

# What Is An Independent Fundamental Baptist Church?

By M. L. Moser, Jr.

[The following was written by M. L. Moser, Jr. in the late 1950s as a tract to inform visitors to the church, the nature of Central Baptist Church of Little Rock, and to explain why it was an independent Baptist church. It was later modified for other independent Baptist churches and printed in tract form and made available to other independent Baptist churches for their use and was used by churches all over the country, some printing it under their own name.]

To many an independent Baptist church is a strange phenomenon. Being accustomed to the various Baptist groups such as Southern Baptist Convention, the Associations, or one of the organized Fellowships (Baptist Bible Fellowship or World Baptist Fellowship) and others, they cannot comprehend the nature of a church that is not affiliated with any of these. For that reason an independent Baptist church is looked upon with some suspicion. Surely a church that stand “all by itself” must be very odd.

Actually independent Baptist churches have existed since apostolic times. Long before the Protestant Reformation began there were independent Baptist churches in both Europe and Asia. An independent Baptist church, therefore, is nothing new or novel. It has an ancient and glorious heritage. Though in various periods of church history members of independent Baptist churches have been persecuted and even slain for the faith, such churches continue until the present day. There are many thousands of independent Baptist churches in all parts of the world.

“What are the distinctives of an independent Baptist church?” you may ask. They could concisely be set forth under four major headings.

## I. A Church That Is Self-governing.

The churches established by the Apostles of Christ were all independent churches, that is, they were free from any outside membership or control in any kind of an organization. The New Testament does not reveal the existence of any synod, conference, association, convention, organized fellowship, or other form of human organization exercising control over the local congregation or even existing apart from a local independent church. Each local church was viewed as a self-governing body.

An aggregation of local churches was never looked upon organizationally as a “church,” but always as “churches,” emphasizing the individual prerogatives of each congregation (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 11:16). Each local church chose its own officers (Acts 6:1-6). Each exercised its own discipline (1 Cor. 5:13). Churches were not responsible to any higher ecclesiastical body (since there were none), but were subject only to God (Rev. 2:4-5). Internal problems were handled by the individual congregation (1 Cor. 6:1-5). The maintenance of pure doctrine was the responsibility of the local assembly (1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 2:14-16).

The Holy Spirit directs each local group of believers (Acts 13:1-2). Such a church cannot be politically pressured because it owns its own property (in contrast to many denominational churches whose property is owned or in some measure controlled by the denomination).

In the important matter of calling a pastor, an independent Baptist church is cast upon the Lord for guidance. While they may seek counsel from neighboring pastors or Christian schools, no one can force them to accept a man they do not want. The congregation must prayerfully consider the merits of a candidate and decide whether or not he is God’s man for them.

Another important characteristic is the liberty

enjoyed in the matter of missionary support. While pressure is exerted upon organized Baptist churches to support their own denominational missions, independent Baptist churches may seek the will and direction of God regarding this.

The Central Baptist Church of Little Rock has been led by the Lord to establish its own mission work in Cárdenas, Tabasco in the country of Old Mexico where we operate a five-year Bible school, Latin America Baptist Theological Seminary, support national churches and national preachers, and through the publication in the Spanish language of books, tracts, and pamphlets, extend the work into all Spanish speaking countries. The position of independent Baptist churches may be summed up thus: they are absolutely free to obey God as they see His direction and are under no obligation to any other church or group of churches. In each phase of their service for the Lord they must exercise spiritual discernment.

Actually, therefore, the independence of a church simply enhances its dependence upon the Lord. This tends to develop prayer and faith and to cultivate spirituality among the members.

## II. A Church That Is Sound In Doctrine

A fundamental Baptist church is one that stands for the historic, conservative Christian faith. Many churches in recent years have moved away from the original teachings of the early Christians. They have substituted human theories for Biblical authority. Independent fundamental Baptist churches continue to uphold the Bible as the divinely-inspired authority for Christian faith and prac-

tice.

An independent fundamental Baptist church places proper importance upon correct Biblical doctrine. Among the doctrines emphasized are the following: the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, absolute deity, sinless life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His high-priestly work in Heaven, salvation by grace through faith, the reality of Satan and his work, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the pre-millennial coming of Christ, a period of great tribulation on earth, the return of Christ to establish an earthly kingdom, the judgment and eternal doom of the lost, and the eternal reward of the saved.

Independent Baptist churches stand as a protest to the religious unbelief (often called “modernism” or “liberalism”) that has engulfed so many of the large denominations and is now invading the ranks of Baptists. Men claiming to be ministers of Christ deny the verbal inspiration of Scripture, question the virgin birth of Christ, deny the necessity of faith in the shed blood of Christ for salvation, accept the theory of organic evolution, and in many other ways oppose the historic faith, yet such men are accepted as ministers in good standing in some church groups. In obedience to the Word regarding false teachers (2 Tim. 3:5; Eph. 5:11, etc.) independent Baptist churches refuse to cooperate with denominations and councils of churches that condone the presence of such unbelieving religious leaders.

