

Historical Baptist

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[0:00] Amen. Well, we are now in week three. I will remind you that tonight we'll do Q&A; and text me and say, hey, I emailed you because I check my emails about once a day.

I have all notifications on my phone turned off so I don't get any notifications. So just let me know that you sent them to me. If you ask me them in person here in just a moment, give them to me in writing, please, because I assure you I will forget your question and I don't want to do that.

So tonight we will do Q&A; as we cover those three. I know there's some questions that have been asked and good questions that are wanting to be asked and hopefully we'll come together and have an answer that is suitable for those.

I can't claim that I would know the answer to all of them, but I think as a corporate body we can work it out with one another. This morning we are looking at historical badness. I have confined myself, just to be honest with you, to the historical badness.

I'm not really focused so much on Southern badness. We are a Southern badness church by doctrine and there is a difference in that at times, if you will, for lack of a better way of saying it.

[1:34] Sometimes the umbrella gets so large, there is so much diversity. You really can say you are this, but it looks a lot different under there. But one thing that unites is the instinctives and the doctrines of the Baptist, or it ought to.

So in the Southern Baptist world, there are 43, almost 44,000 churches, and I can assure you that among those 44,000 churches, there are some that look completely different than us.

And we look completely different than others. So we have to be careful when we say these things, but we want to know who we are and we want to know why we're there. If there is one of these eight, essential eights, that I would say led me to say, hey, I need to do this, it would probably be this one, okay?

One that I am personally least equipped to be able to speak to, and some of you can speak to it much, much better than I could.

Just, and we'll see why in just a few moments. But the reason I did is because I had someone share with me one time, not too long ago actually, they had asked this individual, why do you go to a Baptist church, or why are you Baptist?

[2:42] And the individual responded, well, that's just where I fell. And that's just where I happened to be. Well, as a pastor, that's not a sufficient answer for me because one, you haven't defended anything, you haven't been able to stand and give a reason for why you are where you are.

And so that's what I hope to do this morning, at least make you begin thinking about that. I'm not trying to run anybody off, but I'm also not trying to hide anything, and I want you to begin thinking about it. So quick question, why are you Baptist?

Why are you Baptist? Someone's asked you, why are you Baptist? They tell us that there are three major reasons why individuals are Baptist. The first is conditioning.

And I would say some of you fall within this, and this is not a judgmental thing. That is, you have always been around the Baptist world. You may have grown up in a Baptist church. Your family has always been Baptist.

R.G. Lee is famous for saying that he was Baptist born, Baptist bred, and when he dies, he'll be Baptist dead. So he was Baptist to the core of his being because he was conditioned.

[3:47] He had been raised in that. He had seen that. Some of you have been in this church your entire life, and that is a conditioning thing. That's not a wrong thing. It's just this is who we are.

I can assure you, I am not Baptist by condition. I did not grow up in a Baptist church. I did not, as a matter of fact, grow up. Baptists weren't spoken of very highly among my influences in my life growing up.

So I was not conditioned to be Baptist. It was something that I never really thought much of. I knew some Baptists. They were kind of weird. That's just the way I like to put it, okay?

As a matter of fact, some of the ones I grew up with, you know one of the ones I grew up with, Kirk Shoal's wife, Kathy, when they moved to Tennessee after he had resigned of being pastor in North Carolina, she had heard that Billy Jo Calvert was pastoring a Baptist church and had to go see it to believe it because she could not believe it because she was Baptist when we went to school together, and evidently I was not very commendable to her profession.

So anyway, there is the conditioning. Some are Baptist by convenience. Some of you will fall into this camp. That is, it is the church that is closest to you. I know that's not the case for us here. It is something within the church draws you, whether it be the music, the preaching, the whatever it is, the fellowship.

[5:12] Your identity is wrapped up in your corporate body. Maybe there's friends there. Maybe there's people you know there. And so it's convenience. But the scary thing about convenience is you could just as easily be any other denomination.

If you would find a good preacher, if you would find music that was more suitable to you, if you would find a group of friends that was there, if you are Baptist by convenience, then you could just as easily be Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian.

And that's not judgmental. That's just stating the facts. Okay? The third and final one is conviction. Some people are Baptists by conviction.

That is, lines up with the doctrines and the teaching of historical Baptists. Now, I'll tell you a little bit about me.

I was not conditioned to be Baptist. I became Baptist by convenience. I married a Baptist girl. And she did her due diligence and allowed the Lord to work on my heart.

[6:12] And so that's the way it read. And I've always said, and I've got to kind of change this after preparing for this this morning. I've got to kind of change some stuff. I have said, many of you have heard me say, I'm probably the most non-Baptist Baptist preacher you've ever met.

Well, it turns out my convictions are exactly historical Baptist convictions. Not because anybody told me. Not because anybody taught me. Not because I was conditioned by any school or seminary I attended, though I've attended a number of them.

