

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

*Providing factual information about our Bibles, beliefs, movements,
institutions and events of historical Christianity & Judaism.*

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Who Is a Christian?

By Jim Myers

*Have you noticed that political candidates are playing the "religion card" these days? Some are questioning whether their opponents are "really Christians." What does a Christian look like? We can't tell by their race, because Christians are found in all races. We can't tell by gender, because Christians are males and females. We can't tell by nationalities, because Christians are citizens of nations around the earth. So, how does a political candidate expect voters to know who is a Christian and who is not? *Most will probably say that we can only tell by their beliefs.**

Christianity has left a very long paper trail of its beliefs, but it doesn't seem like many Christians living today are aware of these rich resources for information about their religion. I used to be like that before I decided to investigate my biblical heritage. I thought my beliefs came directly from Jesus and assumed he taught them to the apostles and they passed them to the next generation of Christians -- and then the same process repeated itself generation after generation until the same teachings that Jesus taught ended up in Cleburne, Texas -- where I heard it from our Baptist preachers.

I knew there were lots of other churches in my town, but I never really knew anything about what they believed. *Truthfully, back then, I really didn't understand much about my own beliefs.* I just knew that I walked down the aisle during an invitation, told the preacher I wanted to be saved, prayed the "Sinner's Prayer" with him, and then he introduced me to the church as a new "born-again" Christian. One week later I was baptized. Another thing that I firmly believed by then was that I never had to worry about going to go to hell again. Our church taught "once saved, always saved" and we were saved forever regardless of what we did in the future. *I was saved forever!*

This was important because I had been listening to sermons all of my life about what happens to unsaved people when they die. A couple of times every year our church held revivals, and back then, the visiting evangelists were hardcore "fire

and brimstone preachers.” They would graphically describe what would happen to the unsaved in the future. They would burn forever in the everlasting fires of hell. While they suffered they would be able to see the saved folks living in the paradise of heaven with God. I could picture myself burning in hell because of my sins (13 years old) and looking up and seeing all of the people at church enjoying themselves in heaven. *The bottom line is that we heard a lot about life after death, but very little about living life before death.*

I was in for some real shocks when I started investigating my biblical heritage (Bibles, beliefs, movements, institutions and events of historical Christianity & Judaism) and discovered that other Christians didn’t believe the same things I did. I also quickly learned to stop using my belief system to judge other Christian belief systems. When the thought that what I was reading was wrong, I stopped and asked myself what I thought was right and why. It was usually because someone told me, but I had never checked it out. I needed to know my “Belief Ruler” was accurate before I used it to check others.

One of the first groups I read about was the **Free Will Baptist**, founded in **1727** at North Carolina. They taught that **a person could lose their salvation**. I was taught “once saved, always saved.” I next discovered **Seventh Day Baptist**, founded in 1617 at England. My Baptist church taught that **Sunday was the Sabbath**, which I believed was the Sabbath mentioned in the Ten Commandments. The **Seventh Day Baptist** taught that **Saturday was the Sabbath**. Of course, when I started learning about the Jewish Jesus I discovered that he would have agreed with the Seventh Day Baptist, not with my church. *The Free Will Baptist and Seventh Day Baptist were not only Christians – they were Baptist, too!*

When I became a minister I pastored in a town with a population of a little over 20,000 that had over one hundred churches. I tried to get my fellow ministers to meet and discuss what was keeping us apart. It seemed to be that the churches were in competition and they didn’t want their members to attend any other church. Later I discovered that the Reformed Presbytery Church (1738, Pennsylvania) **prohibited members from the occasional hearing, attending worship services or preaching by ministers of other denominations**. Well, I think we can agree that this belief has been successful because it is still around today. When I jumped back in time to the early centuries of Christianity I discovered differences that were even more shocking. It is important to understand that regardless of how we would view them today, they considered themselves to be Christians.

(1) Some believed that **Jesus was only a man**, while others believed that **Jesus was God**.

