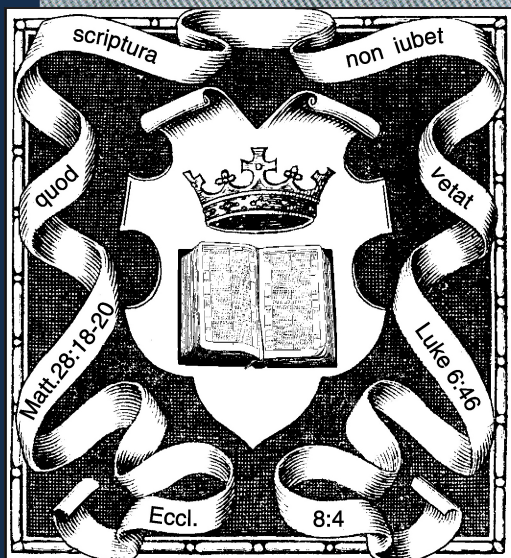


The Baptist Distinctives Series Number 44



A Treatise On Church Order

John L. Dagg



Quod scriptura, non iubet velat

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

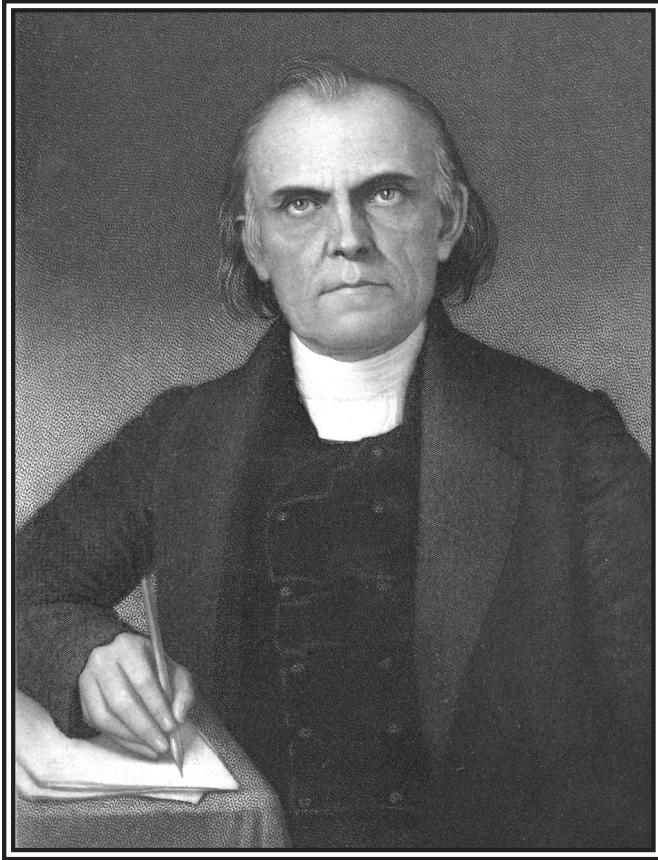
On the Cover: Baptists rejoice to hold in common with other evangelicals the main principles of the orthodox Christian faith. However, there are points of difference and these differences are significant. In fact, because these differences arise out of God’s revealed will, they are of vital importance. 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*.

A TREATISE ON
CHURCH ORDER



JOHN L. DAGG
1794-1884

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A TREATISE ON CHURCH ORDER.

BY

JOHN LEADLEY DAGG

That thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain
elders in every city.—TITUS i. 5.

The rest will I set in order when I come.—1 COR. xi. 34.

With a Biographical Sketch of the Author by John Franklin Jones

Charleston, South Carolina

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

1858.



The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.

NUMBER ONE IRON OAKS DRIVE • PARIS, ARKANSAS 72855

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

Reprinted 2006

by

THE BAPTIST STANDARD BEARER, INC.

No. 1 Iron Oaks Drive
Paris, Arkansas 72855
(479) 963-3831



THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN# 1579784984

P R E F A C E.

IN the Preface to the "Manual of Theology," published last year, it was said :—"This volume contains nothing respecting the externals of religion. The form of godliness is important, as well as its power, and the doctrine respecting it is a component part of the Christian system ; but I have been unable to include it in the present work." The defect here acknowledged, the following treatise on Church Order, including the ceremonies of Christianity, is intended in part to supply.

