanation was given about the word “church” (from Greek *ekklēsia*, “called out ones”) in New Testament usage. First, is the mystical, universal church to which all believers belong immediately upon accepting Christ as Savior. The universal church consists of every true believer in Jesus

Christ, regardless of his or her affiliation with a local church. Second is the local church, to which the New Testament gives the priority emphasis, both in number of mentions and in specific instructions as to its function. A New Testament local church is a born-again assembly of Christian believers who freely unite to serve God in one particular locality.⁶

With these definitions formulated, the instruction followed the New Testament teaching about being part of a local assembly of believers. It was shown that the New Testament does indeed teach the concept of “church membership”—it was the consistent New Testament practice that people who “joined” the church followed the pattern of Acts 2:41. That is, they “received” the message of salvation, were “baptized” as a public demonstration of their faith, and then were “added” to the church, signifying “membership” in both the body of Christ and the local assembly. In sum, the New Testament is reasonably clear that local church membership is important and necessary. However, it is only available to individuals who (1) are saved by grace through faith in Christ and (2) have been obedient to the Lord’s command to be baptized.

The class concluded with a brief overview and discussion about the various views of church membership that do not follow the New Testament pattern. This dialogue included an explanation of both the Catholic and prevailing Protestant teaching that church membership is usually entered by the “baptism” (sprinkling) of infants born to professing Christian parents, or adults who are “baptized” as a means of entering the church later in life. In addition to these practices that Baptists would call erroneous views of church membership—that it is not exclusively for saved people—was a discussion about some of the various movements within professing Christianity that seek to downplay or even eliminate *any* formal structure of church membership.

⁶It is generally understood in a twenty-first century contemporary context that sometimes a “local” church in one “locality” may actually consist of more than one physical location or campus. Multi-site and multi-campus Baptist or baptistic churches certainly meet the criteria of a New Testament congregation. It should be noted, however, that many multi-site churches today allow a certain degree of autonomy for each separate campus. Every situation is different in this regard.

Session 6

Session 6 met on Sunday, May 22, 2016, with 21 students attending, and closed out part 1 of the study (“The Baptist Doctrinal Hallmarks”). The lesson was entitled, “Three’s a Crowd,” and covered the Baptist distinctives represented by the second “T” and the second “S” in the BAPTISTS acrostic: Two Offices (pastors and deacons) and Separation of Church and State. The lesson aims were to (1) explain the biblical teaching that there are two, and only two, offices (pastors and deacons) designated for service in a local church according to the New Testament; and (2) examine why Baptists have historically supported the principle of the separation of church and state and the biblical underpinnings of that doctrinal distinctive.

First, the class discussed the New Testament offices of church leadership and ministry. Since Baptists seek the Bible alone as their source of authority, it was emphasized that they have consistently recognized *only* the offices of pastor (also called bishop and elder) and deacon, which Baptists see consistent with biblical teaching. The congregation chooses these officers through various methods. Other church leaders (such as trustees, ministry directors, church staff, and so forth) are necessary in most churches, but these other leaders must not be equated with the two church offices identified in the New Testament. The key Scripture for this portion of the lesson was Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

The instruction first focused on the office of pastor (or bishop or elder). A close examination of the New Testament reveals that three basic titles conferred are upon the primary spiritual leadership office in a local church. (1) “Pastor” derives from the word “shepherd,” and refers to one who feeds the sheep; a pastor is a teacher and preacher of God’s Word in a local church. (2) “Bishop” literally means “overseer,” and refers to a spiritual leader who administrates or supervises the activities of a local church. (3) “Elder” has historical roots in the elders of Old Testament Israel; it speaks of one who is a wise, mature counselor to the people in a local church. It was pointed out that the

New Testament is reasonably clear that all three titles refer to the same person holding the same church office, but an office having multiple functions as defined by the three New Testament words used to describe it.

It was explained that churches must not be restricted to only *one* pastor-elder-bishop, as a plurality of pastors was probably the norm in the apostolic era. However, while a New Testament church may scripturally refer to its primary spiritual leader(s) by any of the three New Testament titles, it is not scripturally warranted to redefine any of these titles and make them *separate* offices. Many Christian traditions have done just that. Examples given were redefining “bishop” to be an overseer of many churches, not just one, and redefining “elder” into separate categories of “ruling elders” (who do not teach) and “teaching elders” (who do not rule). This redefining of New Testament terms is why most Baptist churches continue to employ the term “pastor” to identify a church’s primary spiritual leader(s), since that is the one term of the three that has generally retained its New Testament meaning through the centuries. The class also explored the notion of why certain (less traditional) Baptist churches seem to have redefined the term “elder,” and essentially made it a “third office” in the church (separate from a pastor). The reasons, as well as the pros and cons of such a phenomenon, were debated. A brief examination of 1 Timothy 3 reviewed the qualifications, requirements, and functions of one who holds the office of pastor.

The second part of the lesson on the two offices of a church concentrated on the office of deacon. Deacon, which means “servant,” is translated as such at least thirty times in the English New Testament. The deacons are chosen by a local congregation to assist the pastor(s) in taking care of the more temporal matters of church life (caring for widows and benevolence concerns are specifically mentioned in Scripture). Handling these responsibilities gives the pastor(s) more time to focus on spiritual concerns, leadership issues, and the preaching and teaching ministry.

Most Bible scholars point to Acts 6:1-7 as the beginning of the deacon ministry and office in the Christian church. Some have suggested that the original office of deacon correlated to the role of the Jewish synagogue assistant, one who managed the organizational and logistical needs of the assembly. It was demonstrated from Scripture (1 Tim 3) that the qualifications for a deacon are virtually identical to those of a pastor (less the ability to teach), and so reflect the great significance of the office and the weighty responsibility of those so entrusted with it. Though Acts 6 mentions seven men selected as the first deacons, there is no biblically mandated number of deacons that each church must elect. It was pointed out that both deacons and pastors are essential roles to be filled in a local church, and that the deacon office should not be considered less vital than that of pastor. Both pastors and deacons are servants of the church—pastors primarily serve by leading; deacons primarily lead by serving. While a discussion was initiated about the debate over women deacons in Baptist churches, it was explained that Mt. Zion recognizes only male deacons in the service of the congregation.

Session 6 then initiated a conversation with the learners about the Baptist distinctive of the separation of church and state (also called religious liberty). It was explained that Baptists believe, based on biblical principles, that there should be no official union of God's church and human government, but the government should protect the rights of the church (or any religion) to practice its faith freely as long as others are not harmed or coerced in the process. Jesus' command in Matthew 22:21 was used as the primary Scripture reference for this part of the lesson: "And He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

It was discussed how Baptists, again referring to the Bible as the sole source of authority, have traditionally understood that God established three human institutions for the good of mankind: the home, human government, and His church. God appointed the home as the centerpiece of human civilization from the beginning of creation. He ordained His church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and provide for the spiritual

welfare of His New Testament people. Scripturally speaking, God instituted human governments as the principal means of establishing order, punishing evildoers, and promoting justice in human society. If they follow God's decrees, governments and their leaders will act in ways that benefit the citizens living under them. In turn, in the New Testament era, Christians are biblically mandated to support the government under which they live by paying proper taxes, honoring and praying for government leaders, and obeying the laws established by governments, as long as those laws do not require them to believe or practice anything contrary to God's laws, as seen in the example of the early disciples in the book of Acts. Scriptures such as Acts 4:18-20, Acts 5:27-29, 1 Peter 2:13-14, Matthew 22:17-22, and Romans 13:1-7 were examined for a comprehensive look at these issues.

Historically, Baptists have declared their allegiance to the state when and where these conditions have existed, such as in present-day America. Ideally, Baptists would point out, the relationship of church and state is to be mutually beneficial—government providing peace and safety, and the church contributing to a positive social order by promulgating the tenets of righteous living and love of neighbor as found in the Bible. Moreover, Baptists contend that this mutually beneficial arrangement is at its best when the church and the state are separate and neither seeks to exert power or authority over the other. A class dialogue was initiated that covered the ramifications of what seems to be God's ideal: "A Free Church in a Free State."

However, it was pointed out that only a cursory look at history demonstrates that the scriptural exemplar has not been often achieved. The Roman government sought to stamp out the church of Jesus Christ in its infancy. Even when the Roman Empire embraced a form of Christianity with the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church of the fourth century, things were no better for those Christians who refused to conform to the rules of the new state-controlled "church." The forebears of modern day Baptists were some of the recipients of the most brutal persecutions from the Roman Church, as

well as other state-controlled churches as late as the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648). Of course, most everyone is aware that certain human governments even today persecute Christians and seek to destroy their churches.

A short-term discussion was held about the historic Baptist struggle for the principle of the separation of church and state in the early days of the United States, and how that struggle contributed much to the religious freedom enjoyed in America today. Most people do not know that even the original American colonies had state-sanctioned churches that marginalized, and even persecuted, non-conformists. Yet, in spite of that reality, a distinctive of Baptist belief has been that, based on biblical teaching, neither the church nor the state has a right to coerce anyone to conform to any religious belief by fiat, nor to persecute non-conformists. Likewise, no state or church has the right to deny anyone the right to believe (or to not believe) as their conscience dictates.

This belief in no way indicates that Baptists believe that God Himself should be left out of human government. On the contrary, Christians should be allowed to freely practice and proclaim their beliefs, which will have the ultimate effect of God being present in a nation at all levels, including government. Furthermore, the Bible itself declares, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Ps 33:12). The historic Baptist position is simply that neither church nor state should seek to exert control over the other. Biblically speaking, there is the state, and there is the church, but there is no “state-church” sanctioned in the New Testament.

Session 7

After a break for Memorial Day weekend, session 7 assembled with 26 students on Sunday, June 5, 2016. This session began the final two-week closeout of the training, looking at part 2 of “Being Baptist” (“The Baptist Distinguished Heritage”), a brief overview of Baptist history. The specific lesson title was, “Who Are These People: Baptists throughout Church History” (part 1). The lesson aim for session 7 was to give a broad overview of church history in general, with an explanation of the various views of

Baptist history in particular, and a focus upon the significant Christian groups through the ages that many Baptist historians believe to be the spiritual ancestors of modern-day Baptists. The key Scripture passage used as a springboard to the discussion was Titus 2:11-15:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

These verses explain that Baptists, while Christians first and foremost, are also a “special people” with a unique heritage, which should be understood and embraced with honor.

In an overview of Baptist history, it was first necessary to point out that one must not be confused by the use of the specific term *Baptist* as an identifier of those who have held Baptist beliefs through the centuries. The name itself was not used to identify Baptist people until about the mid-1600s, essentially bestowed on them by their enemies, who mocked their insistence on believer’s baptism by immersion. The name *Baptist* was soon adopted by these believers themselves as a fitting appellation; however, it was actually not in common use until the middle of the eighteenth century. In light of this historic fact, and in order to understand true Baptist history, one must seek to find those groups of Christian believers through the centuries who predated the Christians who actually used the name “Baptist” to identify themselves. This reality was stated in the instruction as a foundational premise before beginning any discussion of Baptist history.

A second important premise was emphasized at this point. That is, regardless of the name *Baptist*, most (though not all) Baptist historians have sought to point out that Baptist churches have, in the main, sought to follow the pattern of the New Testament church. Thus, at a minimum, most historians will concede that at least the *spiritual* history of Baptists commenced in the days of Christ and the apostles. However, there have been, and continue to be, various arguments and counterarguments about what this claim

actually means. In this regard, the major theories of Baptist history put forth by scholars with differing viewpoints were also briefly discussed. The intention was to give another way of demonstrating the wide variety of independent, autonomous Baptist thought on even such basic issues as Baptist origins. The various theories discussed include:

1. *English Separatism/Protestant Reformation.* Some say Baptist identity is an outgrowth of seventeenth-century English Separatism. This view puts Baptist origins as part of what some call the “Radical Reformation.” It essentially sees Baptists as simply one of several Protestant denominations in existence today.
2. *Anabaptist Influence.* Some posit that Baptists trace their beginnings more or less directly to the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, which predated the Protestant Reformation. This view does not, however, necessarily claim that the Anabaptist movement has connections to more ancient churches.
3. *Spiritual Kinship/Continuation of Biblical Teachings.* Others say Baptist (baptistic) churches descend from churches that have held (to a greater or lesser extent) New Testament principles. Known by various names throughout history, these churches have always existed in some form since the church was founded by Jesus Christ in the first century A.D.
4. *Unbroken Succession of Baptist Churches/Landmarkism.* Still others claim that there has been a sure, certain, and unbroken chain of true Baptist churches since the time of Christ and the apostles down to today.
5. *Convergent View.* A fairly recent take on Baptist history, proponents of this theory think of the Baptist tradition as a great river with numerous historical tributaries flowing into it. In essence, this view theorizes that perhaps strands of truth can be drawn from each of the four main views of Baptist beginnings and annals.

Though each theory was briefly explored, I gave support and reasoning for holding to the “Spiritual Kinship View.”⁷ In essence, for a well-informed Baptist to say his spiritual ancestry can be traced to Jesus and His apostles usually means that in every age from the New Testament era until today the church Jesus founded has continued to exist (see Matt 16:18). In other words, some churches through the centuries have *always* held (more or less) to the essential New Testament beliefs and principles that most present-day Baptists espouse—even though these historic churches were not identified by the specific name “Baptist.” It was also explained that many of these churches even

⁷H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 56-58. McBeth refers to the “Spiritual Kinship View” as the “Continuation of Biblical Teaching” view.

today do not use the name “Baptist,” but are nonetheless baptistic, and therefore may claim the same heritage. The remainder of the course largely proceeded from this “spiritual kinship” viewpoint, with the other views alluded to when needed.