Not because of any of that. These are my convictions. So now, I may be a lot different than Southern Baptists, but these are, these have become my convictions from study of Scripture. And we'll understand why. In the Baptist story, it says, what one believes about God, the Bible, salvation, and the church is ultimately more important than one's heritage or preferences. Or to put it scripturally, it says in the book of Romans, Romans chapter 14, verse 22, the faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God, blessed is he who does not judge himself in what he approves.

If I had to give you a verse for these eight essentials, it would be that one. What I want you to have, your faith, I want you to have as your own conviction before God. These are the things that you bear by conviction.

[7:25] And so you hold on to that and you're not condemning yourself in what you believe or what you approve. So, blessed is the one who does not judge himself in what he approves.

All right, Baptist beginnings. As we begin to look at the Baptist beginnings, we have to do this very quickly and because we could spend an insurmountable amount of time on here. The beginning of the Baptist church is really hard to pinpoint.

It is a point of contention among many church historians at times and there are varying, varying ways. If you were to go read Baptist literature and you say, oh, I went to the Baptist church again,

you're going to find any spectrum of number of things.

Some Baptists, especially historically, even in our own state and even in our own convention, the Southern Baptist days and the early days of Southern Baptist convention and in our own state, there are actually some associational meetings happening in the state of Tennessee in which this was really proposed and really adhere to in the deep south of which we are a part of it.

I believe that you can trace the Baptist history by the blood, the trail of blood all the way back to the New Testament apostles. You know that the Baptists have always been Baptists. We've always been present.

[8:32] We've always been there. Friend, you're really pressing history if you do that, okay? I'm just going to go ahead and say it. You are really kind of squinting your eyes and twisting your head and wanting to read into history more than you ought to read into history, but there are many who would like to say Baptists have always been around.

They might not have been called Baptists but Baptists have always been and you can trace this trail of blood and take us all the way back to the New Testament. Be careful if you do that, okay? Because there are other denominations that like to do that too. Those are proponents who say Baptists are not Protestant at all. We have nothing to do with the Protestant Reformation. We're not Protestant. We existed before the Protestant Reformation and so therefore we are not a Protestant denomination.

Again, proceed with caution and care. There's some great, what I consider historical Southern Baptist leaders. I have their writings in the back and I can agree with them on their interpretations of biblical passages.

I can agree with them in their interpretations of matters of church history but when they start talking about the history of the Baptist church, I think, man, they are really affected by their times.

[9:37] And so we always read things through the lens of our time and our season so understand when they're writing, who they're writing, who they're writing to and so we understand that.

There are many respected leaders and historians go back and forth on when the Baptist began but it does appear, if we were just to look at it, without any kind of ulterior motive, it does appear the Baptist church has its roots in the Protestant Reformation and is one of those, remember we looked at this last week, radical reformers, so we're on the radical side.

The magisterial reformers wanted what? They wanted to maintain this union with the state and to be a member of the church was to be a member of that state and it was kind of garnered by demographics. So if you lived in this area, you were Lutheran.

If you lived in this area, you were Presbyterian. If you lived over here, you were that. And then there were the radical reformers that said, hey, you reformers are not going fast enough. We want to go a little bit further. The magisterial reformers said we want the church to be the first century church.

The radical reformers said we don't care about the first century church. We want the New Testament church. That's a big difference, right? Because as far as you go back and what you set the standard to is what you were doing.

[10:47] The magisterial reformers looked at the church leaders, the early church fathers and said they have something going on. The radical reformers said, well, they might have had something going on but we don't care. If the Bible doesn't say do it, we don't want to do it.

So it seems that the Baptists have their roots and kind of connectivity in the radical reformers and we can see because there are clear influences both in the early church reformers and those who came out of the Reformation period.

These names might not mean a whole lot to you but they do mean much when you start thinking about Baptist thought and what Baptists do. These are the three leading reformers, if you will. You know Martin Luther. He nailed his 99 theses on the wall, 95 theses on the wall. Saw the coolest shirt ever at the convention. Brother, I tried to get it for you. It was like a picture of Martin Luther and it said in the bottom, nailed it.

That's awesome. That was something to me. But you know, he nailed his theses there and he was part of those but the Baptists kind of clung to his insistence on scripture alone. We'll get to that in just a moment and for authority and for purpose so the Baptists said, yeah, that's good.

[11:50] Yorick Zwingli, Zwingli, Zwingli, Zwinglian theology, someone like, who in the world is he? He was a little bit away from Martin Luther. He was one of the reformers but it was his doctrine of the Lord's Supper as a memorial, symbolic event.

Luther still adhered to the body literally being present in the bread and the blood literally being present in the wine. That's one of the questions we'll answer tonight. Zwingli said, no, it's representative and so they're working out their doctrine, right?

Now, these are all magisterial reformers but the Baptists said, I think he's right and so they hold on to that. John Calvin, you know Calvin. Some of you know Calvin for one reason.

