

Ball State Religion Reporting Class

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SUMMARY:

0.1 Introduction

talk a little about myself

Personal Information

My history as a Baptist

My history at First Baptist Muncie

0.2 Basic Distinctives

As we begin to talk about Baptists, you will quickly see that identifying a Baptist belief system is not something that we will be able to do

Certainly, Baptists are Christian

If you take the basic belief system of a Christian, Baptists will line up

It is worth noting that Baptists did not come up with a belief system

They rather inherited it

Baptists did not exist before the 17th century

So, as we talk about Baptist, you need to know that they inherit Christian doctrine

Baptists are Protestants

Therefore much of their understanding of theology and Scriptures comes from the Protestant Reformation

Therefore, I will not cover every point of theology

I will rather describe Baptist distinctives (what makes them different from other Protestant denominations)

John Smyth (pretty common name) is considered the father of modern Baptists

He was educated as an Anglican Clergyman at Cambridge University in England

In 1606, Smyth was dissatisfied with the church of England formed a Separatists group

So, right off the bat, Baptists were formed, breaking away from authority of the Church of England

They did not like the static and rigid *top down* system of the Church of England
Baptists began with an attitude of openness to the ongoing study of the Bible

A first distinctive among Baptists could be *No creeds*

It is not that Baptists deny the theology or truth of creeds

This is certainly not the case

At the first gathering of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905, the group confessed the historic *Apostle's Creed*

But the key difference is that that they acknowledge or confess the Creed

But the Creed (for the Baptist) has no authority

Only the Bible has authority

The Creed only describes what any given group of Baptists believe at any given time

Does that make sense?

Baptist have one authoritative document – The Bible

No other set of documents has authority

Questions?

And here's the deal

Baptist also affirm that each person is free to study and interpret the bible on his/her own

There is no formal or informal teaching office that *hands down* Baptist doctrine

How do you think this plays out?

allow for response

Exactly, diversity

Baptists are an extremely diverse people

They are diverse and by definition (and history) value their diversity

Be aware, all Baptists do not understand their history and are not always open to differing viewpoints

At the same time, Baptist (at least historically) have valued freedom and are willing to live in diversity

Jack K and Bill Eidson

As you might imagine, this can get messy

At the same time, Baptist affirm the Bible and this book tends to pull us together more than tear us apart

The key is that each Baptist is free to interpret the Bible

Another distinctive for Baptist is their focus on the individual

Baptists not only allow for individual interpretation of the Bible, but also stress the importance of the individual in professing their faith

To join a Baptist church, you have to make an individual "profession of faith", even if your entire family is Baptist and you have been attending a Baptist church since you were in the nursery

Baptist practice what is called Believers Baptism

In other words, babies are not baptized (although they are dedicated)

They will need to decide for themselves (when they are old enough) if they are going to be a Christian

Also, in this same vein, Baptists do not have priests

Each person is accountable and responsible to God

They don't need a priest to go to God for them, they do this on their own

I will not spend too much time on this point, but for a Baptist, faith is personal and voluntary and is not dictated through a church

There are more distinctives, but I will get to these as we talk about local Baptist churches

For now, we have said that Baptists

- follow no creeds (and do not expect their members to adhere to any authority other than the Bible). You might even make the case that they are Bible centered people
- allow for freedom for individuals to interpret the Bible
- This naturally creates a diverse group
- Finally, Baptists freedom includes the freedom for each person to approach and relate to God as an individual

You can imagine that this would create all *kinds* of Baptists

Let me test your knowledge for a few minutes

I am going to put a group of faces on the screen and allow you tell me what these three people have in common

The first group includes

J. Frank Norris (some consider him to be father of American Christian fundamentalism that was birthed out of the 1920s Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy)

Harry Emerson Fosdick (Fosdick was an American Pastor also involved in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, but was on the other side, the liberal rather than conservative side)

So, both were involved in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

What about the third guy?