This first lesson on Baptist history then proceeded to give a concise synopsis of Baptist history from the time of Christ and the apostles up to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (1517). The class looked at the establishment and development of the New Testament church and its distinctive doctrinal traits. Students saw how the early church was scattered by persecution. The class understood how, with the death of the apostles, *scriptural* authority replaced *apostolic* authority. This biblical authority rooted and grounded the churches that would, through the centuries, hold fast to New Testament doctrine, all the way to the baptistic churches of today.

The timeline of church history showed how certain errors began to creep into some of the early Christian churches within the first three hundred years. Then, there was a brief discussion and explanation of the origins of the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Emperor Constantine’s role in its formation in the fourth century. It was pointed out how the Roman Church began to move further and further from New Testament Christianity in many respects, how it appropriated the power of the state, and how it sought to persecute Christians who were non-conformists to the Roman system.

Yet, in spite of the danger, the students explored how the baptistic churches held firm in their commitment to the Bible and the doctrines of the apostolic church. Though not perfect holders of biblical truth, many Baptist historians have claimed kinship with the following groups, who were branded “heretics” by the Roman state church: Montanists (c. AD 150); Novations (c. AD 250); Donatists (c. AD 311); Paulicians (c. AD 611); Albigenses (c. AD 900); Waldenses (c. AD 1100); and Lollards (c. AD 1315), to name a few. A further examination was given to the dissenting and non-conformist churches that existed through the Dark Ages (AD 426 – 1628), and those who endured the anguished years of the Inquisition (AD 1198 – 1700). It was demonstrated

that many of these so-called “heretical” churches were, in fact, the true New Testament churches, which survived and even thrived in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword. Many Baptists believe that these churches and fellow-believers carried the torch of God’s truth century after century, and with whom we would claim a spiritual kinship as twenty-first century Baptist Christians. Session 7 ended as the timeline of church history brought the class to the cusp of The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, when baptistic peoples who began to be known as “Baptists” first began to appear on the scene.

Session 8

Session 8 met on Sunday, June 12, 2016, with 23 learners attending. This session wrapped up the teaching portion of the project with the second lesson of part 2 (“The Baptist Distinguished Heritage”), a concise summary of Baptist history. This lesson bore the title, “Baptists as ‘Baptists:’ Baptists throughout Church History” (part 2). The lesson aims for Session 8 were to (1) present a broad historical overview of the emergence of modern-day Baptists as they began to be generally known by that specific name; (2) offer a general discussion on whether Baptists are properly categorized as “Protestants;” and (3) consider the wide diversity of men and women past and present who are identified with the Baptist movement. Following up from lesson 7, Titus 2:11-15 was again used as the key biblical text used as a starting point for discussing the lesson.

After a brief review of the material presented in part 1 (lesson 7), the instruction then picked up the historical timeline at the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, which began in the early sixteenth century. In seeking to trace the historical lineage of modern-day Baptists, one cannot quickly pass over the influence on the modern-day Baptists from the Anabaptists and other dissenting churches, which originated or became more prominent during the Reformation era. The students learned the meaning of “Anabaptist” and “Separatist,” as well as the major beliefs and practices associated with them, especially those that impacted the rise of the “Baptist” movement that would become known by that specific name. Included in this section was a brief biographical sketch of Balthasar

Hubmaier, a leading light (and eventual martyr) of the Anabaptist movement, and a man who greatly influenced the Baptists. The continued persecution of Anabaptist and other baptistic Christians during this period, both by the Roman Catholic Church and even some Protestant leaders, was also examined.

Next, a short summary of the rise of “Modern Baptists” was offered. In this synopsis, the class participants learned about the developments within the Anglican Church that led many to begin to openly adopt “Separatist” views. These occurrences built upon the flow of baptistic influences through the centuries, and were the direct precursors to what can be specifically identified as the present-day Baptist wing of Christianity. Concise summations of the major roles of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were given, along with an explanation that they are credited with establishing in England, about 1610, the first “Baptist” church in history specifically known by that designation. It was further explained how this fact has confused many about the true origins of Baptists since baptistic beliefs and practices most assuredly predate the first church that used the name. Further discussions covered some of the early Baptist confessions of faith, as well as Baptist expansion and development in Europe, including the first Baptist “church split,” which led to the rise of the General (Arminian) Baptists and Particular (Calvinistic or Regular) Baptists in England. The continued persecution of the Christians who adopted Baptist beliefs and ways was also explained.

Advancing the narrative, the students learned about Baptists coming to America in the early seventeenth century, with Roger Williams founding the first Baptist church in America in Rhode Island in 1638. It was pointed out that Rhode Island, founded by Baptist leaders, was the first government in history established with freedom of religion for all as one of its founding principles. Discussions continued that addressed the frequent persecution of Baptists, even in the English colonies of America. As the United States was established after the American Revolution, the class learned about the influence early American Baptists had on James Madison and the enshrinement of the

First Amendment in the United States Constitution, which guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibited the establishment of a state church—two dearly-held Baptist distinctive beliefs.

A cursory observation was given about the early developments of Baptist life in America: the rise of the Sunday school movement; the Triennial Convention of 1814; the rise of the Primitive Baptists; the establishment of the early missionary societies; and the split of Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists, resulting in the establishment in 1845 of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), of which MZBC is a part. Other issues briefly surveyed encompassed the founding of numerous Baptist conventions, associations, and fellowships, the rise of modernism and liberal theology within Baptist life, and the so-called “Conservative Resurgence” of the SBC in the 1980s and 1990s.

A brief consideration was given to Baptist missions and evangelism efforts in the United States, including a look at several prominent missionary personalities who were foundational to modern missions. The class was given a summary of the spread of the Baptist movement around the globe and across cultures. Finally, a debate was fostered about whether Baptists should properly and technically be considered merely a sect of Protestantism, or are Baptists something different. In this discussion, the learners addressed Baptist points of agreement and disagreement with Protestants, the effects of past persecution of Baptists by certain Protestant bodies, and whether there are enough doctrinal and historical similarities to warrant Baptists being included in the broad scope of present-day Protestantism, plus why (or if) it really matters. An interesting look at some famous people past and present who claimed Baptist connections in their lives concluded session 8.

Session 9

After taking another break for Father’s Day weekend, the “Being Baptist” study closed out with session 9 on Sunday, June 26, 2016, with 30 attendees. This session consisted of a final wrap-up of course material, followed by an open-ended question-and-

answer session, which addressed any questions the participants had from the previous eight sessions. Last of all, the post-study small group survey was administered. The results and analysis of the data garnered from the post-study small group are discussed in the following section.

Phase 4: Analyzing and Evaluating Results

Both before and after the “Being Baptist” group study, the participants completed the “Small Group Survey on Baptist History and Doctrinal Distinctives.”⁸ The survey consisted of fifteen multiple-choice questions, five true-false questions, and five opinion questions using a Likert scale that measured six responses from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree;” plus a section to add any personal thoughts or further opinions about the overall course of study (to be completed as part of the post-study survey only). Even though the instrument was identical for use at both the beginning and the end of the course of study, for the benefit of the students the pre-study small group survey was labeled “Course Pre-Test” and the post-study small group survey was labeled “Course Post-Test” in order to avoid confusion among the participants. As with the congregational questionnaire, each class member was asked to provide a four-digit personal identification code. In this case, the code was used to compare the pre-study and post-study survey results more accurately, yet allow the participants to remain anonymous.

Using a *t*-test for dependent samples, it was projected that the results of the post-study small group survey would demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference between the pre-study and post-study survey scores, and that this difference in scores would not be the result of chance alone. This finding would indicate that the study participants gained significant additional knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives as a result of the project’s teaching curriculum.

⁸See appendix 3.

Data Analysis

Though a total of 35 adults registered for the study, and attended at least a few of the class sessions, data analysis was conducted and results tabulated only for participants who could be unmistakably verified as taking both the pre-study and post-study surveys by their assigned identification number. That decision resulted in 20 individuals who fully completed both the pre-study and post-study surveys with enough data that could be used in the analysis phase of the project. That number was smaller than the overall number who participated, but was sufficient to calculate valid results with regard to the project's stated purposes and goals. The post-study surveys were administered on Sunday, June 26, 2016, and the *t*-test for dependent samples was conducted soon thereafter.

A *t*-test analysis was conducted for the overall test scores resulting in a *t*-test statistical of $t = 7.97$, with the degree of difference (df) = 19, and the probability of the difference was brought about by chance of $p = 0.00$. Since p is less than .05, the probability is high that the statistical change is not due to chance, but rather due to increased knowledge acquired from participation in the classes. In table 2, columns 1 and 2 show the question and correct answer. Columns 3 and 4 show the average participant pre-study survey response and the percentage of difference from the correct answer. Columns 5 and 6 show the average participant post-study survey response and the percentage of difference from the correct answer. Column 7 shows the change between the pre-study survey and post-study survey. Columns 8, 9, and 10 show the statistical analysis of t and p for each question.

To summarize, the average score on the pre-study small group survey was 64 percent, which increased to an average score of 89 percent on the post-study small group survey, an average increase of 25 percentage points. The statistical calculations demonstrated that this increase was likely not a result of chance, but was due to the instruction given.

Table 2. “Being Baptist” average pre-study and post-study small group survey responses

Question	Correct Answer	Average Pre-Study Survey Response	Average Pre-Study Survey % Difference from Correct	Average Post-Study Survey Response	Average Post-Study Survey % Difference from Correct	% Change from Pre-Study Survey to Post-Study Survey	df	t	p
1	C	A	65%	A	60%	5%	19	0.79	0.4283
2	A	A	45%	A	5%	40%	19	2.91	0.0075
3	C	C	55%	C	0%	55%	19	4.7	0.0001
4	D	B	70%	D	5%	65%	19	10.11	0
5	A	A	50%	A	0%	55%	19	4.7	0.0001
6	A	A	10%	A	5%	5%	19	0.55	0.577
7	B	B	10%	B	30%	-20%	19	2.12	0.0421
8	B	A	35%	B	35%	0%	19	2.29	0.0298
9	B	B	50%	B	0%	50%	19	4.25	0.0003
10	A	A	40%	A	0%	40%	19	3.47	0.0021
11	A	A	55%	A	10%	45%	19	3.24	0.0035
12	C	C	15%	C	5%	10%	19	0.97	0.3299
13	B	B	15%	B	5%	10%	19	1.42	0.1625
14	D	D	0%	D	0%	0%	19	0	0
15	A	A	0%	A	0%	0%	19	0	0
16	B	B	20%	B	25%	-5%	19	0.32	0.7481
17	A	A	5%	A	0%	5%	19	0.97	0.3299
18	B	B	40%	B	20%	20%	19	1.25	0.2141
19	A	B	40%	A	5%	35%	19	4.37	0.0003
20	A	A	15%	A	0%	15%	19	1.78	0.0828

Participant Feedback

In addition to the quantitative data collected and evaluated by the *t*-test, students who took the post-study small group survey also responded to five opinion questions, rated on a Likert scale. The opinions were not quantifiable, but they nonetheless provided valuable qualitative data regarding the attitudes of the participants toward several important issues addressed as part of the instruction.

As part of the post-study small group survey, participants provided written feedback regarding the “Being Baptist” study, which added qualitative data to the overall subjective evaluation of the project. The instructions read as follows:

In the space below, please give a brief evaluation of the teaching you have received on Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. For example, Did it help increase your knowledge of the subject? Was the instruction practical? Do you believe it helped you grow in your walk with the Lord? If so, in what way? Please add any personal thoughts that you may have regarding the course of study. Your comments will remain anonymous, so please be as thoughtful and honest as you can.

Since the responses were anonymous, the comments were non-attributable.

However, the responses offer a valuable qualitative dimension to the evaluation of the project. Table 3 displays student comments.⁹

Table 3. “Being Baptist” end of course anonymous student comments

ID Code	Comments
9999	Enjoyed [the study] and learned a lot.
7210	Knowledge was increased and belief was improved and strengthened. The historical review is beneficial in dealing with this current culture.
8031	Excellent discussion. You were able to get people to respond to questions, etc. Learned more about SBC that I did not know.
N/A	This class was very, very, helpful in my understanding of being Baptist. The instructor was very knowledgeable of the material. He explained things simply, and [it was] easy to understand. I would take this class again with this instructor.
3838	Truly learned a lot in this course. Impressed with the knowledge Bro. Wes has.
1239	This is the most informative class I have ever attended. Whether I pass the test or not, I have learned a lot. I give the teacher an "A."
6809	Loved learning this history of Baptists. God bless Bro. Wes for bringing it to us.
N/A	Truly enjoyed class; hope to take next one [also].
4030	It was very helpful to learn the Baptist history. Very good information. Learning can be fun.
1971	AWESOME!
0078	Always enjoy your teaching and miss it so much. The instruction was exceptional. We must always know what we believe so we can explain and stand for the truth.
9999(2)	Practical yet in-depth much needed study. Augments 1 Peter 3:15 in being able to give an answer to those who ask, “Why are you a Baptist?” Perhaps could be a condensed less in-depth study for New Christians—whatever their age.
1215	Excellent presentation, great insights and explanations.
9400	It has been so good to know why we believe and do the things we do in our church. Bro. Wes shared so much of his knowledge with us. I am so thankful for my mom and dad [and] my grandparents and all those who have supported their beliefs and have taken the time to share and support Mt. Zion. Bro. Wes, you did a wonderful job!
N/A	Helped me to understand the Baptist history, to be able to explain it better.
4375	Thank you for being such a wonderful teacher. You deserve an "A" for this class!
1537	I enjoyed this class very much. It was helpful to understand the Baptist distinction[s]. I did feel it was a bit rushed. I wish the sessions were longer and went for more weeks. But I am a curious person so that could just be me. I will be researching some things we didn’t get into detail on. Thanks!
1645	The teaching was high quality, interesting, thorough, necessary, and practical. It helped to confirm my choice to worship and serve in [a] Baptist church.
2870	Learned a lot.
2355	Although I was taught some of this when I was in high school, I learned a lot studying the whole history of Baptists. It was great.