In all religious investigations, the Holy Scriptures are our chief source of knowledge. This is especially true in regard to positive institutes, which derive all their obligation from the revealed will of the lawgiver. The present work, therefore, relies wholly on the Bible for proof of its positions, so far as they relate to subjects on which the Bible professes to give instruction. But the volume of inspiration was not given to teach us the meaning of words, or the facts of ecclesiastical history after the times of the apostles. When these subjects come under investigation, I have made such reference to human authority as the case seemed to require. It has been my aim, however, so to lay the facts before the mind of the reader, as to give full scope for the exercise of private judgment, and a consciousness that he is not bowing to the decisions of any fallible master.

In most of the investigations attempted in these pages, the sacred volume sheds its light on our path, and enables us to tread the way with confidence ; but, at a few points,

the light seems to shine with less clearness. Here, the inquiry becomes appropriate, whether the very silence of Scripture is not instructive? We may infer that whatever is not clearly revealed, must be of less importance; and that difference of judgment respecting it ought not to divide the people of God.

The objections and opposing arguments which this work encounters, are such as appear to me most likely to embarrass an inquirer. They are generally expressed in my own language; but, in the discussions on baptism, I am in a few instances indebted for the language, as well as the thoughts, to the Lectures of Dr. Woods. In controverting the opinions of Baptist authors, I have, in some instances, thought it best to present these opinions in the form of direct quotation.

The preparation of this treatise has yielded less religious enjoyment to the Author, than was experienced in writing the "Manual." The subject has less to do with the heart, and furnished fewer occasions for those emotions in which religious enjoyment consists. But the work has been prosecuted under a calm conviction of duty; and if it shall tend to produce, in those who read it, a scrupulous adherence to the precepts of Christ, with expansive love to all who bear his image, the Author's labor will not be in vain. With a hope that it may contribute somewhat to this result, it is commended to the blessing of him whose will it attempts to unfold.

Gratitude requires that I should acknowledge my obligations to the Rev. G. W. Samson, of Washington City, and the Rev. A. M. Poindexter, of Richmond, Va. These brethren have kindly made suggestions, from which the work has received valuable improvements; and Mr. Samson has directly contributed the chief article in the Appendix.

July 31, 1858.

C O N T E N T S .

INTRODUCTION.

Obedience to Christ	PAGE 9
-------------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER I.

Baptism	13
SEC. 1. Perpetuity of Baptism	13
2. Meaning of <i>Baptize</i>	21
Tables of Examples	23
Remarks on Table I.	31
Relation between βαπτω and βαπτίζω	32
Deduction from Table II.	34
Confirmation of the Result	36
Burial in Baptism	38
Arguments for another meaning	44
1. For partial immersion, 44; 2. 3. For purification, 46, 50 ;	
4. For a peculiar sense in Scripture, 51; 5. For a peculiar	
sense in religious ceremony, 54; 6. 7. From circumstan-	
tial evidence, 58, 60; 8. From Baptism of the Spirit, 65.	
Arguments against the requirement of literal obedience	66
1. From feet-washing, 66; 2. From the command by which	
the Supper was instituted, 67; 3. Unsuitableness of Im-	
mersion, 67.	

	PAGE
Sec. 3. Subjects of Baptism	68
4. Design of Baptism	70
5. Connection of Baptism with Church Order	73

CHAPTER II.

Local Churches	74
Sec. 1. Moral Characteristics	74
Assembly	74
Members	79
Organization	80
Independence	83
Divine Rule	84
Design	93
2. Ceremonial Qualification for Membership	95
3. False Professors	97

CHAPTER III.

The Church Universal	100
Sec. 1. Membership	100
The generic church	101
2. Visibility	121
3. Unity	125
4. Organization	128
The Visible Church Catholic, 130; The Baptized Church, 136.	
5. Progress and Duration	137
6. Relation to Christ's Kingdom	139
7. Relation to Local Churches	142

CHAPTER IV.