That is the doctrine of election and the tulips and all those Calvinistic theology, right? That's named after John Calvin. John Calvin's a pretty smart guy, by the way. He's really good. His principles of theology and his writings and all the writings of Calvin have so shaped every denomination around the world more than any other individual.

We can't be careful to write him off and everything so the Baptists really clung to Calvin's concept of the salvation of man and yes, very early on the Baptists did adhere to predestination and they adhered to that in a very rampant way and then very quickly as Baptists do they divided over that and so we started seeing different Baptists.

[13:10] We started seeing them some that adhered to free will and some that adhered to predestination but anyway, it was Calvin who kind of set the standard for what does salvation look like? We'll get to that next week, salvation and sanctification.

But there are also other influences very early in the Baptist church the Anabaptists again, don't look up any of these groups thinking they had it exactly right but the Anabaptists which are not really connected to the Baptists though the Baptist word is still in there totally different.

So the Anabaptist movement, the Brethren movement, the Mennonite movement had more influence than just about any other. The Mennonite movement really had a great influence you'll see that in just a moment and then the Separatist movements, okay?

So they all had influence. All these are happening at the same time. In the early 1600s, I mean like 1606, 1605, we have a gentleman named John Smith.

It is the clear first signs of a Baptist church that we can say, yep, there it is. And they called themselves Baptist church because John Smith came to realize from his study of scripture, man, only baptism done by a believing individual is sufficient.

[14:21] So he said, well, the one who baptized me I don't think was genuinely saved. And he didn't know a saved individual so he said, well, I've accepted Christ my Lord and Savior and went out to the river and he baptized himself.

He baptized those that were with him and baptism formed a church and he became the unlicensed because at that time in England you had to be licensed by the state.

He became an unlicensed pastor of that church, that congregation and began to experience persecution immediately because he was unlicensed, preaching without a license and so he kind of moved and when he moved he moved into the Netherlands region and he met an individual whose last name was Menon, the Mennonites and he started hanging out with him and said, man, you Mennonites have it going on to proper understanding so he started forming his doctrine, his belief upon Mennonite faith and he eventually came to the point where he asked to join and was later accepted into the Mennonite church.

So the founder of the Baptist church was trying to merge the congregation into the Mennonite church but some of them were like, ah, there was one thing in the Mennonite doctrine and it's still adherent to today by the way that the Baptists really disagreed with and that is pacifism.

They thought that you did have the right to bring up arms and they did think that you had the right civilly to fight in the army. The Baptists thought, well, I can be a protector of people and so they just couldn't adhere to this pacifism of I'm never going to bear arms and I'm never going to do this plus they wanted full beards.

[15:48] So, you know, they said, we're not going to be like this and so that group kind of pulled out. John Smith joined that pacifist movement, died in the Mennonite church but then we meet Thomas Hellweiss.

Thomas Hellweiss became the pastor of the church, moved it back into England and so from 1611 on there has been a continuous succession of Baptist churches.

And it was that Baptist church that began forming the early confessions, began forming the early adherents. They were imprisoned, they were let go, they were in prison, they were let go. A lot of things came out of that.

You know John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress. He was a Baptist pastor who was in prison and wrote, did a lot of extensive writing and there's a lot of things. If we were to study the history of the Baptist church, we could just be here for days and days and days on end.

But you have to be really, really moved by the history of the Baptist church for it was the early Baptist church that introduced congregational singing for the first time in church history.

[16:52] And they started singing and they started being persecuted because they were singing. People started making fun of them. But this guy said, I'm going to keep on singing and so they started singing. So congregational singing came into this missionary societies in which people started sending missionaries overseas and funding them by the churches back home, which some of you went on mission trips that we funded you.

All began in Baptist churches. There are a lot of things that historically you look back and go, okay, so the Baptists kind of had some things going on and they were doing it right and it was under the midst of a lot of people wagging their heads and I don't know why they do that.

So anyway, that's the beginning. Now let's get into what we believe the Baptist distinctives, what Baptists have historically believed and affirmed and this is what you need to know. Right? You don't always have to know where it is you came from because the difference, we didn't get into North American Baptist, we didn't get into all that, but the roots all the way back there in the early 1600s is really what began to set these distinctives and what have really adhered every Baptist church historically to.

The first one is one of the five solas out of the Reformation, the sola scriptura or scripture alone and that is what was pushed by Martin Luther and it is scripture alone is sufficient.

Norman once said Baptists have always traced their origin and existence to the prominent place they give the Bible for their faith and practice. Historically, doctrinally, theologically, Baptists have always claimed it is scripture alone that sets the precedence.

[18:24] It is that alone. And this scripture has the sole authority over everything the church does and everything the individual does which means that the Bible is above all church councils, creeds, and confessions.

We looked at the creeds before and the creeds became binding upon the early church and church councils became binding so when the church councils would get together the council would say this is what you ought to do and every individual ought to do it.