His name is Walter Rauschenbusch

He was a little before the first two, but was a key figure in the Social Gospel movement which flourished in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries

Let's keep going

These guys are a little easier

Billy Graham was a 20th century evangelist, probably the most well known evangelist in history

Martin Luther King Jr needs no explanation to most (civil rights leader)

Do you know the third guy (Lester Maddox)

Maddox was the governor of Georgia from 1967-1971

He was a staunch segregationist

He even refused to serve black customers in his Atlanta restaurant, in defiance of the Civil Rights Act

Third group, getting a little closer to modern times

Jerry Falwell is known for his right wing political involvement, founding the Moral Majority (one of the largest political lobby groups for evangelical Christians in the United States during the 1980s)

Jesse Jackson civil rights activist and candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988

Jimmy Carter 39th President of the United States and 2002 Nobel Peace Prize winner

What do these guys have in common?

One more group

Certainly Bill Clinton and Al Gore have much in common right?

What about the third picture

Jesse Helms was a leader of the conservative movement. He was elected five times as a Republican to the United States Senate from North Carolina.

We would probably struggle to come up with commonalities between Helms and Clinton/Gore

What do all of these people have in common?

That's right

All are/were Baptists

You can see the diversity among Baptists

How is this?

In the way that we described the distinctives of Baptists, Baptists are a free and diverse people
With this, you will find Baptists on both sides of almost any political or theological or social issue
Baptists are diverse because they are free

0.3 Pastors/Laity

Because of the understanding that every member is responsible and accountable to God
Baptists have a thinner line between ordained minister and lay person
On the denominational level, Baptists are free
Also, on the church (local) level, Baptists are free
You may see people administering communion or even baptizing who are not ordained ministers
In fact ordination practices vary from denomination to denomination

difference between SBC ordination and ABC ordination (mine not recognized until 2009 by the ABC)

0.4 Structure

Again, no top down Baptist organization or office
The way that Baptists are structured is fairly unique in terms of Christian denominations
The authority for a Baptist church rests in the local Baptist church
The local Baptist church chooses its own pastors, its own church officers
The local Baptist church designs its own worship
Baptists are congregational churches
This means that the congregation has the ultimate authority for a Baptist

As a Baptist pastor, I cannot dictate a belief system for my congregation

I may describe what my congregation believes and/or stands on various issues

I can certainly have my own interpretation or stance on any given issue

But I cannot demand that someone believe a particular way to be a Baptist

Certainly, the common doctrines of the Christian church are held in common by most Baptists, but once you start narrowing down to particular belief systems, you will usually find diversity

And that is OK as a Baptist

The thing to know about Baptist structure or polity is that all authority rests in the local Baptist Church

There is no such thing as a Baptist bishop

The denomination cannot tell a Baptist what to believe and how to function or appoint leaders of a congregation

Some Baptist groups will kick other Baptist groups out of their group, but they cannot keep them from being Baptists

As you might imagine, this leads to many groups of Baptists

0.5 Numbers

There are at least 211 Baptist denominations in the world

Most of them are member of what is called the *Baptist World Alliance*

The Southern Baptist Convention (the largest Baptist group) and the Baptist Bible Fellowship do not cooperate with the Alliance

Baptists are present on almost all continents

According to the Barna Group researchers, Baptists are the largest denominational grouping of born again Christians in the USA

A 2009 ABCNEWS/Beliefnet phone poll of 1022 adults suggests that 15% of Americans identify themselves as Baptists

The USA has the largest number of Baptists (35 million)

the table on the screen represents the top Baptist denominations in the United States (again there are 211 Baptist denominations in the world). This is just a small number.

In terms of individual members in the United States

Out of 800 million protestants, there are somewhere between 75-105 million Baptists

The largest Baptist group is the Southern Baptist Convention (15.7M)

Three primarily African American groups are significant

National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. - 8.5M

National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. - 3.1M

Progressive National Baptist Convention - 2.5M

I will not pretend to know the major differences between these groups

Would you believe that the state of Texas has its own group (that works with the SBC) that includes 2.3M people

My group is called the American Baptist Churches USA - 1.4M

We could go down the list, but I know that you can look up these numbers

There are also a variety of independent Baptist groups that are as small as one local congregation

Because there is no official Baptist group, anyone can form a group and call themselves Baptist

Sound messy?

