

“WHO ARE WE?”

by Milburn Cockrell

“But sanctify the Lord in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

According to this verse of Scripture, it is a Christian duty to reverence Jesus Christ as Lord in our hearts. If we truly do this, then it will make us ready at all times to give a defense of the faith we profess in Him and His Word. We must be ready to make a full statement as the circumstance may require of our doctrinal position. If there is reverence for Christ in the heart, the lips must be able to make an oral expression. At no time are we to be unprepared, or timid in stating our views of the teachings of the Bible. This defense must be made in meekness and modesty to men and in fear of our sovereign Lord.

Quite often people ask me, “What kind of a Baptist Church is your Baptist Church?” Others inquire, “What doctrines do you teach and practice?” Still others question us as to why we are not affiliated with any Baptist convention, association, or Bible fellowship. Our critics demand, “What rare breed of Baptists are you?” In the light of I Peter 3:15 I feel that necessity is laid upon me to take some time to answer these questions for all concerned.

WHO WE ARE NOT

At times our friends make false assumptions about us, and our enemies misrepresent our views before the world. Because we believe in the doctrines of grace we are accused of being Reformed Baptists. We are not Reformed Baptists. We repudiate the idea of Baptist churches beginning at the time of the Protestant Reformation in 1641. We maintain that Baptists are older than the Reformation. We feel that our origin goes back to Christ and the New Testament. We believe we are as old as the Christian religion. Christ’s church does not need reforming so long as it stays with the teaching of the

Bible. We differ with these people on ecclesiology and eschatology.

We are not Primitive or Old School Baptists. These people separated from the old line of Baptists under Daniel Parker in 1832. Unlike us, they are in the main anti missionary and oppose Christian education. Unlike us, many of them do not know if they are saved, and some of them deny Baptist succession.

WE ARE INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS ON CHURCH COOPERATION

To us a convention, an association, and a Bible fellowship are extra-scriptural organizations which lord over the local churches. We do not believe the mission of a Baptist church is merely to be a collecting agency for some man-made religious society. We teach that the churches of Christ on earth are Divine organizations which are responsible to Christ in the work of preaching the gospel, baptizing believers, and teaching God’s Word (Matt. 28:19,20). The local church is the highest ecclesiastical authority on earth and the only organization with a Divine commission from Heaven.

Each church in New Testament times was a sovereign, autonomous, independent body. There is no example in the Bible of the subordination of a church to an organization outside of itself. Each particular church was absolutely independent in the exercise of its churchly rights, privileges, and prerogatives. It was separate from all other churches, individuals, and bodies so far as authority and control were concerned. Christ was its only head and lawgiver (Eph. 1:21-23). No church delegated to another body the right and function Christ committed to it.

Since Christ left ecclesiastical affairs entirely in the hands of His churches (Eph. 3:10,21), it is safe to trust His arrangement. It is unsafe to depart from it. The Divine plan is the best plan with the fewest evils and the most advantages.

It has served Baptists well for well over a thousand years. Let others do what they will. We will stay with the New Testament order.

Our enemies sometimes accuse us of being too independent, but we do not believe it is possible to be too independent in the Bible sense. We are not isolationists. While each church is independent and sovereign in its locality, it also realizes its interdependence upon other churches of like faith and order. Our churches voluntarily cooperate with each other in missions, Christian education, benevolence, Bible conferences, fellowship meetings, revival work, and publication work. All church cooperation is absolutely voluntary and free from any authoritative or dictatorial control.

WE ARE LANDMARK BAPTISTS ON THE CHURCH

Our people steadfastly maintain that a New Testament church is a local and visible congregation of baptized believers (Acts 2:41-47). Every true church is the body of Christ in its locality (I Cor. 12:27). The church did not begin with Adam, or on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, nor at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The New Testament church was organized by Jesus Christ during His personal ministry on earth out of the material prepared by John the Baptist (Matt. 16:18). Since the days of Christ, the world has never been without a true church. We teach that the principles and practices of the New Testament continued even during the Dark Ages because the gates of Hell never prevailed against the church (Matt. 16:18).