Well, the reason the Baptists were under such persecution is because they said ah, well, really we think the Bible should set the standard not the council. And even today one of the major defining distinctives is that the Bible alone has the authority.

It supersedes any other group of believers any other group of bodies and it alone has the right to tell us how to live how to worship and how to join together. A proper understanding of the Bible is all that is necessary.

So, if you study your Baptist history you will find that Baptists have historically been some of the forerunners in theology books in doctrinal books in commentators but we have not historically always been those who wrote great what we would call mystic writings or poetry.

[19:39] Baptists were always their writings the early writings of the Baptists have always been saturated with Scripture and helping you understand Scripture because they thought all you needed to know was what the Bible said.

If you were to look at the major theological writings I have a number of systematic theology books in my office and if you go look at them every one of them are either Baptists or highly influenced by Baptists and if you pull other books off the shelf you will get a little bit of mysticism in it and things like that.

So, the Catholic Church in their world church tradition and interpretation is authoritative so the church tradition carries as much authority as Scripture and on top of that since they perceive that

God has given the church the authority to interpret Scripture what the church tells you the Bible says carries more authority than what you read in the Bible.

This is why their councils and their confessions begin to carry so much weight. What the church the church is the final word in the Catholic Church that is how we interpret it defines how you live it. That's completely different than Baptist theology. liberalism and neo-orthodoxy which is still around today believe that religious experience is authoritative and that is the Bible is not the authority now this is kind of touchy but stay with me but the Bible leads you to experience God and the experience you have is the authority that dictates how you should live your life.

[21:08] Now, you have to be careful there because your experience and my experience can be totally different which means that your word and your authority and my authority are totally different because we're going by experience.

This is why so many cults and so many liberal things have really got caught up in the drugs because they're having a religious experience and that religious experience is the authority that would dictate and determine how they should live.

That's still around today. We see that and I'm not picking on it but the Suzu Street revival that led to the beginning of Pentecostalism was all about a religious experience and it was in the early 1900s and they still continue to live in that experience and they're just wanting to go back to that same experience and they're pointing back to 1908 I believe or 1906 to a place in California called the Suzu Street and the Suzu Street revival that spread into the Catholic Church the Lutheran Church it went into and I believe it was in the 1970s or late 1960s early 1970s even to the University of Notre Dame and they had this Suzu Street revival type thing happening there and it was all about the experience and the experience and the experience well the problem is I don't know about you but sometimes my experiences contradict what the word says and so wherever you put authority is there when you get into Quakers and mystics and by the way one of my favorite writers is considered a Christian mystic he is in this kind of world of neo-orthodoxy too and you know that it's A.W. Tozer

I love the writings of A.W. Tozer the Christian Missionary Alliance kind of falls in that but the problem and you have to be careful on this is that the Christian mystics thought that it was the Holy Spirit speaking to the heart which is authoritative now stay with me that is it was the Spirit speaking to the individual that would give the authority Tozer I love his writings I love his principles but he always spoke of the fellowship of the burning heart right and it was how the Holy Spirit spoke to the heart and that was the authority but again what the Holy Spirit teaches you may be different than what the Holy Spirit teaches me so have the Baptist answer this the Baptist have along with others there are others we don't want to say we're the only one right we're not the only true church out there but Baptist and other Protestants who have believed that scripture alone is authoritative have continued to affirm that it is the Bible alone being properly understood by the guidance and revelation of the Holy Spirit is the final word and authority to all believers so essentially what that is saying is that the Holy Spirit will never tell you anything that contradicts scripture and Jesus himself said that when the Spirit comes he will testify of what

I have said that the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart and leading you to a religious experience will never contradict the clear understanding of what the word of God says that's been the affirmation of the Baptist from the very beginning Baptists have affirmed both the Old Testament and New Testament as important for understanding so we've said you know we have the Old Testament New Testament but and you've heard me say this and I didn't know this was a historical Baptist doctrine but we also believe Baptists affirm in progressive revelation that is the further you read in scripture the more you're seeing what God is doing so the things we see in the Old Testament are the foretellings of what's going to be fulfilled in the New Testament like the lamb being brought in and looked at in the book of Exodus is the same thing as Jesus going into so it is the progressive revelation the final revelation being the close of scripture but it is progressive so with that in mind the best interpretation of scripture is scripture itself and that's something you've heard me say over and over again but if you read the historical Baptist doctrine that is also something that they profess that it is scripture testifies to scripture and the best way we can understand what's happening in the [24:58] Old Testament is to read the New Testament and so with that aim they aim to be a New Testament church because Baptists have historically said that the New Testament is the fulfillment of every prophetic promise

