

Differences Narrowed

(The generally accepted view within Christendom is that every Christian is either a Catholic or Protestant. But historical Baptists believe this is not the case. This podcast shows that the historical Baptist position is that they are not Protestants.)

In our last study we noted that in a broad and general way we categorized theological differences among Christians under three heads: by works, by grace and works, by grace alone. We further identified these systems theologically as Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism. We concluded by saying scripturally there are only two basic theological systems—grace or works—Rom. 11:6, “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” We also stated in our previous podcast that Baptists who maintain the theological position of grace alone technically are not Calvinist nor are they to be classified as reformers or Protestants in the true sense of the word.

Sadly, today, the majority of people have the idea that under the Christian systems that one is either Catholic or Protestant. This is not the case. Protestants are those who distanced themselves from the catholics (mainly Roman Catholics) during the protestant reformation in the sixteenth century. Historically, Baptists do not believe they came into existence during the protestant reformation nor did they come into being after the reformation. Notice the following from the 1926 Bureau of Census for the United States Department of Commerce: “It is a distinct principle with Baptists that they acknowledge no human founder, recognize no human authority, and subscribe to no human creed. For all these things, Baptists of every name and order go back to the New Testament. And while no competent Baptist historian assumes to be able to trace a succession of Baptist churches through the ages, most of them are of one accord in believing that, if we could secure the records, there would be found heroic groups of believers in every age who upheld with their testimonies and, in many cases, with their lives, the great outstanding and distinctive principles of the Baptist churches of to-day” [sic].

While we may expect the general population not to know the truth about this, it is sad that today many (if not most) who profess to be Baptist do not know the truth regarding their origin. More disturbing is that many who profess to be Baptist claim to be reformed and have adopted the name and some principles of the reformers that are in conflict with historic Baptist beliefs. Let us be clear at this point. Because a belief or practice is historic does not necessarily make it right. However, if a doctrine or practice aligns with or does not violate the Scriptures then it should be followed. May we never lose sight of the fact that the final authority is the Word of God.

Allow me to enlarge on this somewhat. There are things about the Lord Supper that are believed by the reformers and Baptists that differ and we plan on addressing some of them in the future. However, there is at least one thing where there may be differences not only between the reformers and the Baptists but also between various congregations of each group. This is the question of how often should the Lord’s Supper be observed. The Scriptures plainly declare in I Cor. 11:26, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” Many discussions and writings have been done concerning how often should a congregation have the Lord’s Supper. The Scriptures are silent about this. Historically, one group may follow the rule of each week, while another would practice each month, a different group may follow quarterly, and an additional group practice it annually. While arguments may be made for each position, the Scriptures declare simply “for as often as ye eat.” History may prove a group practicing one thing and a more modern group practice something different. In such cases, the history of the one group does not invalidate the practice of the more modern position, nor does the modern group negate the historical practice. The answer to this question is not the historical position of any group. Congregational unity is to be sought out and practiced and agreed on without violating the conscious of any is the answer to this question.

While the Lord used the protestant reformation in a grand and majestic way, we must bear in mind that there were people outside of Catholicism defending and proclaiming the gospel all the way back to the time of Christ and the apostles. Also, off and on, there were people inside Catholicism that sought to reform some of her practices and beliefs. (Allow me to point out here that Catholicism as is identified today does not go back to Christ and the apostles. However, our purpose is not to identify or study catholic beliefs. Let us also keep in mind that many heresies [if not all] in one way or another can be found in the days of Christ and the apostles.)

As previously stated, Baptists are not Protestants and while historically we share some major theological beliefs, there are major differences that many today do not understand. While this is true, my purpose in these podcasts is not to battle against the Protestants or reformers or any other group. In many ways I admire many of them. Nevertheless, there will be times when I am setting forth various doctrines when I will endeavor to point out where and why we differ from those who hold to an opposite view. It is hoped that I will be able to do this in such a way so that the truth is what is important and not the author.

I would like to quote J. H. Merle D'Aubigné from his book entitled *The Authority of God*, pp. 303-305. He was addressing friends and students at the Theological College at Geneva, on October 2, 1850. I believe the quote captures the spirit of what I am saying. It is as follows:

Yes, my brethren, you who are younger, make progress. We do not say to you, "Be simply such as we are;" we do not say, "Be such as the Reformers were, feature for feature;" although they were men of God of immense powers, and we should all be happy to have more of the riches of the Spirit that God had communicated to them. No, we do not say this. We say to you of the Bible, as the laborer to his children:

"Sell not your inheritance;
Within its bosom is a treasure:
Onward ... be of good cheer,
You shall find it, you shall gain your end.
Turn well your field
Dig, rake, plough it;
Leave not a spot untouch'd
But turn it over again and again"

Yes, young brethren, do not be satisfied with receiving ready made, from the hands of others, what you yourselves ought to find in Scripture. You must search it; you must find it; you must apply it; you must assimilate yourselves unto it. He who seeks well, finds well. Go beyond us, dear friends, but in the study of Scripture; go beyond us, we conjure you, but in the knowledge of this Word of God, in its application to your heart and life,—in assurance of faith,—in the fidelity with which you endeavor to bring before Christian people, not your own thoughts, but the thoughts of God Himself, such as they are found in His oracles. For this end, work, but with great humility,—with great distrust of yourself. Work, remembering that you "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places,"—against the influence of evil systems and the spirit of the times,—against the seduction of the demons of pride and unbelief: "Withstand in the evil day, and having done all, stand." May God grant this unto you.

It is with this spirit that I pray these studies are produced and that they will be used of the Lord to bless you to rise higher to honor and magnify the truth of the Scriptures.