⁹Minor grammatical and spelling errors in comments have been edited for clarity.

Summation

Upon the completion of this project, the conclusions presented here are considered valid and supported by the available data.

Original Goals Considered

Three goals were established for the ministry project, “Teaching Baptist History and Doctrinal Distinctives to the Congregation of Mount Zion Baptist Church, West Paducah, Kentucky.” The first goal was to assess the congregation’s current knowledge of the origin, identity, and basic doctrinal distinctives of Baptist churches throughout church history. This goal was projected to be successfully met when the church-wide questionnaire developed for the project was completed by at least 65 percent of the Sunday morning adult attendees and the results were tabulated, which yielded a snapshot of the church’s collective knowledge on the subject. Though the actual participation rate was 48 percent, it was deemed adequate to provide the needed baseline on which an appropriate curriculum was created.

The second goal was to develop a discipleship curriculum that addressed Baptist history and doctrinal distinctiveness. This goal was measured by a rubric used by an expert panel of committed Baptist Christians from within the local community. The panel reviewed the proposed curriculum for clarity, content, and biblical and theological soundness. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above level. This goal was clearly met, and appropriate suggestions and corrections given by the panel were incorporated into the final draft of the curriculum.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of a select group of individuals from within the congregation by teaching the established curriculum in a nine-week series of lessons. The discipleship-training group called for not less than twenty volunteers from among the active adult church members of MZBC, representing an approximate demographic cross-section of the congregation. Thirty-five adults signed up for the

group study, and after pre-study and post-study small group survey scores were evaluated, a *t*-test for dependent samples indicated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-study small group survey scores of participants, which indicated the goal had been successfully met.

The results of the *t*-test, along with the end-of-course student feedback (both Likert Scale rating and personal comments), demonstrated that the “Being Baptist” study met the overarching purpose of this project: to increase awareness of and appreciation for the Baptist heritage and the unique set of doctrinal distinctives held by Baptist and baptistic churches today. The project curriculum will be effectively adapted for use in a restyled new member class at MZBC, which is expected to be inaugurated in the fall of 2017.

Generalization, Adaptability, and Exportability

The project teaching material may have moderate export value and be adapted for use in certain local churches. This appraisal comes with at least two caveats. First, it is likely that only Baptist or baptistic churches of like faith and practice as MZBC would be inclined to use such a study. It is intentionally focused on churches that clearly embrace a definite Baptist character and heritage. Churches of other Christian denominations, or even Baptist churches not particularly attuned to a Baptist identity, would presumably not be interested in the information given and the conclusions drawn in this project.

Second, due to the independent and autonomous nature of all Baptist churches, it is further assumed that any Baptist church who sought use of the project’s curriculum would want to adapt the material presented in the curriculum to meet the needs of its own congregation. Though most self-aware Baptists would embrace the major doctrinal distinctives presented in the project, there would likely be shades of difference in how some of these doctrines and practices would be addressed in any particular Baptist congregation. These nuances might include differing views on serving Communion, how new members are received, whether the church recognizes elders or only pastors, and

whether teaching Baptist history is even necessary (and if so, which theory or theories will be discussed).

I have no reservations about any ministry adapting the project curriculum in this project for use in another ministry if it makes the Bride of Christ more beautiful and builds God's kingdom in some way. Rather, my prayer is that Baptist leaders, and pastors in particular, will recognize the need to inform their congregations of the great Baptist heritage that has been handed down from generations past. Mohler's statement cited in chapter 1 still resonates at the conclusion of the project: "The urgency of this task cannot be ignored. In this generation, Baptists will either recover our denominational heritage and rebuild our doctrinal foundations, or in the next generation there will be no authentic Baptist witness."¹⁰ Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project.

¹⁰R. Albert Mohler, Jr., quoted in R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), ix.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

Mount Zion Baptist Church of West Paducah, Kentucky, faces a challenge that many churches of like faith and practice face across North America: an identity crisis. Like a multitude of other like-minded congregations, MZBC claims affiliation with a Baptist Christian tradition, yet the members are mostly unaware of the noble Baptist heritage that has been passed down to them from spiritual ancestors. Many Baptist churches today are likewise largely ill-informed about the doctrinal distinctives that make their church what it is, or perhaps aware of them in a vague way. This ministry project sought to address this concern in this congregation.

A number of positive outcomes resulted from this attempt to teach Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives to the people of MZBC. Understanding that few undertakings such as this are ever flawless, it is recognized that a few challenges and limitations affected the final results of the project. This final chapter offers an evaluation of the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. It also offers insight on how portions of the project may have been conducted differently, as well as my theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The project was intended to increase the knowledge of and appreciation for the Baptist heritage (history and doctrinal distinctives) of a representative group of adults from the congregation of the Mount Zion Baptist Church. Appropriate portions of the curriculum developed for the group were incorporated into a freshly designed new member class, which explains why MZBC is a Baptist church and the biblical and

historical foundations upon which it rests. It is emphasized again here, as elsewhere in this project, that God-honoring Baptists do not claim to be the only ones who hold biblical truth, but they simply believe Baptist churches are the closest modern-day representatives of the apostolic New Testament churches. Committed Baptists know that there are sincere believers in many other Christian traditions, but at the same time, Baptists have a unique connection to New Testament truth. Most Baptists would likely appreciate an understanding of the things that make them unique, and see an increase their spiritual growth as well, if they had the opportunity to be instructed on these issues. Unfortunately, based on my experience of serving for over forty years in over a dozen Baptist congregations, it is my belief that most Baptist churches do not provide this training today.

This current state of affairs has not always been the case. In fact, less than a century ago a large percentage of Baptists knew and understood their heritage, and could usually articulate why they chose to be a Baptist if asked. As referenced in chapter 3, John A. Broadus, one of the founders The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote a small book, first published in 1881, and widely disseminated for years, entitled, *The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views*.¹ Further, the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (forerunner of today's LifeWay), as well as similar organizations in other Baptist groups, regularly published Sunday school and other training material for youth and adults that outlined the unique beliefs and history of Baptists.² With few exceptions, this once-prevalent genre of teaching material in Baptist churches has disappeared to a great degree.

These factors, and others, have contributed to the lack of knowledge among Baptists about who they are, what they believe, and the great sacrifices made by those

¹John A. Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists to Teach Their Distinctive Views* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881). See chap. 3 for more information.

²Several of these works reside in my personal library.

who came before them. Considering these dynamics, the purpose of this ministry project was an attempt to address this general dearth of knowledge in the MZBC congregation. After the results of the congregational questionnaire confirmed the lack of knowledge among the adult members of MZBC, with an average score of 53 percent on the questionnaire, the curriculum was developed to help address the issue. The nine-week curriculum was then taught to the small discipleship group, described in chapter 4, beginning Sunday, April 10, 2016, and ending Sunday, June 26, 2016. Comparing the pre-study and post-study small group survey scores of the discipleship group on their knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives validated by a *t*-test for dependent samples, indicated a significant increase in the desired knowledge. The qualitative data garnered through participant feedback further confirms this finding.

Going forward, as parts of the curriculum are incorporated in the ministry of new member assimilation, future people who join MZBC will have a firm understanding of and appreciation for their spiritual identity as Baptists. In light of these facts, the primary purpose of the ministry project was largely accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The three goals for the project were:

1. Assess the congregation's current knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives.
2. Develop a discipleship curriculum that addressed Baptist history and doctrinal distinctiveness.
3. Increase the knowledge of a select group of individuals from within the congregation by teaching the established curriculum.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the congregation's current knowledge of the origin, identity, and basic doctrinal distinctives of Baptist churches throughout church history. This assessment was accomplished by administering a questionnaire to the congregation that measured overall knowledge and understanding of Baptist history and doctrinal

distinctives. This goal was projected as successfully met when the church-wide questionnaire was completed by at least 65 percent of the Sunday morning adult attendees and the results were tabulated, which yielded a clearer understanding of the church's collective knowledge on the subject. In the actual event, the adult participation rate was 48 percent. Though this percentage point was lower than the set goal, upon examination, it was deemed adequate to assess and provide the needed baseline on which to build an appropriate curriculum that addressed the stated needs. The congregation's aggregate score on the ten-question survey was 53 percent across all demographic categories.

The goal was to assess where the congregation stood regarding a knowledge of the Baptist heritage and distinct beliefs. Much insight was gained as this goal was considered, even though the findings were expected. As with most Baptist and baptistic congregations today, the results of the questionnaire indicated a general lack of knowledge and awareness of what makes Baptists and Baptist churches what they are, as an identity. With insight from the congregational questionnaire, and goal 1 addressed, the project moved to the next phase.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a discipleship curriculum that addressed Baptist history and doctrinal distinctiveness. The curriculum was not to be exhaustive, but rather to present an overarching view of church history from the time of Christ to the present day; major theories on the origins of Baptist churches; and basic doctrines and polity that make Baptist churches distinct from other Christian traditions. This goal was measured by a rubric used by an expert panel of committed Baptist Christians from within the local community. The panel consisted of two Baptist ministers, each with a master's degree in ministry, and two professional educators, each with a master's degree in education or a related field. The evaluation rubric gave the panel the opportunity to appraise the written

curriculum material, using ratings of “insufficient,” “requires attention,” “sufficient,” and “exemplary” for eight different criteria. Comments were also elicited from the evaluators.

The panel reviewed the proposed curriculum for clarity, content, and biblical and theological soundness. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above level. When they were returned, the evaluation rubrics indicated that there were no “insufficient” or “requires attention” ratings, 3 “sufficient” ratings (9.3 percent), and 29 “exemplary” ratings (90.6 percent). The stated goal was clearly met, with 100 percent of the indicators scoring “sufficient” or above. Helpful suggestions from the panel (mostly grammatical corrections, sentence structure, and word choice recommendations) were incorporated into the final curriculum.

Goal 3

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of a select group of individuals from within the congregation by teaching the established curriculum in a nine-week series of lessons. The small group study entitled, “Being Baptist,” called for not less than 20 participants from among the active adult church members of MZBC, representing an approximate demographic cross-section of the congregation. Thirty-five adults signed up for the group study, with 30 completing it. Classes met on nine Sunday evenings at 6:00 p.m. from Sunday, April 10, 2016, through Sunday, June 26, 2016, with breaks on weekends honoring Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, and Father’s Day. Each teaching session lasted about seventy-five minutes, and the curriculum was presented in the format of a small group Bible study. The curriculum presented lessons on the distinctive set of beliefs that have traditionally defined Baptist and baptistic Christian believers throughout the centuries of church history. It furthermore gave a general overview of Baptist history, including the various theories of Baptist origins and historical descent.

The first lesson was introductory in nature and covered the rationale and biblical underpinnings of why learning the unique history and distinctives of Baptist Christians is

a worthy endeavor. It gave a general overview of the course content and explained that the participants would be better prepared to explain why they have identified with Baptist believers and churches as a result of completing the lessons. In this lesson, the acrostic “BAPTISTS,” which served as a memory aid throughout the series, was introduced:

B – Biblical Authority and The Lordship of Christ
A – Autonomy of the Local Church
P – Priesthood of Believers
T – Two Ordinances: Baptism and Communion
I – Individual Soul Liberty
S – Saved Church Membership
T – Two Offices: Pastors and Deacons
S – Separation of Church and State

In lesson 1, the participants were also asked to commit to stay connected with the group until the conclusion of the study, and the “Group Member Expectations” sheet was given to each student. The students left with a complete understanding of what the course of study would entail.

Lesson 2 dealt with the Baptist doctrinal distinctive of biblical authority, and its sister doctrine, the lordship of Christ. The pre-study small group survey was also conducted as part of this lesson, capturing the students’ scores that reflected their current knowledge of the subject. The average participant score on the pre-study survey was 64 percent. The teaching portion of this lesson emphasized that, while Baptists hold many Bible doctrines in virtually the same way as many other evangelical Christian traditions, to seriously study Baptist distinctives is to nevertheless conclude that the beliefs and practices held by the vast majority of Baptist churches today can be traced directly to the New Testament. With that introduction, the first distinctive, biblical authority, was addressed, with its corresponding embrace of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the One who is the theme and main subject of the Bible. Students acknowledged the centrality of the Bible as the sole source of authority and the preaching of Christ as pillar beliefs of Baptist churches.

Lesson 3 covered the Baptist distinctives of the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of all believers. This lesson explained that autonomy means

independence or sovereignty. Students were fully briefed on the fact that, even though thousands of Baptist churches voluntarily affiliate with conventions, fellowships, and/or associations, in reality, *every* Baptist/baptistic church is an independent, self-governing body. It was further emphasized that this distinctive is in total contrast to most other Christian denominations, which rely on other models of church government. The second part of the instruction focused on the priesthood of believers. It was demonstrated that that doctrinal distinctive teaches that all believers are individual priests and ministers before God, and therefore all believers are equal and have direct access to God through Christ, with no need of a human intermediary. It was explained that this belief is not a license for a Christian to believe anything he wants, but that the priesthood of believers is a doctrine rightly exercised only in the context of a local body of believers, with biblical accountability to church leaders and fellow believers. Participants understood how the two doctrines studied in this lesson are scriptural, and are complementary to one another.

Lesson 4 addressed the Baptist distinctive of observing only two ordinances, baptism and Communion. While other Christian groups also practice baptism and Communion, it explained that Baptists recognize these rites as ordinances, not sacraments. It was also clarified that Baptists have a different understanding of both the meaning and mode of these observances as opposed to both Catholic and Protestant teachings. The lesson taught that Baptists practice baptism for believers only (not infants), and by immersion only, as clearly demonstrated in the New Testament. Details were also disclosed that Baptists recognize Communion, or The Lord's Supper, as a memorial meal only, and it does not impart a special bestowal of God's grace on the participants as many Christian groups teach. Many student questions were cleared up about these two important biblical doctrines.