Infant Membership	144
Sec. 1. Direct Arguments for Infant Membership	144
1. The Epistles, 144; 2. Matt. xix. 14, 146; 3. 1 Cor. vii. 14, 155; 4. Congregation of the Lord, 156; 5. Abrahamic Covenant, 161.	

	PAGE
Sec. 2. Arguments for Infant Baptism	183
1. Faith required of adults only, 184; 2. On the same ground as female Communion and the Christian Sabbath, 184; 3. Infants included in all nations, 186; 4. Infants may be disciples, 187; 5. Commission to proselyte, 190; 6. Baptism takes the place of circumcision, 191; 7. Baptism is analogous to circumcision, 194; 8. Baptism of households, 195; 9. Ecclesiastical history, 199.	

CHAPTER V.

Communion	203
Sec. 1. Perpetuity of the Lord's Supper	203
2. Design	209
3. Communicants	212
4. Open Communion	214
Arguments.—1. First Communicants, 214; 2. Commission, 215; 3. Primitive example, 216; 4. Order of the things signified, 217; 5. Brotherly love, 217; 6. The true Church, 218; 7. Exclusion a punishment, 219; 8. Toleration, 219; 9. Pulpit Communion, 223; 10. The Lord's Table, 224.	

CHAPTER VI.

Washing of Feet	226
----------------------------------	------------

CHAPTER VII.

Public Worship	232
Sec. 1. Time.—Christian Sabbath	232
2. Mode	238

CHAPTER VIII.

Ministry	241
Sec. 1. Ministry of the Word	241
A distinct class	241
Their Work	243
Their Call	245
Objections	252

	PAGE
SEC. 2. Administration of Baptism	254
3. Apostolic Succession	257
4. Church Officers	263
Bishops	263
Deacons	266

CHAPTER IX.

Discipline	268
SEC. 1. Admission of Members	268
2. Spiritual Improvement	270
3. Excommunication	273

CHAPTER X.

Miscellaneous Topics	275
SEC. 1. Expediency of the Scriptural Order	275
2. Fellowship between Churches	279
3. Imposition of Hands	281
4. Rebaptism	282
May be necessary	282
Who must decide	282
First Case	283
Second Case	284
5. Treatment of Unbaptized Ministers	286

CONCLUSION.

Duty of Baptists	299
----------------------------	-----

APPENDIX.

Situation of Enon	305
Place of the Eunuch's Baptism	306
Immersion in Cold Climates	308

CHURCH ORDER.

INTRODUCTION.

OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST.

To love God with all the heart is the sum of all duty. Love must be exercised according to the relations which we bear. When a parent loves his child, he feels bound to exercise parental authority over it for its benefit; but the love of a child towards a parent requires obedience. So love to God produces obedience; for it is impossible to love God supremely without a supreme desire to please him in all things. Hence this one principle contains, involved in it, perfect obedience to every divine requirement.

The loveliness of the divine character is not abated, by being exhibited in the humble nature of man, in the person of Jesus Christ. In him the glory of the Father appears, claiming our supreme affections; and he is invested with the Father's authority, to which perfect obedience is due. The divine perfections are rendered more intelligible to us by his mediation; and, in proportion to the clearness of the discovery, the obligation to love and obey becomes increased.

A powerful motive, to love and obey Christ, is drawn from the love which he has manifested in dying for us. Paul felt this in an overpowering degree, when he said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son

of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”¹ The same overpowering impulse to love and obedience, is brought to view in another declaration of this apostle: “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, they were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”² When our love to the Saviour grows cold, we should repair to his cross, and fix our thoughts on the exhibition of love there presented. And when we feel our hearts melt, the recollection that the suffering Saviour is God over all, must produce a full purpose to yield to him the obedience of all our powers during our whole existence. From the cross we come forth to be Christ’s, resolved to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his.

Jesus said to his disciples, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” This claim of obedience is cordially admitted by every true disciple. When the first emotion of love to Christ throbbed in the heart of the persecuting Saul, he inquired, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

The first disciples were required to serve their Lord and Master by strenuous efforts to spread his religion through the world; and the same obligation devolves on us. He came to be the Saviour of the world; and, notwithstanding the humility of his appearance, and the feebleness of the instrumentality which he chose, the religion of the despised Nazarene must prevail over the earth, and bless every nation of mankind. The conquest of the world has not yet been achieved, but the work is before us; and, if we are loyal subjects of Zion’s King, we must give ourselves to its accomplishment.

