

Baptist Brider?

By Les Potter

My son has been corresponding with the daughter of a missionary family in Wyoming (by mutual consent of parents). They seem to be quite interested in each other. The young lady was deeply concerned, however, because she was told we are Baptist Briders. Fortunately, she asked my son outright about it and was greatly relieved at my son's answer. Having heard such an evil rumor, she feared that we may be among those who think they are the only people going to heaven. Personally, I was somewhat amused at the rumor.

I remember hearing of Baptist Brider heretics as a young Christian. These were nutty people to be avoided. Nobody really knew how to describe them specifically. But it was sufficient to know they were a mean-spirited, pharisaical cult who twisted Scripture to promote their heresy. It is said that they even believe in a special rapture just for themselves!

So, why is there a rumor that I am one of these heretics? Evidently there is some doctrinal difference which someone misunderstands and needs to label. To be sure, I believe that the popular Protestant ecclesiology (which many modern Baptists accept without question) differs from Biblical ecclesiology. However, my position on Biblical ecclesiology is identical to what Baptists have always historically held. It is sad, but the Biblical doctrine that made us Baptists is now an anomaly among Baptists! There was a time, however, when the Protestant version was all I knew. As I grew in the Lord I studied Scripture and realized what the words and grammar of the Bible taught on the New Testament church. This was a difficult time because it was different from what my peers or mentors believed. I was very much alone. I resigned to follow the Lord on this as I kept re-checking to see where I might be wrong. As this solidified in me, I discussed what I had found in the grammar and context of Biblical passages with others. I was shocked to meet brethren who dismissed it as "Baptist Brider" doctrine. Putting Bible words in such evil light seemed pretty ignorant to me. Eventually, I decided to dispel the ignorance and prove the difference between the historic Baptist position and "Briderism." However, finding accurate information on these Briders was not as easy as I would have thought. Even the most avid anti-brider experts could not give a definitive answer of how Briders differ from historic Baptists. The only consistent thing I could pin down about this sect is that they are despised. My only recourse was to find men who are known and reputed to be "Brider heretics" and ask them what they believed.

As I corresponded with a number of men of this reputation, I was surprised that **NONE** of them believed **ANY** of the heresies that Briders are supposed to believe. They did not believe they are the only ones saved, nor did any of them believe in a special rapture for Baptists. Nor did any of these demonstrate a nasty or cultish spirit; quite the opposite. I

began to suspect that either I was not dealing with *real* “briders” or this term was just a paper tiger. (After all, I also had been called a “Briders” by the same people that labeled these men). Every one of these men were independent, unaffiliated Baptists. There is no “Baptist Briders” headquarters of any kind that I could find. One thing they held in distinction from evangelicals is that they have not adopted the Protestant (Catholic) concept of a universal church of any kind. They form their ecclesiology from the Bible as I do also - and as historic Baptists always have. Those I have met are as individualistic as anyone else. Each has their own personality, experiences and convictions. Some even have quirks. (After all, they *are* Baptists). But I found nothing uniformly common that could be Biblically challenged. I have found also that most of those who are derogatorily called “Briders” do not identify by the label. They simply consider themselves to be Historic Baptists. The “Briders” term is one of derision (just like Baptist used to be). That term has a lot of baggage that has nothing to do with the beliefs of those whom I met. Furthermore, I never saw any undue emphasis on the bride of Christ or how it metaphorically represents the church. I cannot see how that would be a problem to anyone anyway.

The second surprise I found among those reputed to be “Briders heretics” was the sweet spirit and servant attitude they had. I am sure there are some who do not possess this. Even the best of men are only human. But there is no doubt in my mind that the so-called “Briders heretics” I have met overall possess a much greater Christ-like spirit than their detractors. If there is any personality characteristic I could find among them, it was that.

These “Briders heretics” were kind, charitable and thoughtful in their dialog. They seemed apt to show you from Scripture what they believe without feeling challenged. I know some “fundamentalist” fellowships (which hold to Protestant ecclesiology) that have the *opposite* spirit. Some seem to think truth exists only in their midst. If you question why - you must be either liberal or deficient in spiritual wisdom. Their own bombastic spirit is exactly what they presume others to have.