Lesson 5 was devoted to the Baptist distinctives of individual soul liberty and saved church membership. In sum, soul liberty was described as the historic Baptist belief that, biblically speaking, every individual has the absolute right before God and man to

decide for himself what to believe, or not believe, without coercion or force from any outside source or power. It was demonstrated that standing up for individual religious liberty against coercion from governments, religious authorities, or other powerful entities or persons has been a historical hallmark of Baptist believers in Christ. This lesson disclosed how Baptists championed religious liberty in many parts of the world, including America, and continue to do so today. As a natural belief held in conjunction with soul liberty, this lesson further enlightened the class on the New Testament teaching that membership in a New Testament church consists only of persons who have *individually* confessed Jesus Christ as Savior, have been scripturally baptized, and have expressed a willingness to follow Christ's teachings. This is another distinctive that defines Baptists and to which they tenaciously hold. Participants in this lesson understood the importance and practical application of these complementary doctrinal distinctives.

Lesson 6 covered the Baptist distinctive of recognizing only two valid New Testament church offices (pastors and deacons), and the distinctive of the separation of church and state. Since Baptists seek the Bible alone as their source of authority, it was emphasized that they have consistently recognized *only* the offices of pastor (also called bishop and elder) and deacon, which Baptists see consistent with biblical teaching. It was explained that other Christian traditions have redefined a number of the New Testament offices, but Baptists have tried to be consistent with Scripture and traditionally recognized only these two. Several issues regarding the qualifications, selection, and differing views of these offices were discussed and clarified for the students. The second part of this lesson initiated a conversation with the learners about the Baptist distinctive of the separation of church and state (also called religious liberty). By this, it was explained that, based on biblical principles, Baptists believe there should be no official union of God's church and human government, but the government should protect the rights of the church (or any religion) to practice its faith freely as long as others are not harmed or coerced in the process. Baptists contend that this mutually beneficial arrangement is at its best when the

church and state are separate and neither seeks to exert power or authority over the other. Students were elevated in their understanding of both distinctives discussed in this lesson.

Lesson 7 began the two-week closeout of the training and provided a brief overview of Baptist history. This specific lesson highlighted a review of the various theories of Baptist history, a broad outline of the first fifteen centuries of church history in general, and a glimpse of some of the Christian groups through the ages that many Baptist historians believe to be the spiritual ancestors of modern-day Baptists. In this overview of Baptist history, it was necessary to point out that one must not be confused by the use of the specific *term* “Baptist” as an identifier of those who have held distinctive Baptist beliefs through the centuries. The name itself was not used until about the mid-1600s, but groups known by other names through the centuries held, to greater or lesser degrees, the distinguishing New Testament beliefs embraced by Baptists today. With that understanding, the lesson proceeded to offer a timeline of church history from the apostolic era to the Protestant Reformation, with an emphasis on the various Christian sects deemed to be forerunners of later-era Baptists. The learners were exposed to concepts of Baptist heritage with which they were largely unfamiliar.

Lesson 8 continued the timeline of church history, this time presenting an overview of the emergence of modern-day Baptists as they began to be generally known by that specific name. The students learned about the Anabaptist and Separatist movements and their contributions to today’s Baptists. The beginnings of the first true “Baptist” churches in England and Holland were explained, and a summary of the Baptist movement in America was presented. The lesson also offered a general discussion on whether Baptists are properly categorized as “Protestants,” and considered the wide diversity of men and women past and present identified with the Baptist tradition. The participants ended up with a good working knowledge of the Baptist influence on the professing Christian church, as well as a better appreciation for the Baptist heritage of which the members of MZBC are a part.

Lesson 9 concluded the study with a final wrap-up of course material, an open-ended question-and-answer session, and the administration of the post-study small group survey. Though 35 adults participated in the teaching to some degree, with 30 finishing, only 20 completed both the pre-study and post-study small group survey with sufficient usable data for statistical purposes. This data was considered sufficient to determine whether learning was increased and the goal was met. After the results of the student surveys were tabulated, a *t*-test for dependent samples indicated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores of participants. The results of the *t*-test, along with many positive comments offered through student feedback, demonstrated that the “Being Baptist” study met goal 3—to increase the knowledge of Baptist history and the unique set of Baptist doctrinal distinctives of a select group of individuals from within the congregation of MZBC. As anticipated, the project curriculum will be effectively adapted for use in a restyled new member class at MZBC, expected to be launched in the fall of 2017.

Goals Summation

Summarizing, two of the three project goals were clearly met. Goal 1 fell somewhat short of its stated goal, with 48 percent of the adult congregants completing the congregational questionnaire as opposed to the goal of 65 percent. Nevertheless, this response was considered sufficient to produce adequate information needed to successfully meet goal 2, developing the curriculum.

Goal 2 was met when the expert panel of evaluators scored the printed curriculum 100 percent at the “sufficient” or “exemplary” level on the evaluation rubric provided to them. Using the curriculum to teach the small group study “Being Baptist” was successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples indicated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre-study and post-study small group survey scores of the twenty participants whose data was sufficiently complete and could be properly

evaluated. Student comments qualitatively added to the overall assessment of achieving a successful outcome of goal 3, as well as the project as a whole.

Upon successful accomplishment of goal 3, significant portions of the “Being Baptist” curriculum will be incorporated into MZBC’s newly designed class for new members. Though not evaluated as a designated goal of the project, the material from the curriculum will also be used as the basis for a sermon series designed to baseline all current members of MZBC with a working knowledge of the Baptist heritage and important doctrinal distinctives. Collectively, these actions will help MZBC members to better know and appreciate the biblical principles and practices that their Baptist forefathers have passed down to them over the centuries.

Though two of the three goals of the project were clearly met (and the one not met nevertheless provided adequate useful data), the project was certainly not perfect. The project achieved its major purposes, but, in hindsight, most every ministry activity deserves an after action review, which usually provides a clearer vision for future ministry events. The review of this project proved no exception. There are both strong and weak points to be considered.

Strengths of the Project

In analyzing the final results of this project, several strong points are revealed that contributed to its overall successful conclusion. These strengths are addressed in this section.

The first strength was the strong backing of the MZBC congregation in support of their senior pastor developing and executing this project. I had only been serving MZBC for less than one year when copious amounts of time were needed to produce the project, including the congregational surveys, pre-study and post-study instruments, and development and writing of the curriculum and supporting materials for the class participants (student outlines, PowerPoint slides, and so forth). The church has been gracious in supporting me in my doctoral studies in general. I surmise that some other

congregations I have served over the years would be less patient and understanding about the time needed away from the pastor's office to complete the requirements necessary for implementing this project. Sincere gratitude is extended to the people of MZBC.

The second strength was that the content of the teaching portion of the project met a clear and present need in the congregation. In reality, many, if not most, Baptist church members have little or no understanding or appreciation of their history, nor do they have a firm grasp of what Baptist Christians believe. This was certainly the general case at MZBC. This state of affairs is not usually of the church members' own choosing; rather, Baptist leaders in general have by and large failed to see the need for teaching Baptist distinctives and helping preserve a distinct Baptist witness for the coming generation. At least at MZBC, this project has provided a positive step in addressing the need.

The third strength was the project's teaching curriculum. Using numerous and varied resources, the collected and codified material ultimately helped strengthen and articulate my own convictions about the uniqueness of Baptist believers. Moreover, it has provided a practical resource that can be used far beyond the shelf life of this doctoral project. The curriculum will certainly be incorporated in a newly established new member class at MZBC, and, as mentioned in chapter 4, it is also suitable for export to other churches of like faith and practice. Though nothing is certain, preliminary considerations have been discussed that may lead to the use of all or part of the teaching curriculum as a resource offered by the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

The fourth strength was the Sunday evening timeslot chosen for the teaching of the curriculum. Having the classes held on Sunday at 6:00 p.m. had two major advantages—one for the students and the one for the instructor. For the students, the classes were held at a time when many of them were already attending the Sunday evening worship service of the church, which meant that no one would have to commit to the nine weeks of lessons on another night of the week, likely insuring a greater

participation rate. For the instructor, as the senior pastor of the church, it meant one less sermon or lesson to prepare during the weeks that the lessons were conducted. This advantage was a crucial time factor consideration when considering the amount of preparation time required for pastoral messages. This strength also reflected upon the first strength—the firm support of the congregation in the conduct of the project; in this case, gladly supporting one of the associate pastors filling the pulpit while the senior pastor taught the “Being Baptist” curriculum in a separate venue.

The fifth strength was found in the dynamics of the class sessions themselves. An eagerness and open mindedness to learn the Baptist story and its unique principles were clear among the participants. Overall, there was an intellectual curiosity among the students to comprehend the distinct views of Baptists within the larger context of professing Christianity. Robust debates and differences of opinion were elicited in many of the class sessions, but always in a spirit of Christian charity. Of the 30 learners who finished the course of study, many actually missed one or more of the actual class sessions, but they viewed them on the MZBC website, indicating their desire to learn the subjects discussed. These men and women proved themselves eager to learn and to be able to articulate their Baptist identity. Certainly, the end of course student comments, catalogued in chapter 4, are indicative of this strength of the project.

The sixth and final strength identified for the project was that the written curriculum has provided valuable source material for use in the MZBC new member class, scheduled for launch in the fall of 2017. The material was thorough, comprehensive, and confirmed by the classroom experience to be teachable at the layman level. These factors will likely ensure that the men and women who will connect with this congregation in the future understand it. The project’s teaching curriculum will not be the *only* material used in the new member class, but it will make up a major portion of it, thus enhancing new members’ understanding of why MZBC embraces its historic Baptist identity.

In sum, the project has deepened the understanding of many of the men and women of MZBC about their godly heritage. Some others seriously considered for the first time this important aspect of their spiritual life—to know what they believe and why they believe it. Overall, the project had a significant positive impact on MZBC and the information developed for it will remain fresh for years to come as it is incorporated in the baseline teaching of new congregants.

Weaknesses of the Project

Notwithstanding the overall positive impact of the project on the church, several weak areas identified and reflected on in this section could be improved upon.

The first weakness relates to the congregational questionnaire that the members completed in order to assess aggregate knowledge of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. The goal was to see 65 percent of the adult attendees complete the questionnaire. However, just 48 percent finished and returned it. In retrospect, perhaps not enough time was given for its completion, or maybe the importance of the congregation's input was underemphasized. For either of these reasons, or other factors, this aspect of the project, though satisfactory, was not as robust as it should have been.

The second weakness was that the curriculum proved to be, in some respects, a bit too comprehensive for the small group setting for which it was designed. One of the evaluators from the expert panel that reviewed the curriculum submitted a remark that pointed to this very issue. Under the criterion, "Each lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material," the comment was, "Maybe too thorough if that is possible. Very detailed!" It was not perceived that this was intended as a criticism, merely an observation. However, as the material was presented, I became aware that some of the material perhaps went into too much detail for the intended audience. This reality was manifested by the fact that I was unable to cover some of the teaching points planned for a few lessons because a bit too much information was incorporated into them. This situation was not a distractor as such, but several class sessions required finishing the

previous week's points before the new material could begin. Going forward, as the material is adapted to the new member class, appropriate editing will make certain topics more concise.

The third weakness of this project was that the beginning date of the class sessions was not optimal—an earlier start date might have been better for the small group members. As stated, the project class sessions ran from Sunday, April 10, 2016, through Sunday, June 26, 2016. This scheduling caused the class sessions to have three necessary breaks for the weekends of Mother's Day, Memorial Day, and Father's Day. Holding the group meetings on those weekends would have reduced attendance significantly based on the cultural traditions of western Kentucky and previously observed attendance patterns at MZBC. Each of the Sunday sessions following the breaks required a more lengthy review of the previous lessons that otherwise would not have occurred. In addition, starting in June, the sessions encroached upon the summer vacation schedule of several participants, resulting in a bit of flagging interest in a few cases. Beginning the classes in January might have been a better approach. Based on the 2016 MZBC calendar, a start date of Sunday, January 17, and concluding on Sunday, March 13, would have permitted the class sessions to proceed with no obligatory weekend breaks, and would have ended before Palm Sunday, March 20, which ushered in the Easter season and the public schools' spring break. An earlier start date also might have increased the participation rate of some of the younger adults, who did not commit because of the spring sports and their children's activities.

The fourth weakness addresses the venue used for the class sessions. The room chosen at MZBC was not a very accommodating for the teaching. Though the room is the largest classroom at MZBC, it is nevertheless outdated and cramped for the small group setup the sessions required. Usually only chairs are used in that location, which is typically adequate; however, the necessity of using tables to enhance class discussion and provide sufficient space for note taking caused the room to fall short of

being a creative learning environment. In addition, the ceiling-mounted video projection system, used to show the lesson PowerPoint slides, malfunctioned on a regular basis, causing unnecessary distractions for the participants and undue stress on the instructor. One option, not considered at the time, would have been to arrange the use of the far larger and more modernized seminar room at the West Union Baptist Association, of which MZBC is a part. Though it too would have had some logistical challenges and other shortcoming to consider, it was only five miles from MZBC and would likely have been available for use on Sunday evenings. A second option would have been to arrange the use of the MZBC Family Life Center (FLC). Though a large venue, currently used for morning worship and large-scale church activities, portions of the FLC could have been partitioned off and set up in a classroom-type configuration. Though the options were somewhat limited based on the current physical plant of MZBC, searching out a better location would have improved the learning experience.

