

Our plan...

The outline of the study comes from

The Baptist Story

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These are *Southern Baptist* schools, but they write with objectivity about the whole Baptist scene.

I. The challenge

Two tasks in teaching Baptists

In 1833, Jesse Mercer purchased *The Christian Index*, a Georgia Baptist newspaper. His first editorial contained this quotation:

We now enter immediately on our duties as Editor of a religious journal, and begin to feel them of mountain weight. In the first, chief place, how to please God, the Judge of all, otherwise than by the presentment of truth, frankly and candidly expressed, according to his conscientious views of the most holy Word; he knows not: but in doing this, in the second place; how to please his Patrons (whom to please would be a high gratification to him) in their various and conflicting sentiments, in different sections are clothed, is a herculean task indeed.

1. How to please God
2. How to please Baptists

“Where two or three Baptists are gathered, it seems, three or four opinions are sometimes in the midst of them.” [TBS, 1]

Walter Shurden, Baptist historian, wrote a book about Baptists: ***Not a Silent People*** (Smith & Helwys, 1995).

II. The audience for *The Baptist Story*

- A. Independent Baptists
- B. Cooperative Baptists
- C. Seventh Day Baptists
- D. Southern Baptists
- E. Free Will Baptists
- F. Reformed Baptists
- G. Regulative principle Baptists
- H. Seeker-sensitive Baptists

“Among these groups are differing views of biblical inspiration, age of baptismal recipients, elder-led churches, women pastors, sovereign decrees, and the propriety of vacation Bible school — to name only a few!” (2)

III. Defining the term “Baptist” — what is a Baptist?

- A. Wide difference of opinion

1. Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways, A History* (Judson Press, 2003)
2. R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (B & H Academic, 2005)

One views Baptists as a multi-faceted movement centered on believer’s baptism and congregational polity, the other identifies Biblical authority as the leading distinctive, which produces the other distinct Baptist emphases.

One sees “Baptist” as a relatively loose term, the other as a more specific term.

- B. Many other books in publication on our topic, the field is well-studied

IV. The subtitle: “From English Sect to Global Movement”

- A. Denies that Baptists reach back to the first century, or any of the early centuries of the church
- B. Maintains that Baptists as such are a distinct historical movement with a definite point of origin in history

1. That is, the seed of Baptist thought began in the English Separatist movement
 2. And the initial Baptist identity formed with John Smyth and Thomas Helwys
- C. Baptists began in 1609 with the issues of regenerate church membership and believer's baptism

V. What about the Anabaptists?

- A. John Smyth departed from the Baptists he began, joined with Anabaptists
- B. Hold some doctrines in common
- C. But some Anabaptist views are clearly not Baptist views – they are clearly a separate group
- D. No historical thread tying the two movements together

“We distinguish, therefore, between indebtedness and connectedness.” (5)

“Baptists are indebted to many Christian groups throughout the history of the church, from the early church fathers with their emphasis on the full deity and humanity of Christ to the Reformation leaders with their clarion call to trust Christ alone for salvation. However, differences in life and practise have led Baptists to distinguish themselves from other Christian groups, even those with similar names.” (5)

VI. The function of history in studying Baptists

- A. Ministerial rather than magisterial (5)
- B. Some have used history to pressure others to believe certain points

Example: raging debate whether first Baptists were Calvinists or not — some want to use this history to insist that modern Baptists should be “X”

- C. "History can help us see what Baptists have believed, but it should not be used to tell us what Baptists must believe." (5-6)

However...

"The events of the past do not become history by being simply recorded. Characters that have filled their day with excitement, are only men of straw, their garbs of greatness, but stuffed stage gear; the scenes of their lives, but painted stage scenery; their toils and sufferings, only an idle show; unless they take hold on men's hearts in all time, and teach us how to live and die, to be heroic, to be Christian now. When this is done, the narrative of the past becomes history. It has a philosophy. It has an immortal life in it. It has power upon the hearts of men, that cannot die."¹

In studying what men have done, we can discover how men *ought* to live. It cannot teach us *what* men ought to believe, but can teach us *how* to believe. *What* to believe can only come from the Scriptures.

VII. TWO Common Characteristics of Baptists

- A. They have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, repenting of sins and trusting his work on the cross
- B. They have obeyed the command to be baptized, displaying death to sin and resurrection to new life in identification with our resurrected Jesus Christ

VIII. Course Outline

- A. The first two hundred years (1609-1800)
- B. The great era of expansion (1801-1900)
- C. Strength in Conflict, Weakness in Prosperity (1901-2018)
- D. The Baptist Idea

¹ R. J. W Buckland, *Baptist Church History* (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1867), 309.