Our people detest and despise the Protestant doctrine of a universal, invisible church. This false theory began in post-apostolic times among spiritualizers of the Scriptures. It was popularized at the Protestant Reformation. It has gained ascendancy in our time by means of the Scofield Reference Bible, Fundamentalism, and the New Evangelicalism. Despite its worldly popularity, to us the universal, invisible church theory is an inconceivable conception, an unsupposable supposition, and an unspeakable superstition.

WE ARE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

Our people earnestly contend for what some call "the tulip doctrines." A Tulip Baptist is one who believes in total depravity (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 7:18-19; Psa. 51:5), unconditional election (Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9; II Thess. 2:13), limited atonement (Matt. 20:28; John 10:15), irresistible grace (Eph. 1:19-20; John 15:5), and the perseverance of the saints (John 10:28; Job 17:9). Those who believe these are not followers of John Calvin, but believers in the teachings of the Bible. These truths were believed and taught long before Calvin or Augustine were born. Old confessions of faith of our Baptist fathers reveal that they held to these precious truths.

We teach that there is no salvation apart from the free, sovereign, distinguishing grace of God and the work of the almighty Holy Spirit upon the dead sinner (John 16:8,10). Salvation is by free grace, never by free will. Believing these truths, we oppose Arminianism and all of its kindred evils. We resist modern decisionism, hour-long invitations, graveyard stories, praying through on the mourner's bench, high pressure tactics in evangelistic meetings worldly entertainment to give aid to the power of the gospel, and gimmicks and stunts to draw a crowd. Such things are useless in the salvation of sinners, for God has promised to bless the gospel only (Rom 1:16).

WE ARE MISSIONARY BAPTISTS ON EVANGELISM

Our firm stand on the doctrines of grace does not make us anti-missionary nor non-progressive. We are missionary in profession and practice. Our missionaries are sent out under the authority of a local Baptist church. These missionaries are supported by the home church and other churches of like precious faith. Even at this present hour God is raising up many to go to the foreign fields from among our churches.

To us there is no need of a mission board. Whatever work a mission board can do the local church can do - and do it with a Divine commission. Such boards lord over the churches

who have little say in what goes on and are permitted only to pay the bills. In our opinion it is worse than foolish to boast of church authority and then attempt to delegate missionary work to a missionary society.

WE ARE ANABAPTISTS ON BAPTISM

Our people contend that there are five things essential to Bible baptism. First, there must be Divine authority as given to Baptist churches (Matt. 28:19-20). Second, there must be a Scriptural administrator - an ordained Baptist minister (Acts 13:1-3; I Cor. 1:16). Third, there must be a Scriptural actor - a born-again believer in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31-33). Fourth, there must be a Scriptural action - a complete immersion in water (Rom. 6:4). Fifth, there must be a Scriptural aim - not in order to be saved. but because you seek to declare salvation already obtained by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

Our people totally reject pedobaptism. We do not receive alien immersion from Pedo-Baptists or apostate Baptists. Neither do we receive letters from Pedo-Baptists or so-called Baptists who have denied the faith. Because of this practice our people have been dubbed by our enemies for over a thousand years "Anabaptists;" that is, "rebaptizers."

WE ARE STRICT BAPTISTS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

We hold that the Lord's Supper is a memorial ordinance in which the members of one local church, by means of unleavened bread and wine, show forth the Lord's death till He comes.

This supper is restricted to each local church who alone has the responsibility of disciplining its members (I Cor. 5:6-13).

The Bible restricts the Lord's Supper as to place (I Cor. 11:18), the motive (I Cor. 11:21-22), the purpose (I Cor. 11:27-29), the baptized (Acts 2:41-42), those in the faith (II John 9-11), the orderly (I Cor. 5:11-13), the elements (Matt. 26:26-29), the design (I Cor. 11:23-26), and a united church (I Cor.

11:26-20)

We do not believe in the practice of open

communion. It is a terrible act to offer the Lord's Supper to the unsaved and unbaptized. Such a practice is unbaptistic and unscriptural We deplore the idea that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament.

WE ARE HISTORIC BAPTISTS ON THE WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH

Our people take serious the words of I Corinthians 14:34: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." In our church business meetings the women keep their mouths shut. No woman is permitted to teach in a mixed assembly which contains men. Neither does she lead in public prayer when men are present.

In all our ranks there is not one woman missionary, preacher, or deacon. Neither do we have any future plans of ordaining any like our liberal brethren in conventions. A lady wears a hat in our church services as a symbol of subjection to her husband. Our churches oppose the E.R.A. amendment and the women's liberation movement.

