

WHAT IS BAPTIST FAITH AND ORDER?

By Chester E. Tulga

Faith and order are inseparables in the Bible. A sound faith must have the expression of a sound order for its implementation. The whole Bible rings with exhortations to sound faith, warnings against compromise and apostasy and exhortations to sound doctrine. Unsound doctrine, heresy and apostasy, are clearly condemned, and the Christian is warned against risking contamination with them.

The whole Bible emphasizes proper order. The universe in which we live is the greatest example of order. The creation is an example of order, and order is seen in the Genesis account of creation. Creation is an example of order, while evolution is a philosophy of chance.

The Old Testament is very definite on order in worship. God intends to be approached and worshiped in His way, not man's way. There is an order of approach to God in the Old Testament. There are certain sacrifices which are carefully specified and their presentation meticulously outlined. The Book of Numbers is remarkable for the order of the host which is carefully set forth.

The Old Testament abounds in instances where God refused to accept those who violated divine order. Cain's sacrifice was rejected. Nadab died for he offered strange fire before the Lord (Numbers 26:61). Those who presumed to carry the ark of God in a new cart fell under God's judgment (1st Chronicles 13:9). The prophets thundered against wrong ways to pray, wrong ways to worship, wrong ways to offer sacrifices, and especially that violation of faith and order which combines faith and idolatry.

Christ gave a church order. It is no accident that there were twelve apostles. There were two ordinances given. A great commission was given to the church. The great redemptive facts were accomplished as a basis of Christian doctrine. There is an order of the ministry. "And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1st Corinthians 12:28). Note "set", "first", "secondarily", "thirdly", "after that", "then." Here is an example of God's regard for order.

There is order in the Great Commission—disciple, baptize, teach. Here is the New Testament order. It is not to be abbreviated or changed in order, for to do so alters the faith.

There is order in evangelism: repentance, faith, baptism, church. There is order in the ordinances: first baptism, then the Lord's Supper. They are not to be separated or reversed.

There is order in polity. The local church is the only organization recognized in the New Testament. It must not be subordinated to human societies not of divine appointment. All organizations are to be a part of it, subservient to it and not separated from it. The multitude of free-lance organizations today who have no responsibility to the churches and whose only interest is to live off the churches, have no basis in the Word of God. The local church ordains the ministry.

It may consult sister churches, but it is not bound by their decisions. The local church is the sole judge of the qualifications for membership in its body, the sole judge of the validity of every baptism presented for its approval and the sole judge of the ordination of any candidate for its pulpit who may be presented. This is New Testament order.

Much lip service is paid in these days to the independence of the local church, but there is a refusal to recognize the total sovereignty of a local church under God. Baptists believe in the independence of the local church, but many of them dislike a church that takes its independence seriously. There is Baptist faith and order, and the two are inseparable.

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