and every revelation so they seek to be a New Testament church and not really so much an early church okay it's good to study early church history but our aim is not to be what they were but to be what scripture teaches so they look at scripture and say this is what we need to know so the first distinctive is sola scriptura or scripture alone the second is the lordship of Christ these build upon one another by the way Christ alone is lord of both the individual and the church this is important the lordship principle of Christ is important Christ alone is the lord he is your lord and he's the lord of the church for those who have accepted him as savior so the sovereign rule of Christ over the individual has an impact on their place of importance in the church if he is your lord as much as he is my lord then that directly impacts your connection to the church and we'll see it in just a moment so the lordship of Christ is important he is the head of every individual and he alone is the head of the church it is his church he is the head and so being the lord he gets to dictate the direction of the church he gets to dictate where it goes and that is why his word is authoritative he dictates everything the church should be and should do so when we read a creed or confession or a church council that says anything different than what it teaches us in the new testament so wait a minute the historical saying of baptists when it pertains to the scripture is that where the scriptures are clear that it is binding but when the scriptures are not as clear then you have freedom of interpretation so you are to come together and you're to read the interpretation you're to see the best sense of that and but you are bound to do the things scripture is very clear on now the third distinctive is the one that you probably know much about but you don't know about it by this name and that is a regenerative church membership baptists have historically and adhere to regenerative church membership john hammett and biblical foundations for baptist church says thus to be a member of a baptist church one first of all has to be a genuine christian living as a christian ought to live and next there has to be a visible profession of faith and believers baptism then finally the perspective member is expected to enter into covenant with the church baptists see the church as the called out ones because the word ecclesia means to be called out to be called out that is the literal interpretation of the word used for church and scripture it is ecclesia it is two words and it means the called out ones so baptists have always interpreted that wording to imply that those who are members of the ecclesia are the ones who have been called out and they are called out because of their profession of christ as their lord and savior and followed him in baptism so church is very important this is important to your understanding of what happens next for the baptist church is seen as the home of the saved not a place to be saved so you're not a member of the church in anticipation of your salvation you are a member of the church because you already are saved because you have been called out on your profession of christ now that's that's really important just a moment so this is instrumental in understanding the concept of believers baptism and their rejection of pedo baptism or child baptism why don't we baptize children in the baptist church right so that answers the next question baptists have rejected child baptism for several reasons the first one would be pretty simple children cannot make a profession of christ if we interpret church as being the called out ones of those who haven't professed jesus christ

as the lord and savior then infants cannot make that profession therefore they cannot be a member of the church now it's how we interpret church membership that's important is the church a member of the state so is it we're as much a member of the church as we are a member of the state or is the

church a home of those who have been called out by voluntary association which is what the baptists have always proclaimed these cannot make a profession of faith they interpret scriptural baptism as being given only to those who make profession of salvation so when baptists historically have read scripture and even me when i read scripture we see those that are baptized are those who have already made a profession of jesus christ baptism is an outward display of an internal reality there there is this really clear concept that should be by immersion and that happens very early on by the way even martin luther and john calvin who led the lutheran church and later on the calvins the presbyterian church and they sprinkle or pour both of them said the correct interpretation of the word baptizal in scripture is to be fully immersed because that word was used for the sinking of a ship but they allowed the practice of pouring or sprinkling but there's never historically been any question as to what the word literally meant it always meant to go completely underwater and since the baptists say well if that's always what it meant then that's what we're going to do if that word has but one meaning in scripture and if that word has not because that word is not just a scriptural word if that word has but one meaning in society then we're going to do what it says we're going to take you all the way under and not only because of the interpretation of the word but because of what baptism symbolizes the death burial and resurrection of christ so you are baptized in the likeness of his death and raised to walk in the newness of his life when you are dead you go underground right and to be ready to go out of the ground so baptism is a sign of that so that's why we do full immersion baptism and that's why we adhere to that again the church is not where one goes to be saved infant baptism and child baptism properly understood and again this is not judgmental in this those churches interpret church membership as being we're going to make you a member of the church in anticipation of your soon coming or one day hopefully coming salvation baptists do not interpret church membership that way church membership is not reserved and the reason why I'll be in just a moment it is not for those who are going to be saved it is for those who are already saved and the sign of that is falling in believers baptism baptists have traditionally teach taught and continue to teach and I will affirm this because some will come to you and say oh what about the Philippian jailer's household what about this what about all these other things and no point to all these things and hey let's just go ahead and discuss the elephant in a room right now there are a number of southern baptists to this at this time leaving the southern baptist church and joining churches that practice and adhere to infant baptism some professors have left our southern baptist seminaries because after teaching through the new testament they thought well I can see child baptism and so they went that way and and the question be well why it's because there are passages that they point to and say all these other things and I don't have time to get into all that but baptists traditionally teach that any interpretation of scripture used to affirm child baptism as an esegetics of scripture esegetics means you are reading your interpretation into it you're trying to find you're trying to find a proof text for something you already believe and so if you come to scripture thinking child baptism is appropriate when you read act 16 and you find the philippian jailer and his whole household being baptized you see there it is there's nothing in scripture that does or does not affirm that they were first infants neither does it say that they did not make professions of faith before they were baptized but one thing we do know all those that we are sure that we know their names of all made professions of faith so bad to say we cannot esegetics scripture do not read into scripture what we try to do is exegesis read out from scripture okay when I stand up and preach in just a few minutes I'm going to hope to hopefully exegete scripture we want to read out from scripture we don't want to read into scripture because you I promise can make any passage say anything you want it to if your rose-tended glasses are dark enough and so bad to say what you're going to use scripture to affirm that in an esegetics of scripture not an exegesis of scripture you're reading into it not reading out of it so how did baptists maintain regenerate church membership historically they've done it in three ways and they've done it through believers baptism only going to baptize those who profess Jesus

