What Is a Baptist?
Many people assume that the Baptist movement is a cult that probably started in America over the last few hundred years. However, did you know that Baptist beliefs started with Jesus Christ? The Apostles and early Christians took these beliefs across Europe; and there is much evidence that these beliefs were in Britain by the second century.

**Does History Support the Claims of the Baptists?**

Did Baptist beliefs arise in recent times? Judge for yourself, from these ancient quotes:

1140—**Evervinus of Stanfield**, in the diocese of Cologne, Germany, wrote to St. Bernard: “There have lately been some heretics discovered among us near Cologne...Their heresy is this: ...They do not hold the baptism of infants...They place no confidence in the intercession of saints...They do not admit of any purgatory fire...by which means they make void all prayers and oblations of believers for the deceased...We, therefore, beseech you, holy father...that you would be pleased to direct your pen against these wild beasts” (The History of the Christian Church, William Jones, pp. 364-366).

This quote reveals that there were, in twelfth century Germany, multitudes of Christians who did not pray to saints; who did not believe in Purgatory; who therefore did not pray for the dead or do masses for the dead; and who did not baptize infants, but believers only. Evervinus further reported that there were “great numbers of their persuasion scattered almost everywhere.”

1557 - **The Catholic Cardinal Hosius** wrote, “Were it not for the fact that the Anabaptists [“re-baptizers”] have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1200 years, they would swarm greater than all the Reformers” (Hosius, Letters Apud Opera, pp. 112—113).

The above quote shows a distinct Baptist existence that goes back to the second century, in this Catholic historian’s estimation. It also shows that the Baptist beliefs did not begin during the Protestant Reformation. Throughout the centuries, people with Baptist beliefs have been called “re-baptizers” because they refused to accept infant baptism, and insisted that a person must be baptized the scriptural way after he has truly received Christ as Saviour, by placing his faith in Christ alone. The old label “Anabaptist,” which was originally meant to be an insult, was later changed to “Baptist.” True Baptists embrace this name, for it is biblical. There is only one true baptism—believer’s baptism, by immersion.

Consider these other quotes, from other honest historians:
1726 - The Lutheran J. L. von Mosheim wrote, “...the origin of...the Anabaptists... is lost in the remote depths of antiquity... Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern Baptists” (*Institute of Ecclesiastical History*, II, pp. 119-120).

1819 - Reformed historians A. Ypeij and J.J. Dermout wrote, “We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists... were the original Waldenses, and who have long in history received the honour of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the Apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrine of the Gospel through all ages” (*Gescbiedenis der Nederlandse Hervomke Kerk*, I, p. 148).

1896 - The Methodist scholar, John Clark Ridpath, wrote to W. A. Jarrell, “I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 A.D., though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptists” (W. A. Jarrell, Baptist Church Perpetuity, p. 59).

1862 - The Baptist, C. H. Spurgeon, declared, “We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation; we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born. We never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it: but we have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves” (*C.H.S., Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1861, p. 225).

**What Is A Baptist?**

Let us set the record straight: Being a Baptist does not save anyone! Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone, not through membership in any church (not even a Baptist church). Churches that choose to call themselves “Baptist” do so because of the scriptural beliefs that have long been associated with the name.

A **Baptist** is a Christian who subscribes to a distinct scriptural theology that can be traced back to Jesus Christ and His Apostles. These theological beliefs have often been called the “Baptist Distinctives.” One of the most prominent of these beliefs is that of believer's baptism by immersion (as opposed to infant baptism,
effusion [pouring], or sprinkling). Baptists also believe in the congregational model of church government.

What are the “Baptist Distinctives” (Beliefs)?

1. As Baptists, we believe that the Bible is God’s holy, inerrant Word.

The Bible alone is what we look to for instruction as to how to live our lives. The Bible, not tradition, is our only Authority concerning what we believe and how we worship God (Matthew 7:24-27; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

2. As Baptists, we believe in the Priesthood of all Believers.

We believe that each person has the right to approach God on his own, without the help of any earthly intercessor. (There is no need to confess to a priest.) According to the Bible, every true Christian is a “king and priest” before God—meaning that each believer has direct access to the throne of God, through Jesus Christ. There is no elite class of “priests” who wield god-like power over other Christians. Jesus Christ alone is our High Priest—the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:1-22; Revelation 1:5-6).

3. As Baptists, we believe in Freedom of Soul.

While we firmly hold that Jesus Christ is the only Way to heaven, we do not believe that anyone can be forced to receive Christ. We persuade men through the preaching of the Gospel. We believe each person has a free will to worship as he chooses, without fear of persecution from any group, church, or government. This belief set the Baptist people apart from all other professing Christian groups for nearly a millennium and a half before the idea even began to take root in Western society. The first society in which true freedom of religion was granted to all was the colony of Rhode Island, founded by a Baptist named Roger Williams in 1635 (2 Corinthians 5:11; John 18:36; Acts 5:27-29; Revelation 22:17).