The fifth weakness of this ministry project was the time allotment given to each class session. As referenced, the curriculum covered much material in some of the lessons. This fact was intensified by the amount of time devoted to each lesson. While seventy-five minutes at first seemed to be ample for teaching, it proved insufficient on many weeks. As the end of each lesson approached, the lesson plans called for a brief question and answer period to end the session, and in accordance with human nature, most of the learners were anxious to end when the allotted time period was getting close, thus fostering the necessity of cutting short or eliminating the question and answer time. While not a critical factor in the overarching success of the project, it was an element that could have been mitigated by establishing ninety minutes as the standard lesson length.

What I Would Do Differently

While not having the opportunity for a “re-do” of the project, it is nevertheless important to consider what might have been done better as a strategy for learning lessons

that may be applicable for future ministry. Based on several of the weaknesses listed, I would have approached a few things from a different angle.

First, I would have factored in more time and better communicated the importance of the congregational questionnaire used to baseline the church's knowledge of the project's subject matter. Rather than limiting the response time to two consecutive Sundays, I would have expanded that timeline to four weeks. I would also have personally visited each adult Sunday school class at MZBC to explain the purpose and importance of everyone participating in the questionnaire. This would also have permitted questions people may have had about what I was going to do with the information collected. While a thorough explanation of the questionnaire's purpose was spelled out on the paper itself (and on the church website, where it was also available), and though I spent considerable public announcement time emphasizing it, many members were still unsure about the "why" of the project and therefore did not participate.

Second, I would have scaled down the scope and sequence of certain sections of the curriculum. Based on the time factors there was simply too much material to cover in some areas. While important for Christians to know, the church history timeline feasibly could have been more concise, and I would have cut down that portion of the teaching. Further, even though it would have affected a helpful memory tool, some of the subjects linked together in one lesson would likely have been better explained in a different order. For instance, if I could do it again, I would group together the autonomy of the local church with saved church membership, not, as it was, the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of believers. Likewise, I would pair the doctrines of individual soul liberty with the separation of church and state, a more natural complementary coupling. These are ultimately judgment calls, but if I were to do the project again I would make changes of this nature that would have provided a better "flow" to the lessons. In this regard, I would have also consulted a few pastor friends who might have given insight on this matter.

Third, if I were to do the project again, I would have started the small group study earlier in the calendar year. As discussed, starting in January and ending in March (before Easter) would probably be preferable for most people in regard to a study of this nature. Changing the start date in this way would have eliminated the necessary weekend breaks of the spring, not encroached upon people's summer vacation plans, and possibly encouraged more young adults to participate since their children would be less likely to be engaged in sports and other activities during the winter months.

The fourth thing I would do differently would be to increase the time allotted for each session and change the venue to a more conducive learning environment. Upon reflection, the cramped room and unreliable media equipment likely proved to be a hindrance to having an optimal learning experience for the students. If I could do the project again, I would change the venue to a specially configured portion of the MZBC FLC and extend the class sessions to approximately ninety minutes. This change would structure the teaching as a "special event" for the participants as opposed to merely an alternative Sunday evening teaching activity. This altered format could have perhaps led to fewer group members, but would have probably enhanced the total experience of those who did take part. In addition, more feedback from the learners may have been received, which could have, in turn, offered more ideas for fine-tuning the curriculum for future use.

Fifth and finally, I would have preached a series of sermons on the Baptist heritage and distinct doctrines before I offered the small group experience. These sermons (probably on Sunday morning) would not be in the depth or detail of the teaching material, but perhaps would "whet the appetite" of learning more about the subject. Conceivably, these sermons would have increased the participation level, especially those less inclined to join an endeavor such as this.

Theological Reflections

Though knowing and understanding my identity as a Baptist Christian has been an important aspect of my life and ministry for most of my adult life, this project

reinforced its significance for me in a multitude of different ways. Though I knew intellectually what my Baptist beliefs were, the depth of research required for constructing this project led me to a more comprehensive understanding of and support for a distinctly Baptist ministry as a Christian pastor. In that light, I am more convinced than ever that it is vital for Christians in general to know and understand their godly heritage, and that Baptists in particular should not only know, but also be highly grateful for, the biblical doctrines and practices handed down to them over the centuries by their spiritual forerunners.

The Holy Scriptures indicate in numerous places that God's people should know *what* they believe as well as remember *those who went before them* in the faith. The overall thesis in this project was that the Bible teaches that believers should know and understand Christian doctrine and the people, places, and events that helped shape their spiritual heritage. As I have pondered the Scriptures that provided the foundational support for the project, I see afresh just how critical this aspect of the Christian experience is.

In Deuteronomy 4:1, Moses speaks the famous words, "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you." In essence Moses was saying, "You have heard again how God led your nation in the past, how He preserved you and prepared you, and now, building on that knowledge, understand what He wants you to do to fulfill the promises He gave to you about occupying the land." The admonitions of Moses reminds me that both history and doctrine are important touchstones in the lives of God's people. Moses was telling the people not to forget their history—to learn from both triumphs and tragedies of the past. Is this not a critical part of what is largely missing in God's church today? I believe it is, and so much more after putting together this project over the last three plus years.

Psalm 44:1 reads, “We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did in their days, In days of old.” This psalm reminded me again that the very hymns of ancient Israel taught the people that God *expected* them to remember and cherish their heritage. Should this spiritual principle carry over into the New Testament dispensation as well? I believe it should. God’s people today should revere their spiritual heritage as members of the body of Christ.

First Corinthians 10:1-11 is a text that explains how the apostle Paul used a combination of *history* and *doctrine* to instruct God’s New Testament people in the church. Recounting both righteous and unrighteous deeds of Old Testament Israel, he concludes in verse 11, “These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age” (New Living Translation). Paul further reinforces the idea that the church needs to know its spiritual history—not just to appreciate it, but in fact to *learn from it* so that its lessons may be applied to current circumstances.

In Ephesians 4:12-15, Paul says that gifted individuals (primarily pastors and teachers in a local church context) are given to the church for

the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

The ultimate lesson here is that as believers understand their Bibles and its doctrines, and more fully appreciate their spiritual history, they will be less likely to fall victim by the “wind” of false teaching. This age is overflowing with false teachers, and my research has reignited my passion as a pastor to guard my flock from doctrinal error. Part of this recommitment is simply not to shy away from or apologize for teaching Bible doctrine—and for emphasizing the importance of knowing one’s spiritual identity.

A final theological reflection directly from Scripture is found in 1 Timothy 4:1-11. Paul instructs Timothy to teach correct biblical doctrine and expose the false. The command to teach sound doctrine surely carries over into the twenty-first century church. Any pastor, teacher, or preacher of God’s truth remains under an ancient mandate to teach what is right, true, and holy. Doing this will make him “a good minister of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). In the light of historical realities, right doctrine will help Christians of the modern day church become more firmly grounded with what they believe and why they believe it. This was true in Paul and Timothy’s day, and it remains true today.

While these principles are true in the broadest sense within the professing church, this project’s focus was the *distinctive* history and doctrinal beliefs of Baptist Christians in particular. While Baptists do not deny that other Christian traditions hold to many Bible doctrines, Baptists do confidently assert that they alone (along with baptistic brethren who may not use the name “Baptist”) hold to New Testament doctrine and practice in *unique* and more *biblical* ways—ways that set Baptists apart from other Christian groups. The uniqueness of Baptist doctrinal distinctives are so great that they clearly justify—even demand—a separate identity within professing Christianity, as was presented in the teaching component of this project. Indeed, this project reinforced for me that modern-day Baptists are undeniably the *closest modern-day equivalent* to the ancient church of the New Testament era.

In reflecting on Baptist history per se, I do not believe that the historical evidence shows an “unbroken line” of baptistic churches from the time of Christ until today, as some would try to demonstrate (Landmarkism). Though, after studying the various theories of Baptist history in depth, I also cannot believe that Baptists are merely another sect of Protestantism that arose in the latter years of the Reformation, as many contemporary Baptist historians postulate.

In essence, this project reinforced my firm belief that in every age from the New Testament era until today, the church that Jesus founded has continued to exist,

according to Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18. It can be demonstrated both doctrinally and historically that there have always been in existence churches through the centuries that have held (to greater or lesser degrees) the essential New Testament beliefs and principles that most present day Baptists espouse—even though such churches were not always identified by the name “Baptist.” I am deeply saddened and troubled by the growing segment of contemporary Baptist life that seeks to minimize doctrinal issues in general and a distinct Baptist heritage in particular. This state of affairs is true almost to the degree that a distinct Baptist identity may be in danger of being lost in the coming generation, according to several prominent Baptist leaders.

In contrast to that current state of affairs, my theological reflections conclude with the assertion that Baptists do indeed have a unique history, which gives them the right and obligation to declare a distinct identity among the various Christian traditions. It is therefore incumbent on Baptist leaders to teach their distinctive principles and history to their congregations. For without such teaching, this distinguished separate identity cannot be sustained. Quoting John Broadus again,

The people who allow themselves to be called Baptists differ widely from large portions of the Christian world, and are persuaded that their own views are more scriptural, more in accordance with the Saviour's commands. They must therefore feel themselves required to teach these things as well as others.³

Broadus's philosophy summarizes the motivation and passion with which I have approached this project.

Personal Reflections

The journey of seeking the Doctor of Educational Ministry (D.Ed.Min.) degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has been both highly challenging and highly rewarding. It has been challenging in the sense that the studies, classroom opportunities, depth of research required, and hours upon hours of writing have been almost overwhelming on occasion—especially when superimposed upon the responsibilities of

³Broadus, *The Duty of Baptists*, 5-6.

serving as a senior pastor. At several junctures since starting the program in November 2013, it seemed as if discontinuing my studies was the wisest course. There were many occasions when conflicting priorities of seminary studies and pastoral responsibilities came into vigorous conflict. To God be the glory, there always seemed to be way through the struggles. Now, I am reaching the culmination of my doctoral studies.

In this regard, I praise God for His grace, which He promised would be sufficient for every need (2 Cor 12:9)—and it has! After the Lord Himself, I give great credit to my beloved wife, Eve, who inspired and encouraged me to stay with it through the uncertain times. As always, she came through for me! I love you, Eve! Furthermore, the staff, deacons, and congregation of MZBC have been extremely patient, supportive, and encouraging as I have sought to balance doctoral studies with my calling as their senior pastor. Thank you, MZBC!

To say that the pursuit of these studies has been a blessing and a joy would be an understatement. From the very beginning, I have been impressed with the strong biblical foundations that undergird The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The professors and faculty supervisor, under whom I studied and learned, are gifted and committed men of God, seeking excellence in academics and spiritual leadership. Their heart for local church ministry is evident, and I appreciate the personal guidance and counsel I received from these men. I respect them as leaders who desire to make beautiful the bride of Christ, and I am honored to call them mentors and friends. Much the same can be said of several of my fellow students in the D.Ed.Min. program. I cherish the many new friendships made, and I pray God's best upon each of them as they seek to expand the kingdom of God in various ministries across the nation and the world.

This ministry project has truly been an encouraging and fulfilling experience, despite the long hours of research and writing. Researching, compiling, developing, and publishing a curriculum such as that produced for this project has been in my mind for many years. The subject matter of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives is close to

my heart, especially in light of the (sad) fact (referred to often in these pages) that many Baptist pastors and leaders are either knowingly or unknowingly neglecting to understand, appreciate, and pass on the glorious heritage of Baptist followers of Christ.

As a result of the intense investigation of this topic in the course of developing this project, my knowledge and appreciation of my Baptist heritage in the church of Jesus Christ has been reinforced. Furthermore, my commitment to teach and pass this heritage on to my fellow Baptists has been renewed. I look forward to developing the new member curriculum at MZBC, which will incorporate much of the material gathered and codified for this project. Moreover, I have a renewed spirit to prioritize doctrinal preaching and teaching in general as I conduct my pastoral ministry for the glory of Christ and His church.

Conclusion

Biblically speaking, God's people need to know who they are, what they believe, and whence they came. This ministry project has reinforced my comprehension of who Baptists are, and why understanding, appreciating, and teaching this unique heritage is vital to maintaining a continuing Baptist witness to coming generations. Baptists are unique Christians, both in their history and in the unique "package" of beliefs that define them. In profound ways, this ministry project has challenged my heart and inspired me to help my fellow Baptists know and appreciate their godly and glorious heritage.

In the coming years, as MZBC grows and moves into the future, it is my prayer that the teaching of the "Being Baptist" small group study, elements of it that will be incorporated into the new member class, and various doctrinal sermons that will proceed from the inspiration obtained through my research for this project will produce abundant spiritual fruit. I pray that fellow Baptists will never become haughty or proud in proclaiming their Baptist identity, and that they will always recognize that committed, obedient Christians are to be found in virtually all Christian traditions. Yet, I nonetheless

pray that Baptists—both at MZBC and in general—will always be ready to humbly, yet boldly, embrace their heritage as the Baptist people of God. Initial indications observed at the conclusion of the project seem to confirm that these things will be so at MZBC, with God as our Help.

In concluding this project, I am compelled to offer a debt of gratitude to the multitudes of men and women through the ages who have handed down this heritage that we Baptists so boldly proclaim. From the time of Christ and the apostles; through the early days of the ancient church; into the centuries of persecution when the blood of martyrs flowed, even from those claiming the name of Christ; on through the days of the dissenters and non-conformists to state-controlled religion, and toward the years that finally saw them gain a common name; a steady stream of believers, not always perfect or complete in every way, but always faithful to New Testament teaching as they understood it, who passed down the glorious heritage we call “Baptist.” In spite of dungeon, fire, sword, ridicule, and abandonment they carried on the mantle of the church that Jesus said He would build. Most of these millions of Baptist ancestors remain mostly unknown to history—but fully known to heaven. To these who went before us, my fellow Baptists and I give honor and thanks for passing the torch of truth down through the ages. We receive it joyfully, and I pray that we will have the foresight and courage to pass it to the next generation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Soli Deo Gloria!