Christ their Lord and Savior they've done it through church covenants that's not something we talk about a lot today you know as you join this church you adhere to the church covenant the church covenant is back there in the back I can take you I can bring out one of those used to hang on the wall there's a big framed image of it back there so church covenants were important historically and church discipline okay a right interpretation of these the reason this was important is because of the next thing in just a moment and by the way you said well pastor are we going to do these things with this something again we're going to work out together that's why we're working these things out together okay church discipline was always for the health of the individual and the health of the

church church covenants were to maintain a healthy church and the reason you had to do that is because of the one thing that drives most people crazy in the Baptist church the one distinctive that most people just don't like and the one people like why in the world they do that it's called congregational polity you know business meetings and they are historically biblically important in a Baptist church everything we've said up to this point really hinges on this congregational polity church membership is important because of this distinctive Baptist affirm the biblical teaching of the priesthood of the believer first Peter tells us that we are a holy royal priesthood so every believer has the same and equal access to God through Christ as any other believer just because I'm a pastor doesn't mean I have greater access to God than you do okay we affirm that we don't need a priest we don't need to go into a confessional booth we don't need an intercessor other than Jesus Christ who is our high priest according to the order of Melchizedek book of Hebrews who daily intercedes for us on behalf of of one another we don't need anything else this is important and because of that since each one of us have the equal access each congregation is to govern itself and is therefore autonomous the reason the umbrella can be so large is because it is an autonomous body historically Baptist affirmed that there is no scriptural mandate for a governing body higher than the local church that means nobody can tell us how to be us like it or not when I go to the Southern Baptist Convention and I join with 10,000 other pastors and leaders and I'll look at the people on the platform the people on the platform cannot and will not tell us how to be a church they work for us we do not work for them the New Duck River

[36:16] Baptist Association our director of mission or associational missionaries they call him now Dr. Tim Key he's a he works for us we do not work for him the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board they work for us we do not work for him for scripture does not mandate any higher authority than the local church this is why some of you know this about me when I email someone at the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board or if I email someone at the Southern Baptist Convention and they don't respond back to me I get upset and the reason I get upset is because we pay their check it would be like you reaching out to me and me saying I don't have time to talk to you it bothers me because they're not higher than any local church they're not higher than any body believers they have no scriptural mandate to be that that is by the way I'm just now figuring out why there's so much contention and so many Southern Baptist conventions I'm getting it now right I understand it and I live it why did I get so upset because I understand it and so you're like wait a minute you can't do that you don't get to dictate us what we do we get to dictate what you do that's how it properly works and this is why so there are other polities or church governance around the world the first one is Episcopalian or

Episcopal not necessarily the Episcopalian church but that includes the Roman Catholic church and Episcopalian church and all the others their decisions are made either by a single bishop or a group of bishops think the Pope so the Pope gets to make the final decision or the Cardinals I know we had the rule cardinals and all that other and then they hand it down to the church and the church hands it down to the people and they tell you how you should live the other is Presbyterianism by the way I'm just gonna go ahead and say the only one that I could find some kind of premises in scripture for would be Presbyterianism okay and you'll see why in just a moment I don't say I'm gonna adhere to it but I can say I can I can have that and just so you understand I can fellowship with any believer from any church in any denomination okay I'm not breaking fellowship I'm just this is historical badgers I'm telling you what historical badgers teach okay Presbyterianism says that a group of elders within the local church make every decision that would be just like brother Jamie brother Ivan brother Mike and I making every decision and telling you what you believe okay that's Presbyterian I know Baptist churches that operate that way and I'm just gonna go ahead and tell you they are a Presbyterian church they're not a Baptist church I don't care what it says on their sign because they are operating by Presbyterian polity and when a group of elders from various churches in a geographic region get together they call that a general assembly and they get to make decisions that are going to affect what every other local church does I had the privilege of attending a general assembly of a Presbyterian denomination this past year the week after the Southern Baptist Convention I just got an invitation to go and I said sure I'll go it was holy it was

