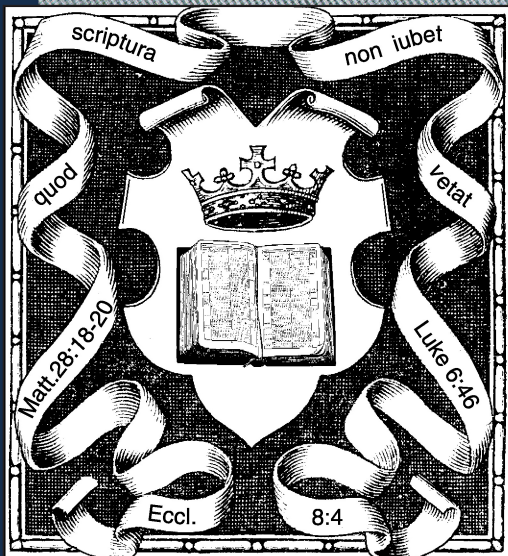


The Baptist Distinctives Series Number 41



The Apostolic Church

William E. Paxton



Quod scriptura, non iubet vetat

The Latin translates, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:”

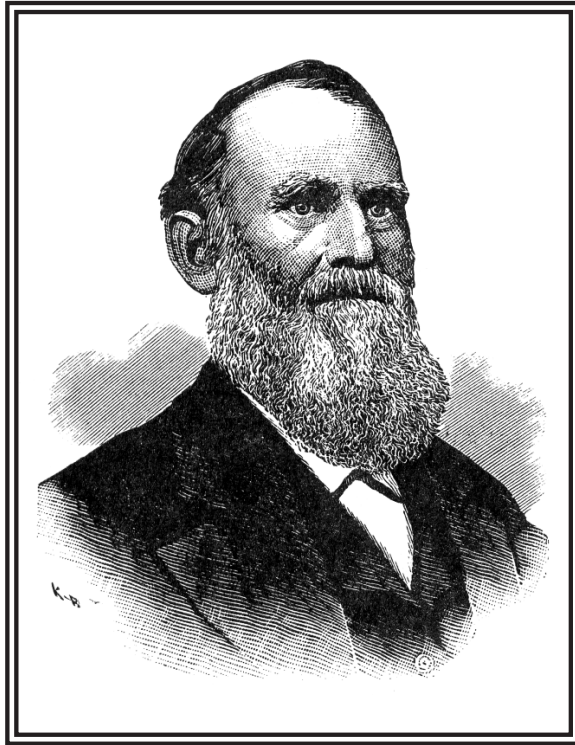
On the Cover: Baptists rejoice to hold in common with other evangelicals the main principles of the orthodox Christian faith. However, there are points of difference and these differences are significant. In fact, because these differences arise out of God’s revealed will, they are of vital importance. Hence, the barriers of separation between Baptists and others can hardly be considered a trifling matter. To suppose that Baptists are kept apart solely by their views on Baptism or the Lord’s Supper is a regrettable misunderstanding. Baptists hold views which distinguish them from Catholics, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians, and the differences are so great as not only to justify, but to demand, the separate denominational existence of Baptists. Some people think Baptists ought not teach and emphasize their differences but as E.J. Forrester stated in 1893, “Any denomination that has views which justify its separate existence, is bound to promulgate those views. If those views are of sufficient importance to justify a separate existence, they are important enough to create a duty for their promulgation ... the very same reasons which justify the separate existence of any denomination make it the duty of that denomination to teach the distinctive doctrines upon which its separate existence rests.” If Baptists have a right to a separate denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which their separate life cannot be justified or maintained.

Many among today’s professing Baptists have an agenda to revise the Baptist distinctives and redefine what it means to be a Baptist. Others don’t understand why it even matters. The books being reproduced in the *Baptist Distinctives Series* are republished in order that Baptists from the past may state, explain and defend the primary Baptist distinctives as they understood them. It is hoped that this Series will provide a more thorough historical perspective on what it means to be distinctively Baptist.