(2) Some believed that **Jesus was God, but he wasn't the God of the Old Testament and Creator.**

(3) Some believed that **Jesus and God were of the "same substance,"** while others believed **Jesus and God were of "different substances."**

(4) Some believed that **Jesus was the Only God,** while others believed that **Jesus was the third person of the Trinity.**

(5) Some believed in the **Trinity,** while others did not.

(6) Some believed **Christians were under the laws of the Old Testament,** while others believed **Christians were not under those laws.**

(7) Some believed that **Jesus's death atoned for all sins,** but others believed that **sins committed after a person was baptized were not covered.**

These are just a few examples of the different beliefs that early Christians held. The differences were not resolved by unbiased investigation. The major factor in creating the core beliefs we find in Christianity by the fifth century was the involvement of the emperors in the Roman Church. When it became illegal to hold specific beliefs and be punished by the secular government, a major transition in Christianity took place and the Roman Catholic Church emerged.

I was a Protestant, even though some of my fellow Baptist denied it, and our form of Christianity didn't exist until the 16th century – 1,100 years after the Roman Catholic Church! *Protestantism simply kept the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church that they agreed with, and then dumped the others.* There were many disagreements between Protestants and Catholics, but in some cases some Protestants would agree with Catholics on an issue, while others Protestants disagreed.

(1) The Catholic Church **required infants to be baptized to protect them from going to hell** if they died. **Some early Protestants, i.e., Huldrych Zwingli, agreed.** But the **Anabaptist** (meaning "one who baptizes over again") **required all baptismal candidates to make their own confessions of faith** before they could be baptized, which obviously was impossible for infants that couldn't speak.

(2) **John Calvin** taught that "God completely and sovereignly accomplishes the salvation of sinners **He has predestined to be saved.**" **Only the sins of the elect** (those God predestined to save) **were atoned for by Jesus's death. Those who weren't the "elect" were predestined to damnation.**

Jacobus Arminius (Armenianism) taught that **“atonement is intended for all; Jesus’s death satisfies God’s justice; and, man has free will to respond or resist.”** Arminius also taught that **“eternal security is conditional”** and the **General Baptist** agree that **“it is possible to fall from grace.”**

(3) **Particular Baptist** taught that **“only Calvinists were Christians; God is the source of sin and of evil; men have no will of their own; and, it is wrong to evangelize.”**

(4) **Pietism** was **against academic degrees**, while the earliest American churches required their ministers to hold college degrees.

(5) **Pietism** also recognized **women as prophets and community leaders**, while **Particular Baptist** held that **“women could not hold positions of leadership; women could not pray in prayer meetings; women do not speak at church business meetings; and, women must cover their heads in public worship.”**

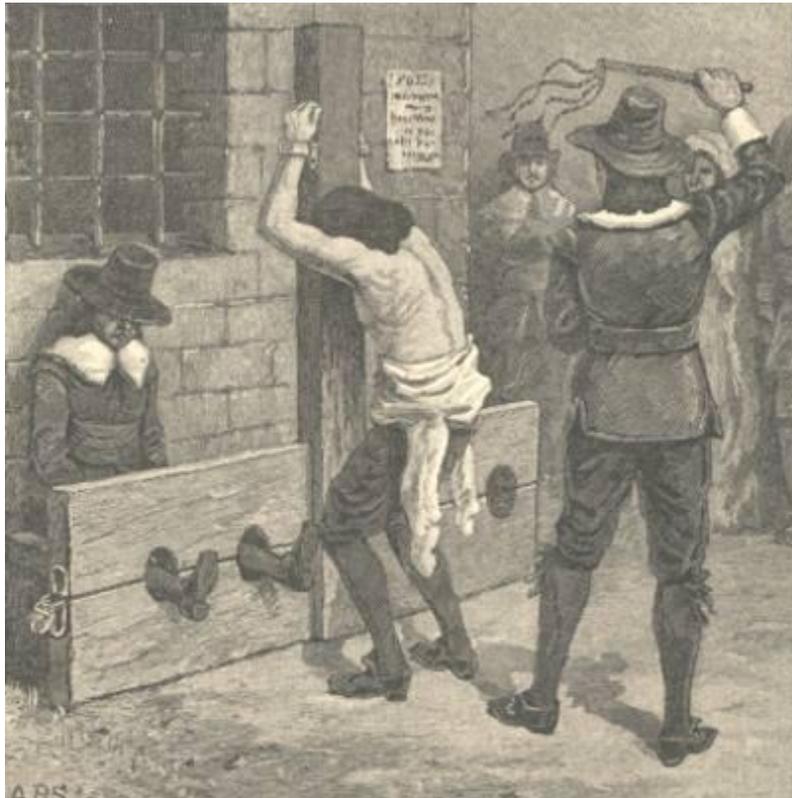
(6) The **Wesley Methodist Church** taught that **“the love of God is always linked with love of neighbors**, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world.” **Particular Baptist** taught **“God only cares for his elect and God hates the non-elect.”**