reverent it was different they took communion together and they said do you do this at the Southern Baptist so say well there are about 2,000 of y'all here there were 20,000 of us there so we we don't do that at the Southern Baptist Convention okay and that's not saying anything's wrong with it but it's just it was different so I've experienced it and it's okay but Baptist say no that's not how it happens and Baptist church is the ultimate authority to make every decision resides in the gathered body of believers final authority resides in the gathered body of believers so this does not imply that the majority always rules people say all the majority rules then that does not imply that because if we see scriptural mandate that's wrong because even in scripture sometimes the majority is wrong think the 10 spies that said oh we shouldn't go the two that said we should so the majority is not always right but it means the congregation has final authority in the Baptist church leadership within the Baptist church is delegated to others but it is never authoritatively given to them so I have daily responsibilities to lead as the church wants me to lead okay so have elders meetings have deacons and elders meetings we make decisions in that we don't bring everything before you we have there's some things that our decisions are made but that is a delegated leadership by the body it is not authoritatively given so if I ever send them say oh you don't have a voice in it you don't have a word in it then I am no longer operating by Baptist polity and you can ask me to leave because I'm not a

Baptist church so ultimately if you think about it at any given moment you can have a business meeting and fire me that doesn't happen in every other denomination okay because I work solely for the local church solely none of my pay comes from the denomination board none of that comes it's solely from the local church so so that's important the reason it's important because this elevates church membership by the way why do we see so many Baptist drawing to the other and I'll give you a reason why in just a moment it's because it's a lot more convenient because in a Baptist church every believer has the opportunity and responsibility to take an active role in church decisions as a Baptist church member it is your responsibility to take an active role the church is not a place to be served but rather is a place to render service what the Baptist have historically understood and affirmed is that we're not here the higher people serving them telling them what they should do no we come together and we serve one another to one another's in scripture and so it elevates church membership and I'm just going to be honest in my interpretation a lot of people leave Baptist church because it's much easier to go somewhere else where somebody else is always making all the decisions and they just tell me what I need to do and it'll be okay I don't have to sit through all that boring stuff and they can just tell me how and I'll go that's dangerous I just just that's just dangerous this elevates your role my role because we have the responsibility to render service and each one matures we were maturing this way because it makes a mature membership because if you know it is your responsibility to make decisions for the church you have to seek the Lord's leading and guidance and matters that pertain to themselves and of the church one of the things that matured me more than anything is that by the age of 24 I was a deacon in a Baptist church very early on I was leading in business meetings of a Baptist church and I had to start making decisions along with other church members they expected me to make decisions they expected me to do these things very early on and I had responsibility I remember very early on we were in a church and we were struggling financially I wasn't the pastor yet I was just a member and I remember I made this motion talk about scary I was a young member I made the motion that we empty all of our bank accounts pay off our debts and just trust the Lord to move forward because we had debts and we were looking at it and we were losing a lot of stuff and I said you know what I think we have the money in the bank let's just pay it off and trust the Lord and they looked at me like my head fell off right and then somebody seconded that motion and the next thing I know it got voted on and the church we emptied our bank accounts we paid off our debts and we had zero money we were operating on a zero line on a budget but the Lord blessed that church moving forward and I made the motion everybody's like are you crazy I'm like well kinda I think the Bible says God will take care of us so I'm gonna trust that God will take care of us and only in a Baptist church does a young member have that type of responsibility but that matures you and the reason I can make that motion is because in my life I had seen God had done that for us and you have that responsibility we have money we're trying to give away to missions and I can tell you every one of them that I think we should give away but I'm waiting on the church to come it's your responsibility it's not just my this is a valid mission ministry we ought to give to thank you and the reason I'm waiting is because that means you're gonna think about it pray about it consider it wrestle over and realize you're giving some of the church's money away that matures you right that matures you

because you have to take ownership and every member is as important as the other part that's why congregational polity is so important we have to sit through business meetings sure but it's important because it means we all have an equal part two lesser known but really connected distinctives that I'll kind of touch on really quick is Baptists have historically affirmed what they call soul competency they actually were the ones that really spoke of it first soul competency means that all persons have an inalienable right of direct access to God these are important the man has the ability and the capacity to know God our sin has created this chasm between us but there is something within us that says oh we have the right we have an ability to know God we don't need the church to tell us about God God has created this

[45:17] God shaped vacuum in each and every one of us and so we have the capacity at least in part to know God and God can draw us to himself so each one must be given the opportunity to personally know God that is why in the early days of North American Baptist churches we didn't lead in believers prayer we didn't leave in a sinners prayer we didn't altar calls really weren't even a major thing and if you were working out your salvation they would leave you alone on the altar because they didn't want to interfere with what God was doing you and some people would go through a two or three year process before they finally found what they would call the breakthrough moment and they would know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and they would be free and they would have the conviction that they were genuinely truly born again and after three years then they'd be baptized and nobody would even walk them through it they would just let because of soul competency but you know what else you don't find in the early days of Baptist church is the back door was firmly shut people weren't leaving either because those that were genuinely saved were genuinely saved now there has to be a fine line somewhere in there do I walk people through the gospel sure you say well pastor you don't do a lot of altar calls altars always open and the preaching is the altar call and I want to walk with people as they go through it have I ever asked anyone to repeat a prayer after me no have I ever asked anyone that wanted to know Jesus our