It is

There is no *The* Baptist Church as there are in other denominations

Not only is there no official group, but even the groups cannot dictate what the members of each group believe

In my group (American Baptist Churches USA) there is a wide variety of church types

In some groups (the more narrow, the less diversity), they choose to kick churches out of their group over particular issues

Stop for Questions

0.6 Baptist in Media

Baptists are often the subject of media attention

Probably the most common assumption is that when you see the title Baptist, you think there is a connection with other Baptist groups

Let me give you an example

How many of you have heard of Westboro Baptist Church

This group is known for protesting at funerals and other activities that could certainly be considered actions of a hate group

Fred Phelps was ordained Southern Baptist

But Westboro Baptist Church is not connected to any denomination

If you pull up Wikipedia, you will read

The Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) is an American unaffiliated Baptist church known for its extreme ideologies . . .

There is a fine line between the words

an American unaffiliated Baptist church

and

an American Baptist Church

One can be an American and a Baptist without being an American Baptist

I think that often people assume that all Baptists are connected

This is not the case

As I was preparing this presentation, I took a few minutes to Google the term "Baptist"

Several of the articles landed on Westboro

Another article landed on the First Baptist Church in Hammond, Indiana

The article detailed the hypocrisy of the pastor who preached against “rock music” yet he plead guilty for having sex with a 16 year old girl he was counseling

Another top article was a Southern Baptist Pastor who was calling on President Obama to defend the world against ISIS or ISIL

Finally, a third article has to do with a group of Baptist petitioning for a stay on the execution of a Georgia woman

Moderate Baptists rise to aid of woman on death row in Georgia

Finally, a fourth article highlights Baptists working with Methodists

The Headline reads

Baptists, Methodists seek to overcome differences to minister together

The article continues,

Nowadays, Baptists and Methodists seem the least likely to become entangled in theological disputes or battles over turf and members. Pulpit swaps and shared downtown ministries are increasingly common between them.

But that was not always the case. Historically, the two traditions were often bitter rivals in cities and rural communities across the nation, said Bill Leonard, professor of Baptist studies and church history at Wake Forest University School of Divinity.

I have given you several current examples of Baptists in Media

1. Westboro Protests
2. FBC Hammond pastor in sexual abuse
3. SBC Pastor calling on Obama to stop ISIS
4. Cooperative Baptists attempting to stop an execution
5. Baptists and Methodists working together

Which ones do you feel accurately portray Baptists?

All of these stories are valid and should be reported

I like the way that that each of these stories highlight the fact that Baptists are either (fundamental or moderate)

I wish more stories were written on Baptist groups helping others and serving the poor and needy

I wish there were less stories (and instances) of abuse and hate among Baptists

0.7 Current Issues

What are current issues that are being debated among Baptists?

I will highlight a few:

1. Women in Ministry
 2. Gay Marriage
 3. Openness to working with other denominations/groups
-

0.8 Muncie Baptists

In Muncie, we have several Baptist groups represented. It would be impossible for me to highlight all of them

If you do a Google Search, the first seven listed are varied

SBC

- Old Town Hill Baptist Church
- Halteman Village Baptist Church

American Baptist

- First Baptist Church
- I will also mention Riverside Baptist Church

Independent

- True Light Baptist Church
- Temple Baptist Church
- Grace Baptist Church

If you go to the Web site of most of them, it is difficult to find the association or denomination

Others include

- Union Missionary Baptist Church
- Calvary Baptist Church
- Antioch Baptist Church

0.9 Conclusion

As we close our time together, I would like to open our time for questions?

0.10 Further Reading

Buddy Shurden's brief book, *Four Fragile Freedoms*

Presenation is online at bit.ly/ballstatebaptists