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CONGREGATIONAL
KNOWLEDGE OF BAPTIST HISTORY AND
DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

The purpose of this questionnaire is to establish the congregation's current level of knowledge on the origin, identity, and basic doctrinal distinctives of Baptist churches. Before the teaching curriculum is established, this questionnaire will be distributed to the congregation on two consecutive Sunday morning worship services (as well as available on the MZBC website), with instructions on how to complete and return it. The questionnaire contains multiple choice questions, perspective questions (agree/disagree), and opportunities to provide additional comments. It also asks the participants about their personal level of interest in participating in a small group study of Baptist history and doctrine.

The results of the questionnaire will provide a baseline of information concerning the congregation's aggregate knowledge of their Baptist heritage and identity and provide a reference point from which to build a proper curriculum. The congregational questionnaire will also provide pertinent demographic data that will be used in establishing an appropriate small study group in which to teach the curriculum when it is developed. The questionnaire will be administered again at the end of the teaching to select individuals in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the congregation-wide curriculum.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CONGREGATIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

Agreement to participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge of Baptist history and the distinctive biblical doctrines to which Baptists hold. This research is being conducted by Wes Conner for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions that will help determine the current collective level of knowledge of our congregation on the stated subject matter. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your response. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this project.

Directions: Please answer the following questions as directed.

Personal Information (*For statistical data only*)

(Please Circle the Correct Response)

Age: 18-25 • 26-35 • 36-45 • 46-55 • 56-65 • Over 65

Sex: M F

Education: HS Grad (Incl. GED) • Some College • College Grad • Master's Degree or Higher

Survey Questions

(Please Place a Check or an X on the Line Beside the Correct Response)

Baptist History

1. What is the *main* belief for which Baptists have been known throughout history?
☐ a. The Bible is the sole source of belief and practice
☐ b. The pre-tribulational return of Christ
☐ c. The Lord's Supper is only for members of the local church that is serving it
☐ d. Children must wait until age 12 before they can be baptized
2. In which country was the first local church that bore the actual name "Baptist"?
☐ a. Egypt
☐ b. France
☐ c. Germany
☐ d. England
3. Which one of the following Christian leaders from history was a Baptist?
☐ a. John Calvin
☐ b. Charles Haddon Spurgeon
☐ c. Dwight L. Moody
☐ d. John Wesley

4. In which state was the first Baptist church in America founded?
- ☐ a. Virginia
 - ☐ b. Pennsylvania
 - ☐ c. Kentucky
 - ☐ d. Rhode Island
5. Which of the following groups is NOT a real present-day Baptist organization?
- ☐ a. Baptist Bible Fellowship
 - ☐ b. Southern Baptist Convention
 - ☐ c. Northern Baptist Convention
 - ☐ d. General Association of Regular Baptist Churches

Baptist Doctrinal Distinctives

6. What are the distinct church offices of a Baptist congregation?
- ☐ a. Pastors, Deacons, and Trustees
 - ☐ b. Pastors and Deacons
 - ☐ c. Pastors, Deacons, and Elders
 - ☐ d. Pastors, Deacons, and Board Members
7. What are the practices of baptism and communion called in a Baptist church?
- ☐ a. Sacraments
 - ☐ b. Church Commands
 - ☐ c. Baptist Rites
 - ☐ d. Ordinances
8. What is the correct name for the type of church government Baptist churches have historically followed?
- ☐ a. Congregational
 - ☐ b. Pastoral
 - ☐ c. Democratic
 - ☐ d. Representative
9. Baptists have historically stood for the doctrine of the autonomy of the local church. What does “autonomy” mean?
- ☐ a. Spirit-filled
 - ☐ b. Supported only by tithes and offerings
 - ☐ c. Independence
 - ☐ d. Practices baptism only by immersion
10. Which of the following distinctive beliefs have Baptists *always* stood for throughout history?
- ☐ a. The King James Version of the Bible
 - ☐ b. The importance of Sunday School
 - ☐ c. The unity of the Baptist Church
 - ☐ d. The separation of church and state

Your Perspective

Please give your opinion of the following statements using this scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

11. It is important for Christians of today to have a basic knowledge of church history.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

12. Most Baptists do NOT know much about the history of their Baptist ancestors.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

13. Baptist Christians hold to some important Bible doctrines that other Christian churches and traditions do not think are important.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

14. As a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, I believe it is important for me to be able to explain to others why I have chosen to be a Baptist follower of Christ and not belong to another denomination of Christians.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

15. I believe a concentrated study of biblical doctrine is important in the life of a Christian.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

In the space below, please add any personal thoughts that you may have regarding the importance or lack of importance in knowing about Baptist history and doctrine. Your comments will remain anonymous, so please be as thoughtful and honest as you can.

Final Request

Would you be willing to participate in a small group discipleship study on Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives (your schedule permitting)?

Please circle one. YES NO

Please select a four-digit personal identification code known only to you:

(This code is used for statistical analysis only. It will remain confidential unless you choose to reveal it.)

This completes the Questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The Curriculum Evaluation Rubric is a tool used to evaluate the scriptural integrity and overall clarity of the lessons developed on Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. A draft of the curriculum will be presented to a panel of four trusted pastors and educators for their assessment and comments about the curriculum. The results obtained from this rubric will be used to appropriately edit and refine the curriculum.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Instructions: Please use the following evaluation tool with the scale provided to assess each aspect of the Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives curriculum presented to you. Your honest input is necessary for the successful completion of this ministry project. Please add as many comments as you feel are necessary to give appropriate feedback in each area evaluated. Use the back of this sheet or extra paper if necessary, but please indicate which specific area on which you are commenting.

Baptist History and Doctrinal Distinctives					
Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum is clearly relevant to the topic of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives.					
The material is biblical.					
The material is theologically consistent.					
The thesis and aim of each lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of each lesson clearly support the thesis and aim.					
Each lesson contains points of practical application to the Christian life.					
Each lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the curriculum is clear and understandable.					

APPENDIX 3

SMALL GROUP SURVEY ON BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

At the opening session of the small study group, the participants will complete the Small Group Survey on Baptist History and Doctrinal Distinctives. This survey will assess their understanding of Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives on a deeper level than the congregational questionnaire and focus on the actual content of the established curriculum. The survey will serve as a data baseline of knowledge for the individuals actually participating in the course of instruction. After the completion of the study, the same survey will be administered again in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the small group curriculum.

SMALL GROUP SURVEY ON BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

Agreement to participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge of Baptist history and the distinctive biblical doctrines to which Baptists hold. This research is being conducted by Wes Conner for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions that will help determine the current collective level of knowledge of our congregation on the stated subject matter. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your response. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this project.

Directions: Please answer the following questions as directed.

Personal Information (*For statistical data only*)

(Please Circle the Correct Response)

Age: 18-25 • 26-35 • 36-45 • 46-55 • 56-65 • Over 65

Sex: M F

Education: H.S. Grad (Incl. GED) • Some College • College Grad • Master's Degree or Higher

Baptist History

(Please Place a Check or an X in the Line Beside the Correct Response)

1. What is of the following is a NOT a recognized school of thought on the origin of Baptist churches?
 - ☐ a. John the Baptist started Baptist churches
 - ☐ b. Baptist churches originated during the Protestant Reformation
 - ☐ c. Baptist churches began during the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine
 - ☐ d. Baptist churches are part of the Anabaptist Movement
2. Who was the first Roman Emperor that officially persecuted the Christian church?
 - ☐ a. Nero
 - ☐ b. Trajan
 - ☐ c. Augustus
 - ☐ d. Marcus
3. When did the Roman Catholic Church begin?
 - ☐ a. In the New Testament with Peter
 - ☐ b. AD 505
 - ☐ c. AD 325
 - ☐ d. AD 1054

4. Which of the following groups do many Baptist historians believe were spiritual ancestors of modern-day Baptists?
- ☐ a. Arians, Gnostics, and Pedobaptists
 - ☐ b. Grecos, Romanists, and Petrograds
 - ☐ c. Coptics, Moors, and Ottomans
 - ☐ d. Montanists, Novations, and Donatists
5. What does the term “Anabaptist” mean?
- ☐ a. Re-baptize
 - ☐ b. Persecute Baptists
 - ☐ c. Restore water baptism
 - ☐ d. Reconcile with Baptists
6. In general terms, modern Baptists can trace a *spiritual* lineage back to the churches of the New Testament.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
7. The Apostle Peter was the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
8. Martin Luther had a special love for those who identified themselves as Baptists or Anabaptists.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
9. The First Baptist Church in America was founded by Richard Smith in Georgia in 1638.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
10. The early American Baptists were often persecuted by the colonial governments.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False

Baptist Doctrinal Distinctives

11. What doctrine do Baptist churches and the Presbyterian Church usually have in common?
- ☐ a. Eternal Security
 - ☐ b. Christening of infants
 - ☐ c. Local church autonomy
 - ☐ d. A board of elders
12. What does the Greek word *baptizo* literally mean?
- ☐ a. To serve bread and wine
 - ☐ b. To stand for truth
 - ☐ c. To dip, plunge, or immerse
 - ☐ d. To give a command

13. When Baptists say that they believe in the priesthood of all believers, they mean what?
- ☐ a. Christians will be allowed to offer animal sacrifices in the Millennium
 - ☐ b. All Christians have the right and responsibility to go directly to God in prayer
 - ☐ c. Christians must confess their sins to each other
 - ☐ d. All Christians have the right to be ordained
14. What does “believer’s baptism” mean?
- ☐ a. One must join the church before baptism
 - ☐ b. One must learn certain beliefs before baptism
 - ☐ c. Only another believer is allowed to baptize someone
 - ☐ d. Only those who profess Christ are proper candidates for baptism.
15. The three ways Baptist churches typically receive new members are: baptism, transfer of membership (letter), and what?
- ☐ a. Statement of faith
 - ☐ b. Rededication
 - ☐ c. Renewal
 - ☐ d. Holy unction
16. Paul Bunyan wrote the Christian classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1678.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
17. Baptist evangelist Billy Graham has preached the gospel to more people than probably any person in history.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
18. Nineteenth century Baptist Pastor Charles Spurgeon was a committed Arminian.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
19. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is the only Christian denomination in history to revert to conservative doctrine after it had drifted into theological liberalism.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False
20. Not counting independent and non-affiliated Baptist churches, there are over 60 Baptist groups, fellowships, associations, and conventions in the USA.
- ☐ a. True
 - ☐ b. False

Your Perspective

Please give your opinion of the following statements using this scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

21. According to some church historians, Baptist Christians should not technically be referred to as "Protestants."

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

22. Baptist churches are by-and-large the closest modern-day descendants (in terms of doctrine and polity) of the churches of the New Testament era.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

23. New Christians should go through a new member's class and a "waiting period" before being baptized in order to prove their faith is genuine.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

24. Disagreements over Bible doctrine should never be a reason for Christians to separate from one another.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

25. It is wrong for Baptist churches *not* to use the title "Baptist" in their church name.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment (if desired):

End of Course Only

In the space below, please give a brief evaluation of the teaching you have received on Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. For example: Did it help increase your knowledge of the subject? Was the instruction practical? Do you believe it helped you grow in your walk with the Lord? If so, in what way? Please add any personal thoughts that you may have regarding the course of study. Your comments will remain anonymous, so please be as thoughtful and honest as you can.

Please select a four-digit personal identification code known only to you:
(This code is used for statistical analysis only. It will remain confidential unless you choose to reveal it.)

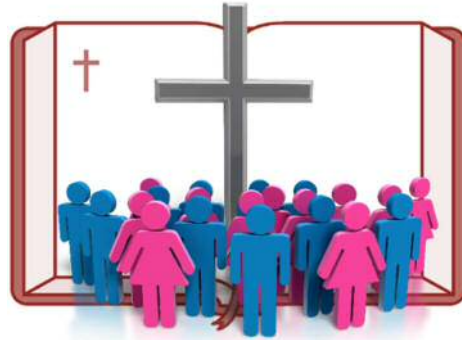
This completes the Survey. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX 4

SMALL GROUP STUDY SCHEDULE, GROUP MEMBER EXPECTATIONS, AND STUDENT OUTLINES

The following materials constitute the handouts received by each participant in the small group study, “Being Baptist.” This appendix includes the actual study class schedule, the written guidelines with which each group member was asked to comply, and the student outlines given out at each teaching session. NOTE: There was no student outline for Session 9, which was used for a final question and answer time and the administration of the post-study small group survey (see appendix 3).

Being Baptist



PROPOSED COURSE SCHEDULE

Classes Meet Sunday, 6 PM, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Room 106

SESSION 1/April 10: Course Orientation & Overview

PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS

SESSION 2 / April 17: Pre-Test & "The B-I-B-L-E, Yes that's the Book for Me"

Biblical Authority & the Lordship of Christ

SESSION 3 / April 24: "You're Not the Boss of Me"

Autonomy of the Local Church & Priesthood of Believers

SESSION 4 / May 1: "Down by the Riverside and at the Table"

Two Ordinances: Baptism & Communion

NO SESSION / May 8: Mother's Day

SESSION 5 / May 15: "In Christ Alone"

Individual Soul Liberty & Saved Membership

SESSION 6 / May 22: "Three's a Crowd"

Two Offices: Pastors/Deacons & Separation of Church & State

NO SESSION / May 29: Memorial Day Weekend

PART 2: THE BAPTIST DISTINGUISHED HERITAGE

SESSION 7 / June 5: "Who Are These People?"