4. As Baptists, we believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

We believe that through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, He conquered sin, death, and hell. Every individual who will, by simple faith (trust) in Christ, receive the free gift of Jesus’ atoning death on his behalf, has eternal life. Since we believe that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ were enough to purchase our salvation in full, we believe baptism and the Lord’s Supper are only symbols of our trust in Christ, and not ways of obtaining saving grace (they are not “sacraments”) (John 1:12; 1 Corinthians 11:24,25; Hebrews 10:10-18).
5. As Baptists, we believe that baptism is by immersion (not sprinkling or pouring), and that it is only for believers.

Only a person who has believed in the finished work of Jesus Christ to save him from sin, death, and hell is eligible for baptism. One must be old enough to understand the Gospel and make the choice to trust Christ. This excludes infants and toddlers from baptism. According to the Bible, infants are safe from God’s judgment until they reach an age of understanding and accountability—at which time they must choose whether to receive God’s way of salvation, or reject it (2 Samuel 12:21-23; Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:1-5; Romans 7:7-10).

6. As Baptists, we believe that the local church is God’s instrument of worship.

One enters into membership in a local church by scriptural baptism. The local church should not be ruled by a hierarchal system. Each local assembly (church) has its own autonomous, congregational government, and answers to no higher “ecclesiastical” authority—only to Jesus Christ. The local church should have a biblically qualified pastor (the same office as bishop/elder), and biblically qualified deacons where necessary (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:12,13; Ephesians 5:23-33; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

7. As Baptists, we believe in the separation of church and state.

All Christians are to pray for, support, and obey civil authority as long as the civil authority does not command one to violate God’s Word. We also believe that no government has any authority over the religious practices, administrations, and teachings of the local church. Nor is there any such thing as a “state church.” As Jesus clearly stated, His kingdom is “not of this world.” He did not commission His servants to fight with swords, but rather to put away the sword. This belief radically sets Baptists apart from both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation churches, which often forced people, on pain of fines, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, and even torture and death, to belong to their religion (Matthew 26:52; John 18:36-37; Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7).

These “Baptist Distinctives” were recorded not only by the Baptist peoples, but
by those who persecuted them. The record cannot be denied. It is estimated that as many as 50 million people of Baptist belief were martyred by the end of the Middle Ages.

As Baptists, we believe that the church (founded by Jesus Christ in Jerusalem) was Baptist in character and doctrine, and that separate, yet similar churches have had perpetual existence from the days of Christ to the present. This view is not only demonstrated throughout history, but is also based on Jesus’ promise that He would be with His followers as they carried out His commission, “even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The history of the Baptists shows that Baptists have always been separate from both the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations. The Baptist movement predates the Catholic Church, and was therefore not a product of the Protestant Reformation. The Baptist churches did not come out of the Catholic Church: rather, the Catholic Church departed from the New Testament-modelled, Baptistic churches by the third century. J.M. Carroll’s booklet The Trail of Blood, published in 1931, has been a popular writing presenting the historical facts. It points to ancient groups such as the Novatianists, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigensians, Waldenses, and Anabaptists, as predecessors to contemporary Baptists. Baptist historian John T. Christian writes in the introduction to his book History of the Baptists: “I have...pursued the scientific method of investigation, and I have let the facts speak for themselves. I have no question in my own mind that there has been a historical succession of Baptists from the days of Christ to the present time.”

What Is The Baptist Desire?

The desire of every genuinely born-again, Bible-believing Baptist is the same desire our God and Saviour has. That is, we long for all people to know, understand, and experience the love of Jesus Christ, “who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). You can experience this love through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Here is how you may enter into this wonderful relationship with Christ:
First, realise that God loves you.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Second, realise that you are a sinner.

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Third, realise that sin has a price that must be paid. The penalty of sin is death—which, ultimately, is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.

Romans 6:23a “For the wages of sin is death.”
Revelation 20:14-15 “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Fourth, realise you cannot earn God’s gracious gift of eternal life by any good works, religious rituals, giving of money, or any merit of your own. Salvation is a gift, which Christ purchased with His blood.

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”
Titus 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us....”
Romans 3:28 “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”
1 Peter 1:18-19 “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Fifth, repent (turn your mind, heart, and will from sin to God), and believe that Jesus Christ (and only Jesus) died and rose again to pay the price for your sin in full.
Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Hebrews 1:3 “…when he [Jesus Christ] had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Mark 1:15 “…The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel [literally, “good news”].”

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 “…I declare unto you the gospel [literally, “good news”] which I preached unto you....by which also ye are saved...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

Romans 10:9-10 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Finally, believing these things in your heart, ask Jesus Christ to be your Saviour, and claim His promise of eternal life.

Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you have made this decision to repent and believe on Christ alone to save you, please know that salvation is eternal! You cannot lose your salvation, because Christ has died and paid the full price for your sins “once for all.”

1 John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life....”

John 6:37 “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

For further information, or for a personal visit, please contact Pastor Stephen Finley at 086.223.2487. Church web site: redemptionbc.com.

---

You are invited to our services:
Sunday morning—9.20 a.m. / 10.30 a.m.
Sunday prayer time —6.00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible study—7.00 p.m.

Meeting location:
Basement of the Townhouse
(in the rear of the RTE building),
St. Mary’s Place, Athlone