The means which our King employs, for diffusing the blessings of his reign, are not such as human wisdom would have adopted. It has pleased the Lord, “by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” It has seemed good to infinite wisdom, that the religion which is to bless mankind, should be propagated by the simple instrumentality of the Christian ministry and the Christian churches. If we seek military force, or legislative enactments, to accomplish the work, we turn away from the simplicity of Christ,

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

² 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

and convert his kingdom into one of this world; and, whenever human wisdom has attempted, in any particular, to improve the simple means that Christ ordained, the progress of truth and righteousness has been impeded.

Much that has existed, and that now exists, among the professed followers of Christ, cannot be contemplated by one who sincerely loves him, without deep distress. Different creeds, and different ecclesiastical organizations, have divided those who bear his name into hostile parties, and Christianity has been disgraced, and its progress retarded. The world has seen hatred and persecution where brotherly love ought to have been exhibited; and Christ has been crucified afresh, and put to open shame, by those who claim to be his disciples.

For these evils, what shall be the remedy? Shall we look to the wisdom of this world, to devise the cure? Human wisdom did not originate the institutions of Christianity; and it is now unable to give them efficiency. We must return to the feet of our divine Master, and again receive his instructions. Let us, in the spirit of obedient disciples, inquire for the good old paths, that we may walk therein. No individual can accomplish everything; but it is his duty to do what he can. Let each one show that he possesses the spirit of Christ, and carefully obey all the commands of Christ. If he cannot cure the existing evils, he will, at least, not increase them; and the influence of his example may produce salutary effects beyond his most sanguine hopes.

The true spirit of obedience is willing to receive the slightest intimations of the divine will. All the truths of Revelation are not equally clear; yet none of them may be disregarded because of difficulty in their investigation. If some most needful to be known, are presented prominently on the inspired pages, and written in characters so large that he who runs may read; there are others which are discoverable only by diligent search. Yet the truths, thus discovered, are precious gems dug from an exhaustless mine; and even the very labor of discovery brings its own reward in the mental and spiritual discipline which it furnishes. The diligent student of the Scriptures derives an abundant recompense for his toil, not only from the enlarged and clearer views of divine truth to which he attains, but also from that constant exercise of

humility and faith, for which he finds occasion at every step of his progress.

As the truths of revelation differ in the clearness with which they are exhibited, so our faith embraces them with different degrees of strength. A man who does not investigate for himself, may receive, with unwavering confidence, and maintain, with obstinate pertinacity, every dogma of his party: but he who uses his own powers in the search after truth, will find some things to be received as undoubted articles of faith, others as opinions to be held with various degrees of confidence, according to the strength of evidence with which they have been severally presented to the mind. By not furnishing overpowering evidence on every question of faith and practice, the divine wisdom has given scope for the moral dispositions of men to exert their influence. A careful inquiry respecting the minutest portions of duty, and a fixed determination to observe the will of God in every particular, may exhibit proofs of obedience more strong and decisive, than would be possible, if all truth and duty were discovered by intuition.

Our obedience to Christ should be universal. The tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, is of less moment than the weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy, and faith; but it is not therefore to be disregarded. Christ taught that both were to be observed. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."¹ Church order and the ceremonials of religion, are less important than a new heart; and in the view of some, any laborious investigation of questions respecting them may appear to be needless and unprofitable. But we know, from the Holy Scriptures, that Christ gave commands on these subjects, and we cannot refuse to obey. Love prompts our obedience; and love prompts also the search which may be necessary to ascertain his will. Let us, therefore, prosecute the investigations which are before us, with a fervent prayer, that the Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth, may assist us to learn the will of him whom we supremely love and adore.

¹ Matt. xxiii. 23.

“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

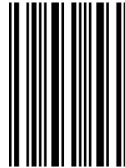
Distinctive Principles of Baptists.
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The Baptist Standard Bearer, Incorporated is a republication society organized in 1984, and is recognized as a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization. It was founded for the primary purpose of republication and preservation of materials reflecting the Baptist heritage.

ISBN 1-57978-498-4



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