The Lord Jesus Christ asked, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). The immediate context surrounding this question explains what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. Addressing the same issue, Christ’s question is meant to show that a confession of discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is inconsistent and untrue if it is not accompanied with a corresponding submission to His authoritative commands. Christ’s question teaches us that a true recognition of His authority as Lord inevitably includes a submission to the authority of His Word. Hence, with this question Christ has made it forever impossible to separate His authority as King from the authority of His Word. These two principles—the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word—are the two most fundamental Baptist distinctives. The first gives rise to the second and out of these two all the other Baptist distinctives emanate. As F.M. Jans wrote in 1894, “Loyalty to Christ as King, manifesting itself in a constant and unswerving obedience to His will as revealed in His written Word, is the real source of all the Baptist distinctives:’ In the search for the *primary* Baptist distinctive many have settled on the Lordship of Christ as the most basic distinctive. Strangely, in doing this, some have attempted to separate Christ’s Lordship from the authority of Scripture, as if you could embrace Christ’s authority without submitting to what He commanded. However, while Christ’s Lordship and Kingly authority can be isolated and considered essentially for discussion’s sake, we see from Christ’s own words in Luke 6:46 that His Lordship is really inseparable from His Word and, with regard to real Christian discipleship, there can be no practical submission to the one without a practical submission to the other.

In the symbol above the Kingly Crown and the Open Bible represent the inseparable truths of Christ’s Kingly and Biblical authority. The Crown and Bible graphics are supplemented by three Bible verses (Ecclesiastes 8:4, Matthew 28:18-20, and Luke 6:46) that reiterate and reinforce the inextricable connection between the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word. The truths symbolized by these components are further emphasized by the Latin quotation - *quod scriptura, non iubet vetat*— *i.e.*, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:’ This Latin quote has been considered historically as a summary statement of the regulative principle of Scripture. Together these various symbolic components converge to exhibit the two most foundational Baptist Distinctives out of which all the other Baptist Distinctives arise. Consequently, we have chosen this composite symbol as a logo to represent the primary truths set forth in the *Baptist Distinctives Series*.

THE
APOSTOLIC CHURCH



WILLIAM EDWARDS PAXTON
1825-1883

THE
APOSTOLIC CHURCH;
BEING
AN INQUIRY INTO THE
CONSTITUTION AND POLITY
OF THAT
VISIBLE ORGANIZATION
SET UP BY
JESUS CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES.

BY
W. E. PAXTON

FIRST THOUSAND.

*With a Biographical Sketch of the Author
By John Franklin Jones*

MEMPHIS:
Southern Baptist Publication Society
W. D. Mayfield, Business Manager.
1876.



The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.
-- Psalm 60:4

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN# 1579786421

PREFACE.

IN the work here presented to the public, I have endeavored to meet a recognized want in our denominational literature—the discussion, in a single volume, of the underlying principles of that church polity which we derive from the New Testament. Our people have scarcely enough appreciated the strength which our simple, popular government gives us, to make those principles prominent in our discussions. We have too much relied upon our Scriptural Baptism as our main pillar of strength, when in truth it is but one of many. A converted church membership, the want of power in the church to alter its forms, the local and independent character of the Apostolic Churches, the essential equality of the Christian brotherhood, the subordination of the clerical order to the church, the rights of conscience and private judgment—these and other principles, discussed in this volume are readily admitted; but we scarcely realize how peculiarly these are our own, and how certainly we derive them from the Scriptures. These are no minor questions, but they involve the authority of the Scriptures themselves; and present the only safeguard against the Spirit of innovation that would sweep away the whole fabric of the church, with all its precious and consoling doctrines.

Most of the questions discussed are living ones, though a few of them, necessarily embraced in the subject of our inquiry may not be so regarded. The law of religious liberty has made wonderful progress during the present century; yet it is but imperfectly understood out of our own country. It is true that almost everywhere dissenters enjoy the privilege of worshiping God according to the dictates of their own conscience; but in most countries this is regarded as an act of generous toleration, rather than the enjoyment of a natural right; and even in our own country we encounter a power that denies the right of private judgment.

The subject of Baptism is regarded as one of the settled questions, and I have only aimed to gather up and classify the results.

