

Baptist Distinctives

Baptists share many beliefs in common with other Christians, including belief in one God, the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ, and the significance of his crucifixion and resurrection for salvation. With other Christian churches, they know that hope for the individual, the nation, and the world is found in Jesus Christ and in a personal relationship with Him.

Baptists emerged historically out of a desire to follow New Testament teaching as they understood it. The following beliefs have come to be known as **Baptist Distinctives**:

- **The Lordship of Jesus Christ.**

Baptists believe that Jesus is Lord of both the church and the individual. We believe that it is only through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, burial and resurrection that a person can know salvation or eternal life with God in heaven - there aren't many paths to God, only one. But belief in God means that what a Christian says is also evident in his/her action - every area in the believer's life and the life of the church is to be subject to the Lord. God is the supreme authority.

- **The Authority of the Scriptures.**

Baptists believe the scriptures are inspired by God. They are the only perfect, supreme, infallible and sufficient standard of faith and practice.

- **The Priesthood of the Believer.**

Baptists hold that ALL believers share as equals in the church, and, in turn, have a priestly role toward each other. Every member is called to be a minister. Differences in education, wealth, gender, and so on do not disqualify a person from service or from serving God through ministry to others.

- **Soul Liberty.**

Inherent in the worth of each person is also the ability of the soul to have **direct access to God through Jesus Christ**. Baptists believe that no group has the right to force others to believe or worship as it does. God has given all people freedom of choice, and as such Baptists have championed the cause of religious liberty.

- **Regenerate Church Membership.**

To become a Christian requires a personal acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. You cannot say Christ has saved you from judgment unless you also allow him to control your life as Lord. This act of faith and believer's baptism must precede membership in the local church.

- **Baptism.**

Baptists practice believer's baptism by immersion. It is one of the first significant acts through which the believer proclaims personal faith in Christ and is initiated into church life and ministry.

- **Lord's Supper.**

Baptists celebrate the Lord's Supper, or Communion, commemorating and remembering Christ's death. Matthew 26:26-30.

- **Local Church Autonomy.**

Baptists believe government in a local church is controlled by the principles of the priesthood of believers, the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, present in the lives of congregational members, leads them corporately to discover and obey his mind and will. As a result, it is important that each church verify each potential member's statement of faith to make sure that their claim is valid. Each church is competent under Christ to look after its own affairs and has freedom from coercion by other bodies. From their beginning, however, Baptists have consistently recognized the importance of cooperation with churches of "like faith and order."

- **The Separation of Church and State.**

Baptists have championed the right to freedom in spiritual matters under the lordship of Jesus Christ. They believe there must exist a separation between the church and civil governments. There should not be a church-controlled state, nor a state-controlled church. God has given legitimate roles to both, but neither is to encroach upon the rights or obligations of the other. They are, however, under obligation to recognize and reinforce each other as each seeks to fulfil its divine function.