Baptists Throughout Church History (Part 1)

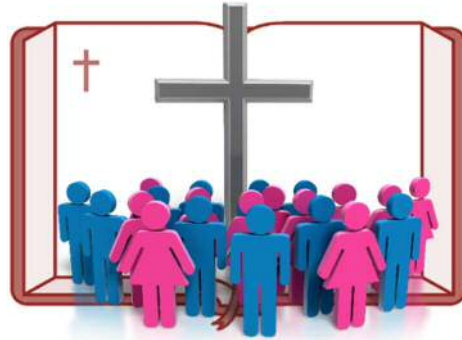
SESSION 8 / June 12: "Baptists as 'Baptists'"

Baptists Throughout Church History (Part 2)

NO SESSION / June 19: Father's Day

SESSION 9 / June 26: Course Wrap-Up & Post-Test

Being Baptist



GROUP MEMBER EXPECTATIONS

This small group study will offer an overview of the distinctive doctrines that identify us as Baptist Christians. It will also provide a summary of Baptist history, helping us develop a better appreciation for our Baptist heritage. After taking this course of study you will be able to better answer anyone who asks you the question, "Why are you a Baptist?" This study is offered as part of Senior Pastor Wes Conner's work toward his doctor's degree in ministry from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville). Results gathered from these lessons will help incorporate some of the course material into a new member's class for Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

As a participant in this study, we ask that you graciously commit to the following guidelines and make every effort to complete the study.

1. Attend every session if at all possible.

We will not hold class on Mother's Day, Memorial Day Weekend, or Father's Day so that you may enjoy those times with family. But please be in class on time every other week (unless there is an obvious reason to miss, such as sickness or work schedule conflicts.)

2. If you have to miss a session, please make it up by watching the video.

Every class will be videotaped and then posted weekly on our church website (mtzionpaduch.org).

3. Bring a Bible with you each week.

Much of the teaching material will be based on various Bible passages, so you will need to have a Bible with you in order to follow along with the lessons.

4. Plan to take a few notes in each class.

We want this to be a thoughtful learning experience, and encourage you to take in the important material. Student outlines/note-taking material will be provided each week. Having a small notebook or folder would be helpful for you to keep track of your notes and other class handouts. In addition, the pre-test given to you as part of Lesson 1 will be given again as a post-test at the end of the course to determine the effectiveness of the lessons. Notes taken throughout the lessons will assist you in completing the post-test.

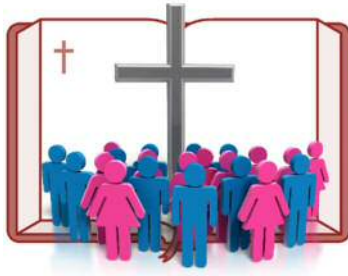
5. Please ask questions and contribute to discussions as you feel led.

These lessons are not intended to be “lectures”—but rather as interactive Bible studies. Do not be shy about asking for clarifications or for further information on any topic we discuss. Furthermore, feel free to share insights and observations from your own life experiences that may others better understand the issues presented.

6. Pray for God's guidance, favor, and blessings on our weekly sessions together.

Without the Lord blessings, our efforts are always in vain!

Being Baptist



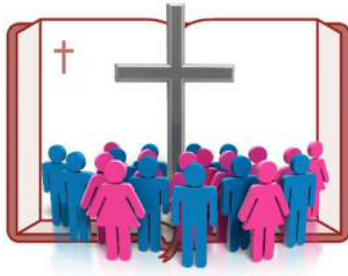
Session 1

Course Orientation & Overview

- **WELCOME & GETTING ACQUAINTED**
- **INTRODUCTION**
 - Course Context
 - Rationale: Why This Class?
 - Biblical Commands to Know Who We Are
 - General Loss of Baptist Identity Nationwide
 - Results of Congregational Baptist Questionnaire
 - Basic Understanding of Subject—Not Exhaustive Study
- **PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES** (*See "Group Member Expectations"*)
- **TWO MAJOR DIVISIONS OF STUDY**
 - The Baptist Doctrinal Hallmarks: "What Makes Baptists Unique?"
 - Many Doctrines in Common with Other Christian Traditions
 - Distinct Doctrines that "Mark" Baptists
 - Use of Acrostic: B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S

- The Baptist Distinguished Heritage: "How Do We Trace Baptist History?"
 - Several Theories of Baptist History
 - History of Baptists Before They Were "Baptists"
 - More Clearly Defined Historical Trace & Baptists Today
- **CALENDAR OF EVENTS** (*See "Proposed Course Schedule"*)
- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW OF PRE-TEST & SESSION 2**

Being Baptist



Session 2

“THE B-I-B-L-E, YES THAT’S THE BOOK FOR ME” Biblical Authority & The Lordship of Christ

- **WELCOME & REVIEW OF SESSION 1**
- **COURSE PRE-TEST**
- **INTRODUCTION TO PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS**
 - What Are Distinctives?
 - What Are Baptist Distinctives?
 - B – Biblical Authority & The Lordship of Christ
 - A – Autonomy of the Local Church
 - P – Priesthood of Believers
 - T – Two Ordinances: Baptism & Communion
 - I – Individual Soul Liberty
 - S – Saved Church Membership
 - T – Two Offices: Pastors & Deacons
 - S – Separation of Church & State
 - Proper Baptist Attitude to Others Regarding Doctrinal Differences

- **FIRST DISTINCTIVE: “B” = BIBLICAL AUTHORITY & THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST**

- Meaning of Biblical Authority
 - Key Reference: 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Various Sources of Authority for Churches
- How Baptists Differ from Other Christian Traditions

QUOTABLE QUOTE: “The most prominent basis for religious authority within Baptist distinctives is the Bible. Along with other Christian denominations, Baptists appeal to the Bible as their ultimate, or sole, source for theology. Baptists distance themselves from others, however, by claiming a complete dependence upon Scripture as the principle foundation for belief and practice. Whereas other Christian groups incorporate sources for religious authority such as tradition and experience, Baptists ... contend that they alone consistently regard the Bible their religious authority” (John Q. Adams, *Baptists the Only Thorough Religious Reformers*, 1858).

- Divine Authority of the Bible
 - Inspired (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)
 - Inerrant & Infallible (Ps. 119:89; Mt. 5:18; Jn. 10:35; Rev. 22:18-19)
- Divine Content of the Bible
 - Source of Salvation (Jn. 5:39; Jn. 20:30-31; Rom. 1:16, 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15)
 - Sufficient for Faith & Practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - Standard for Church Conduct (1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)
- Meaning of the Lordship of Christ
 - Key Reference: Philippians 2:9-11

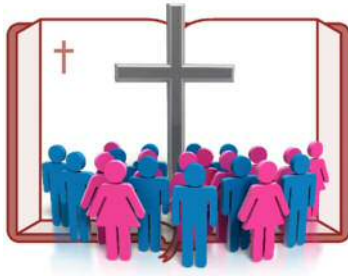
QUOTABLE QUOTE: “The basic principle of our faith and life as Christians is loyalty to Jesus Christ as our sovereign Lord. As Baptists, whose sole and only

Lord is the Saviour, we need to go on record in our own hearts and before the world as claiming no other right to be heard except on the basis of our loyalty to Him" (T. D. Brown, *Re-Thinking Baptist Doctrines*, 1937)

- "The Scarlet Thread" of Scripture (Lk. 24:25-27; Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:21-23)

- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW OF SESSION 3**

Being Baptist



Session 3

“YOU’RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME”

Autonomy of the Local Church & Priesthood of Believers

- **WELCOME & BRIEF REVIEW**
- **PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS (Continued)**
 - The Baptist Distinctives
 - B – Biblical Authority & The Lordship of Christ
 - A – Autonomy of the Local Church
 - P – Priesthood of Believers
 - T – Two Ordinances: Baptism & Communion
 - I – Individual Soul Liberty
 - S – Saved Church Membership
 - T – Two Offices: Pastors & Deacons
 - S – Separation of Church & State
- **SECOND DISTINCTIVE: “A” = AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**
 - Meaning of Local Church Autonomy
 - Key Reference: 1 Timothy 3:15
 - Description: Each local Baptist church is independent or sovereign in and of itself.

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "Each local Baptist church is an independent unit, responsible to no one but Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, transacting its own business, ordaining and instituting its own programs, determining its own voluntary course of cooperation and fellowship with other churches and organizations, and deferring to no higher earthly court of appeals than itself" (Virgil W. Bopp, *Confidently Committed: A Look at the Baptist Heritage*, 1987).

➤ What Constitutes a Baptist Church?

- Good Characterization: A Baptist Church = New Testament Church
- Christ: The Only Head (Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 3:20-21; Col. 1:18)

➤ Forms of Church Government (Polity)

- Hierarchical/Episcopal
- Presbyterianism
- Congregationalism
 - Voluntary Cooperation
 - Equality of Membership

➤ Importance of Local Church Autonomy

- No Outside Control
 - "Baptist churches" vs. "The Baptist Church" (Acts 16:5 + 35 NT verses)
- Final Authority in Disputes (Acts 15; Gal. 2:2)
- Elects Own Officers/Leaders (Acts 6:1-7; Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23, 20:17)
- Directs Own Missions & Evangelism Priorities (Acts 13:1-4; 14:26-27)
- Final Authority in Church Discipline (Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Thess. 3:14-15)

• **THIRD DISTINCTIVE: "P" = PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS**

➤ Meaning of Priesthood of Believers

- Key Reference: 1 Peter 2:5, 9
 - Description: Every Christian has direct access to God through Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), and the sole mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).
 - What the Priesthood of Believers Signifies & What It Does Not Signify
- The New Testament Teaching (Mt. 27:51; Rev. 1:5-6)
 - The New Testament Application
 - Direct Access to God (Heb. 4:16)
 - Equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28)
 - Offering Sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1)
 - Representing God to Man & Man to God (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:1)

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "The priesthood of all believers has far-reaching consequences for every Baptist. It means that none of us can be a spectator who sits back while others carry on the work of the church. Nor should any of us be willing to forfeit our responsibilities as ministers and expect the pastor to fulfill them for us" (Jeffery D. Jones, *We Are Baptists*, 2001).

- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW OF SESSION 4**

Being Baptist



Session 4

“DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE AND AT THE TABLE”

Two Ordinances: Baptism & Communion

- **WELCOME & BRIEF REVIEW**
- **PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS (Continued)**
- **FOURTH DISTINCTIVE: “T” = TWO ORDINANCES (BAPTISM & COMMUNION)**
 - “Ordinance” vs. “Sacrament”
- **BELIEVER’S BAPTISM**
 - Meaning of Baptism
 - Key Reference: Matthew 28:18-20
 - Description: The Bible teaches “believer’s baptism”—the immersion in water of people capable of making a conscious decision to trust Christ. Though baptism is not essential for salvation, it is commanded in Scripture as a step of godly obedience and necessary for membership in a local New Testament church.

QUOTABLE QUOTE: “In a very real sense, baptism is what makes Baptists Baptists. At least it is the characteristic first noticed and by which we got our name. We baptize in a different way and at a different time than many other Christian groups do. We baptize people who are old enough to understand what following Jesus Christ means and when they make such a commitment. When

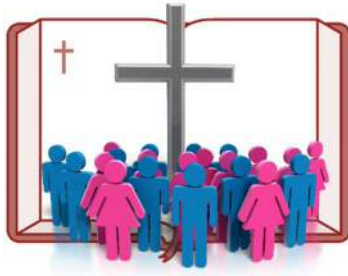
Baptists baptize... they immerse the person in water" (Jeffery D. Jones, *We Are Baptists*, 2001).

- History of New Testament Baptism (Mt. 3:1-6; Lk. 16:16; Acts 1:21-22; Mt. 3:13; Jn. 3:22, 4:1-4; Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-41, etc.)
- Purposes of Baptism
 - For Believers Only (Acts 8:35-39; 10:47)
 - Public Profession of Faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41)
 - Depiction of the Gospel Message (Rom. 6:3-5; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4)
 - Symbolizes New Life in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13 [Spirit baptism]; Acts 19:5 [water baptism])
- Proper Mode of Baptism
 - Definition of New Testament "Baptizo"
 - Proper Meaning of the Act (Acts 6:3-4)
 - Context of Many Scriptures (Mt. 3:16; Jn. 3:23; Acts 8:38)
- Results of Baptism
 - Obedience to God's Word (Cf. Mt. 28:19 & Jn. 14:15)
 - Identification with God's People (Acts 2:41-42)
- Authority to Baptize: The Local Church (Mt. 16:18→Mt. 28:19-20→Eph. 1:22→1 Tim. 3:15)
- **COMMUNION / THE LORD'S SUPPER**
 - Meaning of Communion
 - Key Reference: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 - Description: Communion (or The Lord's Supper) is a symbolic meal using the common elements of bread and the fruit of the vine to memorialize the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and, thus, remind believers of His sacrifice for their sins.

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "Like baptism, the Lord's Supper is not regarded by Baptists as a sacrament. It does not save, it does not help to save, nor does it impart any of God's grace to the soul. It is a memorial supper—pure and simple. We are commanded to use it to remember Christ's death until He comes again" (Steuart McBirnie, *Instruction in the Baptist Faith*, 1955).