In a few instances I have dared to follow the inexorable deductions of logic to advanced conclusions, from which many of my brethren may shrink, who deprecate a denominationalism rigidly distinctive in practice, if not in theory. But I have not sought to give these matters an undue prominence or thrust them into connections where they do not properly belong; and altogether they occupy less than a dozen pages of the volume.

In the original plan of the work I included the Doctrines of the Apostolic Church. But I found that the proper discussion of these would extend the book beyond the limits I had assigned myself; and a mere compend would hardly serve any useful purpose. I preferred therefore to defer these to some future volume, if God should graciously spare my life.

In regard to the execution of the task I have assigned myself, I invite fair, candid and respectful criticism; and for the benefit of those who may essay the role of critics I am constrained to confess that I cannot plead in extenuation either the indiscretion of youth, or haste in the preparation of the work. It is the work of mature age, and the fruit of years of study. My studies in this direction began previous to the year 1859, when I published a little work on the Rights of Laymen; but in 1864 I began to collect the material for a more extended work on the Apostolic Church. Most of these questions I have had occasion to discuss in the regular or occasional discharge of my duty as a minister; and I have devoted my leisure moments—those precious fragments of time which it has been my habit to improve—in arranging and unifying the material thus accumulated.

There is one respect in which I ask indulgence; I am at too great a distance to personally supervise the publication, and am compelled to depend upon the care and intelligence of compositors and proof readers for the accuracy of the typography.

Thus I send forth this child of my brain to battle with the world and to accomplish its destiny, invoking the blessings of the Great Head of the Church, and praying that he may sanctify my labors to the good of his cause.

SHREVEPORT, LA., Aug. 13, 1876.

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INTRODUCTION.

I PROPOSE, in the spirit of Christ, to institute an inquiry into the organization, external form, rights and powers of the Apostolic Church, so far as the same may be deduced from the Holy Scriptures. If I shall have occasion to refer to those writings immediately succeeding the Apostolic age, usually denominated the Apostolic Fathers, it will be with that caution with which it is necessary to examine all merely human writings. Many who have undertaken to investigate this subject lay too much stress upon the authority of those fathers who wrote during the first three hundred years of the Christian Era, forgetting that corruptions began to creep into the church polity even during the days of the Apostles ; for Paul declares that the mystery of iniquity had already begun to work, and that these corruptions went on until they subverted the original constitution.

In the application of their writings we should not loose sight of the fact that the lust of power is the ruling passion of man, from which not even good men are always exempt, and that the natural tendency of those who are invested with temporary authority, is to endeavor to establish, perpetuate and extend that power, and to enlarge the prerogatives of office. The few who govern are apt to be more vigilant than the many who are governed. Men are disposed to suffer some encroachments upon their rights rather than to disturb the peace and order of society by an effort to redress their wrongs. Hence gradual inroads may be made upon their rights without resistance. All history proves that there is a tendency in all governments, administered by man, to centralize and consolidate power in the hands of the few ; and what was at first permitted in an emergency, is afterwards construed into a precedent and finally claimed *jure divino*. No part of history more clearly illustrates this than the first centuries of the Christian Era. Now, in examining the writings of this period, as I may occasionally do in the course of these pages, this fact must be kept constantly in view. They must be

treated as all other witnesses, and their admissions against themselves allowed more weight than their declarations in favor of themselves.

These writers were the bishops and presbyters, the rulers in their respective churches, and may be supposed to be careful not to admit anything against their own order, while at the same time they were not so exempt from ordinary human frailties as not to desire to extend their prerogatives as far as circumstances would permit. Thus any concessions made by them as to the rights of the laity are to be taken as sufficient proof of their tradition from the Apostles, unless contradicted by Apostolic authority. While on the other hand if we find them laying claim to powers neither expressed nor implied in the inspired writings, we may justly suspect that the powers are usurped. Judged by this rule, they may serve to throw light upon the Sacred Record.

It is plain that in an inquiry of this kind the principle authority must be the Holy Scriptures. Where these speak, it is the duty of man to be silent and obey. When they are silent, man may safely leave off doing.