WE ARE PRE-MILLENNIALISTS ON ESCHATOLOGY

In the main our people maintain the doctrine of pre-millennialism and believe it to be the historic position. A-millennialism is a Catholic and Protestant belief. We teach that Jesus Christ will come and rapture the saints to glory for the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; II Cor. 5:10-11) and the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:1-9). At the end of Daniel's Seventieth Week the glorified saints will return to the earth with Christ for the battle of Armageddon and the Judgment of the Nations (Rev. 19:11-21). Israel will be regenerated and restored as a nation (Isa. 11:11-12; Ezek. 37:1-28), and Christ and the saints will reign over the earth a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-6). After the Millennial Reign Satan will be loosed and judged (Rev. 20:7-10), and the unsaved judged and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Then Christ and the saints will reign for ever on the renovated earth (Rev 22:5).

We have little time to spend with those who teach the amillennial tradition We detest its spiritualizing system of the interpretation of the prophecies of the Bible. We believe all Bible prophecy has a literal fulfillment, and even the prophetic symbols contain literal truths The popularity of a-millennialism among Catholics, Protestants, and religious liberals is enough to convince us once for all it is not of God.

WE ARE CONSERVATIVE BAPTISTS ON MORALS

We do not teach that a Christian can live a sinful, wicked, worldly life (Rom. 6:1-22) We preach and teach a high standard of morality. Disorderly church members are excluded from the assembly of the saints (I Cor. 5:9-13). Such excluded members are restored only upon repentance and amendment of life (II Cor. 2:3-7). Growth in grace is expected, but we do not believe it is possible to attain sinless perfection in the flesh (I John 1:8,10). This awaits the coming of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21).

We totally reject the teaching that a person can habitually make a practice of sinning and be truly a child of God (I John 3:1-10). We do not believe in falling from grace, but we do believe that a saved person will live different from an unsaved person (I Cor. 6:9-11). We denounce as heresy the "new-lite" teaching of some that there is no sin but a doctrinal sin. To us those who do not strive for a holy life are the children of the Devil.

WE ARE LIBERAL BAPTISTS ON GIVING

Our people have a good record in giving to the cause of Christ through God's storehouse, the local church (I Tim. 3:15; Mal. 3:8). In the main our churches preach tithing and our members practice it. We are not much for pledges and high-pressure tactics. We believe people should give out of love for Christ (II Cor. 5:14; 9:6-7) and in obedience to His command (Matt. 23:23; I Cor. 16:1-2).

Many of our churches pass no offering plates. This is hard for some to believe, but it is no brag - just facts. Usually there is an offering box placed near the back of the church (II Chron. 24:8-9) where the members put their tithes and offerings.

WE ARE BIBLE BAPTISTS ON ALL MATTERS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

Our creed is not found in a confession written by some man. Our creed is the Bible and the Bible only. We are the people of a book, the Holy Bible. We believe in the complete verbal inspiration of the Bible (I Tim. 3:15-17). If it is in the Bible, we believe it; if it is not in the Bible, we reject it (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11). Every doctrine must be established by a "Thus saith the Lord."

Most of our churches who have Sunday schools use the Bible as a textbook, not a Sunday school quarterly which is denominational propaganda. It is our belief that the Bible is the best Baptist literature in all the world.

CONCLUSION

We are not a perfect people, nor are our churches infallible. We are what we are by the grace of God. We do have our problems. But we are bold to say that we worship a perfect Saviour, and we preach an infallible Book, the Holy Bible. God is blessing our efforts, and our future is bright. We are as able to meet the challenge of our time as our God.

We do not condemn to Hell those who are not in agreement with us. We leave them to the Lord who will judge all by His Word. We hold to the priesthood of the believer and feel that every man has a right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. We will forever defend the right of any man to follow his religious convictions, and we reserve the right to do likewise.

Our people are called by various names in different sections of the world. We in the main are content to be called just "Baptists." We believe that true Baptists have always held to the doctrines and practices which we maintain. Let

the world call us what they will. We desire only to follow Christ and His Word in every detail. By the grace of God we will continue to walk in the old paths and keep to the old landmarks until the glorious day of His appearing.