(7) **Jakob Hutter (Hutterites)** taught that **“all property owned by the colony and provisions for individual members and their families come from common resources.”** Paul Palmer (**Free Will Baptist**) taught **“voluntary tithing; total abstention from alcoholic beverages; and, no work on Sunday.”**

(8) The Westminster’s Confessions stated that **“the Pope is the Antichrist; Roman Catholic mass is a form of idolatry; civil magistrates have divine authority to punish heresy; and, marriage with non-Christians forbidden.”** Obviously, **Catholics disagreed on some of these.**

The **Founding Fathers** were well-aware of the Christian religious issues of their day, *and the deadly consequences of mixing government and religion*. For some reason, however, we were not taught about the environment in America before and immediately after the Revolution. What you read next are actual events and the lives of real people were affected. Put yourself in their shoes and think about what they experienced. Also think about what would lead to the actions taken by government and Christian church leaders. Ask yourself if the religions involved in the things below are what Jesus had in mind and would want his name associated with? Don’t they sound much more like what the Roman soldiers did?

(1) 1631 (Massachusetts) - **Phillip Ratcliffe** convicted of "uttering malicious and scandalous speeches against the government and church of Salem" by a court consisting of the governor, his deputy, and several magistrates. He was sentenced to be **whipped**, **his ears cut off**, **pay a heavy fine**, and be **banished**. What did he say that led to this punishment? *A report described his crime as saying, "The devil was the founder of the Salem church."*



SOURCE¹

(2) 1631 (Massachusetts) - **Roger Williams** was **banished** from for "dyvers (divers) newe (new) and dangerous opinions" **against the magistrates**. It should be noted that it wasn't unusual for the property owned by those banished to ultimately find its way into the hands of church officials and judges.

(3) 1654 (Boston) - **Benjamin Saucer**, a soldier, was charged with blasphemy for saying, "*Jehovah was the devil and the only God he knew was his sword.*" The court wanted to try him capitally (death penalty); the grand jury refused because he said it while he was drunk. **The magistrates rejected that verdict, and tried and convicted him**, but *before they could impose sentence, he escaped*.

(4) 1656 (Plymouth) - **Katherine Aines** found guilty of **lascivious behavior**, she was **whipped**; for her **blasphemous words**, she was **required to wear a capital "B" on her sleeve**.

(5) 1656 (Boston) - **Two Quaker women** arrived by ship and were arrested before they left the ship. Their **books were seized and burned**. They were **imprisoned, stripped naked, searched for signs of witchcraft,** and **held incommunicado for five weeks** before being **deported**.

(6) 1657 (Boston) - **John Crossman** found guilty of blasphemy and **beaten severely**. A **letter "B" for "blasphemy" was burned into his forehead**, and he was **banished forever** from the colony.