- What Communion Is Not: Sacrament / Transubstantiation / Consubstantiation
- What Communion Is: Memorial Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26) / Command (1 Cor. 11:24-25: "do")
- Purposes of Communion
 - Remembrance of the Person of Christ (1 Cor. 11:24-25: "*in remembrance of Me*")
 - Covenant Sign of the New Testament (Mt. 26:28, Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25)
 - Display of the Sacrificial Death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26)
 - Time of Worship & Fellowship for Christ's Church (Acts 2:46-47; 1 Cor. 10:17)
- Final Observations on Communion
 - Elements? • Participants? • Frequency? • Open, Closed, or Close?
- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW SESSION 5 / NO CLASS NEXT WEEK (Happy Mother's Day)**

Being Baptist



Session 5

“IN CHRIST ALONE”

Individual Soul Liberty & Saved Membership

- **WELCOME & BRIEF REVIEW**
- **PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS (Continued)**
- **FIFTH DISTINCTIVE: “I” = INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY**
 - Meaning of Individual Soul Liberty (Soul Competency)
 - Key Reference: 1 John 2:27
 - Description: Every individual has the God-given liberty to choose what his conscience or soul dictates is right, as long as it does bring harm or interfere with the rights of others, and is responsible to God alone for his choices. Matters of conscience are not to be forced on any person against his will.
 - Biblical Doctrine of Soul Liberty
 - Humans Created as Individuals (Gen. 1:27-28, 3:20)
 - God Ministers to Christians as Individuals (Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 12:7; Rom. 12:3-5)
 - Men & Women Choose as Individuals (Rom. 12:1-2, 14:5; Acts 17:11)

- Men & Women Are Taught as Individuals (1 Jn. 2:27; Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:15)
- God Sees Us as Individuals (Acts 10:34; Rom. 10:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Mt. 23:8-12)
- God Judges Individuals (Unsaved: Rev. 20:11-15 • Saved: 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)

➤ Practical Implications of Soul Liberty

- Freedom to Worship & Serve God Without Coercion
 - Foundation of Religious Liberty & Separation of Church & State
- Freedom to Disagree Without Fear of Reprisal or Punishment
- Each Person Is Ultimately Responsible to God for His Choices (Rom. 4:12)

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "The [individual] soul...is answerable to God alone in the ultimate analysis... A true understanding of soul competency rests upon the freedom to reject or to accept God and his revelation...The true Baptist is tolerant of others from the very nature of the case. What he claims for himself he accords to them..." (R. Stanton Norman, *More than Just a Name*, 2001).

➤ Two Cautions Regarding Individual Soul Liberty

- Not All Individual Choices are "Right" (Pr. 14:12; Jn. 17:17; Rom. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:15)
 - "Postmodernism" • "All Roads Lead to God" • "What Works for You"
- Harm to Others in the Name of Soul Liberty Is Unacceptable
 - Example: Radical Islam

• **SIXTH DISTINCTIVE: "S" = SAVED MEMBERSHIP**

➤ Meaning of Saved Membership

- Key Reference: Acts 2:41-47
- Description: Saved church membership (also called regenerate church membership) means that membership in a New Testament

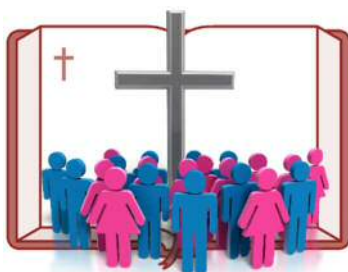
local church consists only of those individuals who have openly and consciously confessed Jesus Christ as Savior. This act of faith is followed by believer's baptism (by immersion), which is both a symbolic representation of being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at salvation as well as the public rite of local church membership.

- Two Biblical Meanings of "Church" (Ecclesia / Greek ἐκκλησία)
 - Universal Body of Christ (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23)
 - Local Congregation of Believers (Acts 13:1, 16:5, etc.)
- Does the New Testament Teach Church "Membership"?
 - Three-Fold Progression of Acts 2:41 ("received" ... "baptized" ... "added")
 - N.T. Saints Continued to Be "Added" to the Church (Acts 2:47, 5:14, 11:24)
 - Every Context of a Local Church in the N.T. Indicates "Saved Membership"

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "The biblical basis for seeing the church as composed exclusively of believers is so strong and obvious that the difficulty is in seeing how this idea was ever obscured... This principle of a regenerated Church membership, more than anything else, marks our [Baptist] distinctiveness in the Christian world today" (John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 2005).

- Views of Church Membership that Do Not Follow the New Testament Pattern
 - Catholicism • Protestantism • "Open" Membership-ism
- The Importance of Local Church Membership
- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW SESSION 6**

Being Baptist



Session 6

"THREE'S A CROWD"

Two Offices: Pastors & Deacons • Separation of Church & State

- **WELCOME & BRIEF REVIEW**
- **PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS (Continued)**
- **THE SEVENTH DISTINCTIVE: "T" = TWO OFFICES: PASTORS & DEACONS**
 - Meaning of Two Offices
 - Key Reference: Philippians 1:1
 - Description: Pastors (also called bishops and elders) and deacons are the two offices the Bible recognizes in a local church. Both are chosen by the congregation. Other church leaders are necessary but must not be equated with these two offices.
 - "Three's a Crowd": Biblically, there is the office of pastor/elder/bishop and the office of deacon, but there is no "third church office" sanctioned in the New Testament.
- **THE OFFICE OF PASTOR**
 - Description of a Pastor
 - Pastor = One Who Feeds/Nourishes ("Feeding") (Eph. 4:11-2; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)

- Bishop = One Who Administrates/Oversees ("Leading") (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9)
- Elder = One Who Is Wise/Mature ("Heeding") (1 Tim. 5:17-19; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)
- Qualifications of a Pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 15-9)
 - Role
 - Reputation
 - Relationships
 - Requirements
 - Responsibilities
- Acknowledgement of a Pastor (1 Tim. 5:17-19; Jas. 5:14; Heb. 13:7, 17)
- **THE OFFICE OF DEACON**
 - Description of a Deacon (Acts 6:1-7)
 - Qualifications of a Deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13)
 - Role
 - Reputation
 - Relationships
 - Requirements
 - Responsibilities
 - Acknowledgement of a Deacon (Acts 6:3, 7; 1 Tim. 3:13)

• **WHO CHOOSES THE OFFICERS OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?**

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "When the pastor and deacon body work in unison for the advancement of the kingdom, God is honored and His hand of blessing is apparent through unity, fellowship, and... baptisms. His will is accomplished, and the church is advanced forcefully against the darkness of evil" (Byron McWilliams, *Upon This Rock: The Baptist Understanding of the Church*, 2010).

• **EIGHTH DISTINCTIVE: "S" = SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE**

- Meaning of Separation of Church & State
 - Key Reference: Matthew 22:21
 - Description: The separation of church and state (also referred to as religious liberty) means there should be no official union of God's

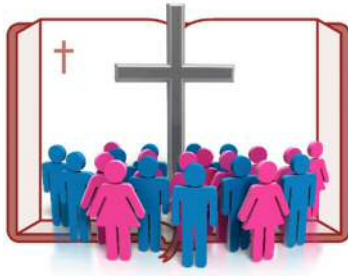
church and human government, but the government should protect the rights of the church to practice its faith.

- “Three’s a Crowd”: Biblically, there is the state and there is the church, but there is no “state-church” sanctioned in the New Testament.
- God Established Government (Gen. 9:1-7; Rom. 13:1-2) & the Church (Mt. 16:18)
- God's Ideal: Church & Government in Supporting Roles (“*A Free Church in a Free State*”)
 - Government: Peace & Safety (Acts 13-16; Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:13-14)
 - Church: Positive Social Order (Eph. 4:24-32; 1 Pet. 2:11-17)
 - Christian Duties to the State
 - Support (Rom. 13:1-7)
 - Submission (Tit. 3:1) (Exception Clause: Acts 4:19-20; 5:29)
 - Supplication (1 Tim. 2:1-6)
- Violations of the Biblical Principle & the Baptist Struggle

QUOTABLE QUOTE: “Early Baptists had to struggle against both tradition and established laws governing religious expression in order to worship and believe as their conscience directed them. Therefore, from their earliest origins, Baptists have... deeply cherished and fiercely asserted... religious freedom” (Everett Goodwin, *Down by the Riverside: A Brief History of Baptist Faith*, 2002).

- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW SESSION 7 / NO CLASS NEXT WEEK (Memorial Day Weekend)**

Being Baptist



Session 7

“WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?”

Baptists Throughout Church History (Part 1)

- **WELCOME & BRIEF REVIEW**
- **PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS**
 - Major Baptist Distinctives
 - Proper Baptist Attitude to Other Christian Traditions/Denominations
 - Part 1 Questions/Clarifications
- **PART 2: THE BAPTIST DISTINGUISHED HERITAGE**
- **INTRODUCTION**
 - Review of Basic Principles of Course
 - The Baptist Name
- **WHERE DID BAPTISTS COME FROM?**
 - Key Reference: Titus 2:11-15
 - Asserted Connections to the New Testament Church
 - Basic Views of Baptist History
 - Outgrowth of English Separatism (Reformation Era)

- Anabaptist Influence (Radical Reformation)
- Spiritual Kinship (Continuation of Biblical Teachings)
- Unbroken Succession of Baptist Churches
- Convergent View

➤ Instructor's View

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "These historians [who hold the Spiritual Kinship view] seek to trace a continuity of Baptist teachings from New Testament times to the present through earlier dissenting [Christian] groups" (H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 1987).

• **BEGINNING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

- The Church Established
 - First Mention: Mt. 16:18
 - First Members: 1 Cor. 12:28
 - First Formal Meeting: Acts 1:15
 - First Revival: Acts 2:1-4
- Distinctive Doctrinal Traits: Acts 2:38-47

CRITICAL POINT REGARDING BAPTIST HISTORY: Churches *like* the New Testament church have continued to exist from the time of Christ to the present day.

• **DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

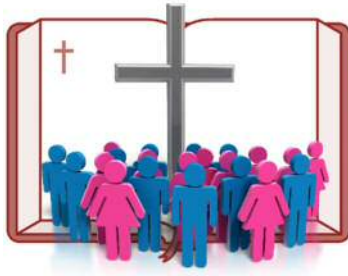
- Persecution Scattered the Church (Acts 8:1-5)
- Scriptural Authority Replaced Apostolic Authority (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

• **BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHURCH HISTORY**

- First 300 Years
- Progress of Doctrinal Error
- Those "Heretic" Baptists
 - Montanists (c. AD 150)

- Novations (c. AD 250)
 - Donatists (c. AD 311)
 - Paulicians (c. AD 611)
 - Albigenses (c. AD 900)
 - Waldenses (c. AD 1100)
 - Lollards (c. AD 1315)
- The Dark Ages (AD 426 – 1628)
 - The Inquisition (AD 1198 – 1700)
 - The Reformation (16th Century)
 - Baptists as “Baptists” Appeared
- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW SESSION 8**

Being Baptist



Session 8

“BAPTISTS AS ‘BAPTISTS’”

Baptists Throughout Church History (Part 2)

- **WELCOME**
- **REVIEW: PART 1: THE BAPTIST DOCTRINAL HALLMARKS**
- **REVIEW: PART 2: THE BAPTIST DISTINGUISHED HERITAGE**
 - The Baptist Name
 - Basic Views of Baptist History
 - Outgrowth of English Separatism (Reformation Era)
 - Anabaptist Influence (Radical Reformation)
 - Spiritual Kinship (Continuation of Biblical Teachings)
 - Unbroken Succession of Baptist Churches
 - Convergent View
 - Tracing Baptists & Their Spiritual Ancestors from Apostolic Era to The Reformation
- **ANABAPTIST & SEPARATIST INFLUENCE ON BAPTISTS**
 - Meaning of “Anabaptist”
 - Meaning of “Separatists”
 - Balthasar Hubmaier
 - Persecution

- **BAPTISTS IN THE REFORMATION ERA**

- Persecution
- Rise of Modern "Baptists"
 - Developments in the Anglican Church
 - John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, England, & Holland
 - First "Baptist" Church (England, c 1610)

- **BAPTIST EXPANSION & DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE**

- General Baptists
- Particular (Regular) Baptists
- Persecution

- **BAPTISTS COME TO AMERICA**

- Roger Williams & Rhode Island
- Persecution
- James Madison & the First Amendment
- The Triennial Convention & Primitive Baptists
- Baptists North, Baptists South

- **BAPTISTS ORGANIZING & DIVIDING**

- Sunday School
- The Southern Baptist Convention
- Other Baptist Conventions, Associations, & Fellowships
- Rise of Modernism & Liberal Theology
- "The Conservative Resurgence"

- **BAPTIST MISSIONS & EVANGELISM**

- Carey, Judson, & Rice

- Moon & Armstrong
- To the Ends of the Earth
- **ARE BAPTISTS PROTESTANTS?**
 - Where We Agree
 - Where We Differ
 - Conclusion
- **FAMOUS BAPTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW**
- **SUMMATION / PREVIEW SESSION 9 / NO CLASS NEXT WEEK (Father's Day)**

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¹In 2016, Peter T. O'Brien received allegations of plagiarism with regard to some of his New Testament commentaries. He acknowledged unintentional misuse of others' work and apologized. Because of this development, some of his commentaries ceased publication.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING BAPTIST HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES TO THE CONGREGATION OF MOUNT ZION BAPTIST CHURCH, WEST PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

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This ministry project was designed to conceptualize, develop, and teach a discipleship training curriculum that instructed members of Mount Zion Baptist Church of West Paducah, Kentucky, to understand and appreciate their Baptist heritage. Chapter 1 establishes the goals of the project and the ministry context. The first chapter also explains the rationale for the project, outlines its definitions, limitations, and delimitations, describes the research methodology employed, and defines a successful outcome.

Chapter 2 lays out the biblical and theological basis for teaching the history and doctrinal distinctives of Baptists. An exegesis of two Old Testament texts and three New Testament texts provides scriptural support for teaching Baptists to appreciate the doctrines, people, places, and events that shaped their spiritual heritage.

Chapter 3 advances the historical, theoretical, and practical issues related to teaching Baptist history and doctrinal distinctives. This chapter includes a historical survey of past Baptist leaders on the subject, and emphasizes the practicality and relevance of the topic.

Chapter 4 explains how the discipleship curriculum of the project was developed and implemented at the Mount Zion Baptist Church. This chapter also gives a detailed review of the study sessions and the project's successful outcome.

Finally, chapter 5 concludes with a forthright appraisal of the project's purpose and goals. Chapter 5 also provides a candid evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and offers ideas on what could have made it better.

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