The third surprise I found among several of these Briders heretics is that they actually demonstrate their beliefs of the ***Priesthood of believers*** and ***Individual soul liberty***. This is something that is only *rhetoric* among many modern Baptists. The concept that a preacher is specially endowed above the people is a serious heresy. This Catholic/Protestant doctrine is called Nicolaitanism in Revelation 2. It is unknown whether there was ever a group that identified themselves as “Nicolaitans.” We understand their heresy primarily by the descriptive name the Lord used for them. It is derived from “Nico” meaning *dominance* and “Laos” (“Laity”) meaning “*people*.” The Lord commended the church of Ephesus for hating the “*deeds of the Nicolaitans which thing I also hate*.” (That is pretty strong language). The church of Pergamos was rebuked for having those who hold the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitans. Catholicism and Protestantism openly hold the *doctrine* of Nicolaitanism. There are Baptists today who denounce the *doctrine* in rhetoric, while making full use of it in *practice* (deeds). These are like those whom the Ephesians rightly rejected and whose *deeds* the Lord hates. It is common for them even to use the term “laymen” (from laity) to denote non-preacher underlings. If they truly do not believe in a class of clergy, then there is no such thing as a laity.

The *practice* (deeds) of Nicolaitanism is usually rationalized in reaction to the heresy of the other ditch which is “Laodiceanism.” That is, “laity (people) rule.” While these two concepts react against each others abuses and heresies, the true New Testament church is a world away from both. In a New Testament church, **The Lord is the head** (Eph. 5:23; Col 1:19 & 2:19). He will not share this position with anyone or anything. When the people rule - the Lord does not. The Nikolaitan remedy for this prevalent heresy is Pastoral headship. This actually becomes a practical necessity. After all, somebody must occupy that position when the Lord vacates it. The result, however, is simply clergy rule (though Baptists reject the term itself). A Nicolaitan will dwell on verses such as Heb. 13:17 (“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: . . .”), defining “rule” privately to the exclusion of New Testament context. Verses such as Matthew 20:25-27. Mark 10:42-45. Luke 22:25-26 and 1 Peter 5:3 specifically forbid pastors from exploiting lordship. The Baptist variety of a Nicolaitan will procure immunity by *proclaiming* Christ is the head of the church, while acting in His stead. When the lordship of Christ upon a member conflicts with that of the Nicolaitan pastor, they are anathematized as a rebel to Christ’s church. If a pastor pontificates in Christ’s stead (as the Vicar of Christ), he fails to discern the body of Christ. He has made *himself* the head of the body (in *deed* if not by *doctrine*).

In contrast, a true New Testament body of Christ is the optimal organism. The Head directs and operates ***all*** the members. This is necessary for *any* body to function properly. The Lord adds members as it pleases Him and equips them with gifts for its edification. Historic Baptists have always believed that *Christ* is the *literal head* of their local New Testament church. Because of this, they tend to fear and shun the “lord of the flock” mentality. Allowing this would paralyze the body and eventually deprive them of His presence. Interestingly enough, one of the chief criticisms we hear against those who are maligned as “Briders heretics” is that their pastors are cultic dictators. That certainly may be true of *some*, but it is not distinctive to the group by my observation. (Perhaps the so-called “Briders” I met were falsely labeled). Not surprisingly, however, that practice is more prevalent among brethren of the neo-baptistic, universal-church doctrine.

So, I am saddled with the question: Am I a Brider? Well, if that term denotes a proud, mean spirited, pharisaical cult that believes they are the only ones going to heaven then I have to laugh and say “***absolutely NOT!***” Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ; not by church or even perfect doctrine. But if that term describes those who believe the New Testament church belongs to Christ, then at least it puts me in good company. My preference, however, is to be called simply a “Historic Baptist” because that is what Baptists have always believed from New Testament times.

Les Potter