(7) 1659 (Boston) - **Two men were found guilty of being heretics and blasphemers because they were Quakers**. They were **hanged**, and **Mary Dyer was forced to stand by them with a noose around her neck,** and **watched them die, expecting to be next**. She was released at the last moment and **banished**. She returned the next year and was **hanged**.

(8) 1670 (New York) - **Samuel Forman** was **convicted for having disrupted church services, abused the word of God, and blasphemed His name**. He was **severely flogged with rods, fined the costs of prosecution,** and **banished forever**.

(9) 1670 (Massachusetts) - A **student at Harvard College**, for **having said something malicious about the Holy Ghost,** was **publicly whipped before the student body** by the town jailer and **suspended**.

(10) 1702 (New Hampshire) - **Blasphemy laws** passed that provided for punishments short of death: *six months in prison, boring through the tongue with a hot iron, the pillory, or whipping, at the discretion of the court.*



The Pillory²

(11) 1710 (Maryland) - **Charles Arabella** spilled some scalding pitch on his foot. In sudden pain, he uttered some unknown words for which he was convicted of blasphemy. He had **his tongue bored through with a hot iron, fined 20**

pounds, and was **sentenced to six months in prison**. Unable to pay, he was **kept in prison over a year.**"

In 1791, the **Bill of Rights** was ratified as part of the United States Constitution. The **First Amendment** became law because Americans knew first-hand what happened when government became the enforcer of religious doctrines.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Our **Founding Fathers** had this situation in mind when they wrote the US Constitution. Article VI states:

" . . . The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; **but no religious Test shall ever be required** as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

The **law of unintended consequences**, often cited but rarely defined, is that *actions of people—and especially of government—always have effects that are unanticipated or unintended.*³ The decision political candidates are making **to play the "religion card" is very dangerous**. They are imposing a "religious test as a qualification for office." *How long will it take for those who play the "religion card" to present a bill to establish a specific religion as the standard for American Christianity?* The American government can use force against its citizens – American religions can't.

The fact that the "religion card" is being played successfully reveals something very important -- *it works great on an uninformed audience*. Why don't Americans know more about the histories of religion? Why aren't they taught factual histories in public schools? Why don't members of the churches demand accurate accounts of their histories? "Who is a Christian" is a question that I believe should be answered by earnest Christians seeking to understand their roots – not politicians with questionable personal and business agendas who inflame and polarize American Christians in order to get a vote. I have introduced you to what happens when government & religion mix. Every Christian should take a stand on this one. Tell the candidates to layoff the "religion card!" **BHC**

¹ <http://lrwhitney.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/puritan-whipping.jpg>

² <http://media.salemwebnetwork.com/Christianity/HistoryTimeline/31009.jpg>

³ <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/UnintendedConsequences.html>

March Memorials

In Loving Memory

**DOVA
IDA
GREGORY**

March 14, 1907
March 7, 1997

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**MINNIE
KRAUTH**

March 22, 1998

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which we shared as we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued -- kindness, faith,
love and peace.*

*As long as we live, they too will
live; for they are now part of us.
It is an honor to speak their names
and remember their lives again.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The
Prayer Book Press)

In Loving Memory

**ROBERT
DEAN**

March 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JOHN W.
"JACK"
NELSON**

October 25, 1932
March 21, 2008

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit the next time you are on the Internet and stop back by often. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send the information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

Your support is greatly appreciated
& makes our work possible.

How important is it to know the history of Christianity & the spiritual heritages from which our beliefs, morals & values came?

What we know about the history of our religions and beliefs affects us as individuals, communities & nations – and how we relate to one another. The Biblical Heritage Center is committed to providing solid fact-based information that will your help understand your spiritual heritage, so you can make solid fact-based decisions in life.

We need your help to help us help others and continue to provide you with quality information, too. The bottom line is that it takes money to do our work and make it available through our publications and the internet. BHC is completely funded by individuals who care about & understand the importance of providing fact-based information about difficult & often challenging topics.

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