While I am not disposed to disparage the real difficulties of the investigation I have undertaken, I by no means adopt the opinion of Dr. Bangs :

“Perhaps there are few subjects of a religious nature involved in greater obscurity, and which have occasioned sharper disputes than the question : *What was the primitive mode of church government?* Its obscurity, indeed, affords a very obvious reason why ecclesiastical writers have been so much divided concerning it; for those truths which are expressly revealed as articles of faith, or may be easily deduced from given principles, do not readily admit of controversy, and therefore respecting all such, Christians are more generally agreed.

* * * * * This imperfect manner in which the order of the church is sketched out in the Holy Scriptures affords no small proof that no specific mode is essential to constitute an evangelical church.”—Original Church of Christ, page 6.

If this argument is worth anything, it proves that all revelation is a crude mass of obscurities, for there is not a single doctrine of the New Testament that is not disputed by some class of persons, calling themselves Christians; and some of its plainest teachings are most hotly contested. Dr. Bangs himself does not more widely differ from his Presbyterian brethren on the form of church government than he does on the essential doctrines of grace.

I cannot think that God, who revealed the most minute particulars respecting the form, dimensions, material and construction of the temple at Jerusalem, which was the antetype of the Christian Church, would leave his spiritual building at the caprice of every bungling journeyman, who might choose to set up his own model and exercise his skill in erecting this Holy Tabernacle of the Lord. If God has left no designs upon the tressel-board, whereby the workmen may pursue their labors, who shall arrogate to himself the exclusive right to become master builder? If God has given no directions upon the subject, it becomes the common property of all, and each may set up his own model. And so, Jo. Smith, the Mormon, had as clear a right to set up a new church as Luther or Calvin, Henry VIII. or John Wesley

I believe a candid examination of the Holy Writings will satisfy any unprejudiced mind that this question is susceptible of as clear and definite an answer as any question concerning the doctrines taught, and the duties enjoined in the Sacred Scriptures. I am not surprised that men, who start with their own ecclesiastical organizations, and look in the New Testament to find a counterpart, should discover any amount of obscurities. But he who divests his mind of his preconceived notions of what the church *should be*, and comes to the Scriptures to learn what it *is*, I dare say will be able to learn the leading characteristics of the church, the qualifications of its members, its officers, and their qualifications and powers, and the manner of administering discipline. This is all that need be known, for this knowledge *practically* applied, will constitute all that Christ intended his church to be—an executive, not a legislative body. To adopt the language of an earnest advocate of original church order: “That

these principles can be found together, embodied in specific articles in any one chapter of the New Testament, I do not claim; nor can the Apostles' creed, or the acknowledged articles of evangelical faith, but like these they run through the whole body of the teachings of Christ and his Apostles; and I do maintain that the principles of church constitution, order and discipline, are as clearly and specifically taught as are the doctrines which Christian churches are to hold and teach." (J. R. Graves.)

“REASONS WHY BAPTISTS OUGHT TO TEACH THEIR DISTINCTIVE VIEWS . . . First, *it is a duty we owe to ourselves*. We must teach these views in order to be consistent in holding them. Because of these we stand apart from other Christians, in separate organizations. . . We have no right thus to stand apart unless the matters of difference have real importance; and if they are really important, we certainly ought to teach them.”

JOHN A. BROADUS

The Duty of Baptists To Teach Their Distinctive Views.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881).

“No religious denomination has a moral right to a separate existence unless it differs essentially from others. Ecclesiastical differences ought always to spring from profound doctrinal differences. *To divide Christians, except for reasons of gravest import, is criminal schism*. Separate religious denominations are justifiable only for matters of conscience growing out of clear scriptural precept.”

J. L. M. CURRY

A Baptist Church Radically Different From Paedobaptist Churches.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1889).

“There is something distinctive in the principles of Baptists. They differ from all other denominations; and the difference is so great as not only to justify, but to demand, their separate existence as a people . . . What distinctive mission have the Baptists, if this is not their mission? - to present the truth in love on the matters wherein they differ from Pedobaptists. What is there but this that justifies their separate denominational existence and saves them from the reproach of being schismatics? *If they have a right to denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which that life cannot be justified or maintained.*”

J. M. PENDLETON

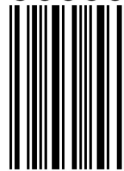
Distinctive Principles of Baptists.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882).

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