Lord and Savior to stand no I've never done that not because Baptist teach that I've never done it because I don't see it in Scripture and that's not how I came and very early on I was a youth leader and I saw so many of our youth group members raising their hands and praying prayers and going and living like they wanted to live however they wanted to live and I saw so many of our youth and it got to the point that when we went to youth conventions and youth meetings I would tell them hey guys at the end of this they're going to ask you to repeat a prayer don't do that you said wow that's cold I said I did and then I say we get back to the hotel room if you have any questions about the gospel we'll talk about the gospel but don't repeat that prayer don't go down there don't don't don't do that why because I believe in the reality that God draws those whom he himself wants that's called soul competency you have the ability to know God and God can draw you as he sees fit and the second one it's really directly connected to that they had to establish soul competency to get to this one Baptist in England and in

North America are the leaders in religious freedom okay so the whole separation of church and state that's a Baptist idea you can think of Baptist for that actually started in Rhode Island of all places there was this really cool experiment that said what the province of Rhode Island if it could be set up with just a strictly religious freedom that you were free because early American Baptists began to be imprisoned they began to be fined they began to be judged because they were not a part of the congregational church and so we were just as harsh and hard in America as they were over there by the way so that kind of judgmentalism came here so very early on it was the Baptist who began to really proclaim religious freedom they arrived very early on they they were motivated behind these the earliest confession the London the Baptist London confession of faith really is all about religious freedom and is telling the king in England that hey we have the right to believe these things we believe and this is what we believe and you're going to leave us alone and so that's where the

London confession of faith came from which is kind of the bedrock of every other confession that you'll find just a moment there shall be no state funded or sanctioned churches Baptist don't want the state telling us where we go to church Baptist have never wanted to be state funded state sanctioned really just want the state to leave us alone because they believe that the right of liberty of conscience to worship as one chooses and with that they don't interfere with how other people like that we are badness have historically been those to say if that's how they want to worship they can worship as long as you let us worship the way we want to worship because if we're going to affirm it for ourselves we have to affirm it for others okay and that's where soul competition comes in we're not going to quit evangelizing we're not going to quit sharing the gospel but we want to preserve their right to worship how they want to to ensure that our right stays there so that's that's a historical Baptist distinctive finally Baptist have not been creedal historically they are confessional you don't find any

Baptist creeds but you find a multitude of Baptist confession confessions are simply what they claim to be they are a public profession of what one believes one that would probably matter most to use the Baptist faith and message the Baptist faith and message is the confession of the Southern Baptist Church Baptist faith and message 2000 it is something that is brought up every convention something that has been added to every convention there have been multitude of motions made at every convention the last few conventions that we have been at asking that the Baptist Southern Baptist Convention add the Niscean Creed to the Baptist faith and message has been rejected time and time again even though I affirm the Niscean Creed they will not add that to their confession because we are confessional not creedal okay because a creed is binding confessions are saying hey this is what we believe so in no time of these confessions been seen as final or authoritative the Baptist faith and message is not authoritative does not carry authoritative means now there are churches disfellowship from the

[50:56] Southern Baptist Convention because they do not adhere to that there are churches that say oh well you're no longer Southern Baptist that doesn't mean they're not a Baptist church anymore just means they're not Southern Baptist so in that autonomous local church they are never final or authoritative so no one could ever come in even the churches that are disfellowshipped from Southern Baptist Church Saddleback Community Church Rick Warren's Church some of you know Rick Warren's Church I voted to disfellowship Saddleback Community Church from the Southern Baptist Convention a couple years ago you said pastor I can't believe you did that well they broke alliance with the Baptist faith and message but what did not happen is the Southern Baptist did not move in and say Rick you got to give us your building all of your assets and all of your people they're still in existence doing things the way they want to do it okay so because it's not binding it does not the final authoritative voice we admit Baptist admit we might be wrong if anybody tells you they won't admit that they're wrong we might be wrong so we've never seen this as complete it's just a summary of what Baptist belief Tom Nettles said they are expressions declarations or affirmations of the Christian faith as

Baptist understand it and they are genuinely very vague okay and the reason they're vague the Baptist faith and message is very vague the reason they're vague is because we are an autonomous church and they will never tell us what we believe because it matters we have to work that out for ourselves okay any questions any questions are you going to save one for tonight all right let me pray with us father we thank you for the day thank you for this group of people that are before us thank you for your faithfulness and goodness towards us father we pray that you continue to lead and guide us as you see fit for your glory and honor we ask it on Jesus name amen you