Independent Baptist churches stand firm for the doctrines as laid down in the New Testament that have separated them from other denominations. We adhere to the New Testament doctrine of the church, thus denying the modern doctrine of an invisible, universal church which is unknown to the Scripture, and holding fast to the Biblical doctrine of the church which identifies the church as a local visible body. We hold fast to the Bible doctrine of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (the ordinances of the church) meaning that we reject “alien immersion” and receive only scriptural baptism, and practice the Bible doctrine of closed communion. We do not maintain these doctrines simply to be “different” or to hold ourselves “aloof” from others, but because we sincerely believe the Bible teaches these doctrines and that, as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are obligated to obey His commands in keeping (preserving or guarding) these ordinances as He has given them unto His church (Jn. 14:15).

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### III. A Church With A Bible-centered Program

One of the first things many people notice about an independent Baptist church is the fact that almost everyone comes to church with their Bibles. Not only do they bring their Bibles, but they use them in the regular services of the church. The Bible is looked upon, not as an obscure religious textbook to be studied primarily by a priest or minister, but as the guide for every Christian and the source of instruction for his daily life.

Our pastor uses the Bible in his pulpit ministry. He reads from it and his congregation follows him in searching out various passages. He is not endeavoring to foist upon the people some human observations concerning “religion” but rather he is seeking to unfold the exact revelation which God has given us in the Bible. Preaching in independent Baptist churches is not simply delivering some ethical or social precepts, but is an exposition of the written Word of God as found in the Bible.

The educational program of the church is likewise centered around the Bible. Every Sunday School teacher teaches from it. We do not study the International Sunday School Lessons as most churches do where quarterlies are studied rather than the Bible, but we study the Bible book-by-book, studying one chapter each Sunday, until we complete the study of the book. This is much better than using the typical “hop, skip and jump” method of the quarterlies, and there is the value in studying God’s Word directly for yourself.

The same is true of our Doctrinal Training Union on Sunday evenings. Rather than the study of the Bible book-by-book as in our Sunday School, we study the Bible doctrine-by-doctrine, using “Baptist Doctrine In One Year” by M.L. Moser, Sr., so that within a year’s Bible study, we study every major doctrine of the Word of God at least once. This makes for a church that knows their Bibles. The study of the quarterly system will not develop a church member with a real knowledge of the Word of God. The study of the Bible does.

The same emphasis is seen in the missionary program of the church. Both home and foreign missionary efforts are geared to one purpose — the winning of the lost to Jesus Christ. All our missionary work is simply a means to the end of bringing people to read, understand, and obey the

Word of God. The primary aim of all missionary and evangelistic effort is not social betterment but spiritual regeneration — personal salvation.

### IV. A Church With Distinctive Emphases

In addition to the things already mentioned there are several other important and scriptural distinctives of independent Baptist churches.

#### *A Regenerated Church Membership*

Only those who have personally, consciously received Christ as their Lord and Savior have a right to church membership. Acts committed by a parent, priest, or minister for a child cannot and do not save the child. Children dying before they are old enough to be accountable to God go to heaven. Acts 2:47 clearly states that “the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved.” In other words, a personal experience of the new birth is a pre-requisite to church membership. For this reason, independent Baptist churches require evidence of a person’s salvation before they are received into the membership of the church.

#### *Scriptural Giving*

Many churches support their work by fundraising schemes such as church suppers, raffles, and sales. Some assess each member a certain amount each year. All such practices are totally unscriptural. The local church should be supported by the free-will offerings and tithes of saved persons, not by commercial or worldly appeals (Cf. 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 9:6-8).

In recognition of the truth in all that has been written above, independent Baptist churches are caused to place loyalty to Christ and His Word above loyalty to an earthly organization. Everything is tested by the Word of God, not by its relation to a denominational program.

Independent Baptist churches are seeking, as enabled by God, to perpetuate New Testament churches, remembering that the church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

### STATEMENT OF FAITH OF THE CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

We believe in the verbal inspiration of the 66

books of the Bible and that it is without error and it is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. We further believe that the Bible reveals God, the fall of man, the way of salvation and God's plan and purpose in the ages.

We believe there is One and only one true and living God, existing in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are co-eternal and co-equal from all eternity, each with distinct personalities but with one nature.

We believe in the Deity and Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, coexistent with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He came to the world, born of a virgin, suffered, died, was buried and rose again bodily and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

We believe in the Person and work of the Holy Spirit which includes conviction of sin, regeneration of sinners, and indwelling of the believer.

We believe that salvation is "by grace", plus nothing and minus nothing. The conditions to salvation are repentance and faith. We further believe that a soul is saved when Christ is received as personal Savior and Lord and the Holy Spirit imparts eternal life.

We believe in the perseverance and preservation of the saints and that it is the plan of God for such believer to walk after the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

We believe in the immersion of the believer in water under the authority of a New Testament church to signify His death, burial, and resurrection and the believer's identification with Him. We do not believe that baptism saves. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward change. The Lord's Supper constitutes the other of the only two ordinances of the church.

We believe that a New Testament church is a local group of baptized believers, united for His purpose and knowledge and spread of the Word of God, including world-wide missions. We believe it to be completely independent with no other person, group, or body having any authority, right of intervention or control whatsoever over or within a local church.

We believe in the visible, personal and pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ, the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead at His coming. We further believe in the everlasting conscious blessedness of the saved and the everlasting conscious punishment of the lost.