
From: Dr. Tom Vogel [mailto:web@hylesanderson.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, June 23, 2009 2:36 PM
To: pastor.baker@lighthouse-baptist.net
Subject: An Open Letter to Independent Fundamental Baptists



David Baker,

When my wife invited me to church for the first time 37 years ago, everything was new to me. I quickly got the assurance of my salvation, was baptized, and joined the church. We were married about a year later. Though I never struggled with my faith, there were many things that I did not understand about Baptists. But I overlooked those things that were a mystery to me, and I concerned myself with my own personal growth as a Christian.

These many years later, I have not arrived as a Christian, but I have come to understand most things in our Independent Baptist world. However, there are some things I have yet to figure out. Of all the things I have learned, there is one thing that I do not understand and that is why are some Baptists so hateful and spiteful towards each other?

When I was a little boy my mother taught me, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all." I must admit, I haven't always followed her advice, but I always knew I was wrong when I didn't. She also taught me to mind my own business. That was very good advice, and it has kept me out of a lot of trouble. Sometimes I did not obey my mother's admonition, and I always regretted it later.

Moms know a lot about Christian living. My mom was a wonderful lady. She was born with one leg shorter than the other, and when she was a child, other children teased her about her very pronounced limp. She grew up very sensitive to the weaknesses and disabilities of others. My mother was a very sweet lady and her sweet spirit always inspired me to try to be nice to people. She would never approve of anyone criticizing another human being. If my mom knew how mean some Baptists were to each other, she would never approve.

My mother was raised in a Methodist church. When she met my dad, prior to World War II, he was a Catholic. My Dad changed religions and has been a faithful Methodist since. In those days, that was not something that one did without consequence. My Dad's family basically disowned him. It was sad. Though I knew who my grandmother was, I never knew any of my other relatives. I had one aunt, eight uncles, and dozens of cousins in my hometown, and I never knew any of them. What inspired them to treat my family disdainfully, I will never know. When my grandmother died, I met dozens of relatives who were very nice to me, but I never saw them again. I guess Independent Baptists are not the only ones who do not get along. It must not be an Independent Baptist thing. It must be a

sin thing that makes people act that way.

I was a Marine rifleman with the Third Battalion, Seventh Marines when I was in Vietnam. My platoon went out early one morning on a road sweep. My squad of 11 men left the road sweep to run a patrol into the jungle. We crossed a series of rice paddies before we entered the tree line. As soon as we entered the jungle, we were attacked by the enemy. Immediately, our machine gunner was killed. He was hit in the head with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and decapitated. Eight other men were grievously wounded. Blood was all over the place. I saw the enemy assaulting our position, and I shot their leader in the chest three times. One of the other men in my squad came running to me. He yelled something, and suddenly there was a terrific explosion. I saw nothing because of the black smoke and dust. He disappeared into the smoke. Suddenly, and thankfully, the rest of my platoon came running to our aid, and the enemy fled into the jungle as quickly as they had come.

When I eventually returned back to camp, I walked into an empty tent. My entire squad had been evacuated. I was in a state of shock. A few hours later, I received some letters from home. I opened the mail with desperate anticipation of a glimpse of good news from the home I loved so well. To my dismay, I read a letter that was filled with criticism of one of my family members. The words hurt beyond belief. I opened the other letter and found it as critical as the first. I was devastated.

I needed help. I was fighting a war. I had just returned from the worst experience of my life up until that time. No one can ever know how traumatic a firefight can be unless he lived through it. I needed some inspiration. I did not need a family feud. My first thought was, "Don't these people know there is war going on over here?" My second thought was, "What do these people think I am doing over here?" I threw the letters away and joined my new squad. I had a war to fight, and I couldn't worry about a family fight that was half a world away. An interesting postscript to the story is that forty years later those same family members are still fighting with each other. They fight over different issues, and instead of letters, I get emails; but the fight goes on. My life has not changed one bit because of them or their spiteful words toward one another, except that my spirit hurts when I think of them.

Another thing I don't understand about some Independent Baptists is that for some reason they have a hard time understanding word definitions. For example, some do not realize that "inspiration" has a number of definitions. Some definitions apply to the method that God used to give the Scripture and some definitions apply to a person's feelings. Some definitions apply to how a person affects another person or how God affects man.

I have also noticed that some Baptists don't understand what "independent" means. It is a simple word that means "not dependent upon another person or institution." It means "not accountable to another person." Of course, we are all accountable to God for our actions, but we are not accountable to each other unless we choose to be.

For example, I am accountable to my pastor because I choose to be. He is accountable to God unless he also chooses to be held accountable to another man. My pastor has chosen for our church to be an Independent Baptist church, so he is accountable only to God. I am glad. God can inspire my pastor, then my pastor can inspire me. This way there is no other

party involved. I like that. I believe this is the way God intended inspiration to be. For example, when Jethro told Moses in Exodus 18:19-20, “. . . be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.” God inspired Jethro who in turn spoke to his son-in-law Moses, and Moses followed the admonition from his father-in-law as if he had heard from God.

I think many Baptists misunderstand the Great Commission. As I understand the Great Commission, believers are supposed to witness to unbelievers so unbelievers can get saved. The believers are then to get those new believers baptized, and then the believers are supposed to teach those new believers everything that God has commanded all of us to do. It appears that the task that God has given to us would tend to consume a great deal of our time. I have looked and looked, but I cannot find anything about my responsibility to tell another man of God how to conduct his ministry or tell him what he should believe. Of course, Paul admonished believers on a regular basis because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to pen the Holy Writ.

I do not know the exact process by which God gave the Bible to the men who authored it. Somehow it was “God breathed.” The actual writing of the Bible was as miraculous as its preservation for the last 4000 years. I do not know how our Bible was preserved down through the ages, I just accept that fact by faith. The Bible is the Word of God and contains the “words of God.” There are many things about the Bible I do not understand, but I guess I am like Mark Twain who said, “It ain’t the parts of the Bible I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.” My mom would wonder why some men who claim to know some parts of the Bible so well don’t know the other parts of the Bible that teach about being kind and loving to one another.

A lot of things I don’t understand, but I do know that God is not pleased when one of his children attacks another one of his children. My mom taught me that. She loved all of her children equally. I was about six years old when a boy chased me home. He wanted to beat me up. My mom saw him trying to catch me then I knew I was safe. Thank goodness for Mom. But my mom pulled a fast one on me. She invited my enemy into the house. We sat down at the kitchen table and had chocolate cake and milk. To my surprise, that made everything better and my enemy became my friend.

Those of you who attack my pastor, my college, and my church need to learn from my mom. Why don’t you all find some sinners, invite them over for chocolate cake and milk, and make them friends of God. We will do the same here in Hammond. I think this would be well-pleasing to God.

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