

Distinctive Baptist Principles

There is much diversity among Baptists. While there are many variations there are some basic principles that are held in common in some form and have related concepts.

The Authority of Scripture and the Liberty of Conscience Baptists recognize the Bible to be the Word of God, authoritative for belief and practice. At the same time, they hold that all are accountable only to God for religious belief and practice and each can interpret scripture through the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith. This is often referred to as the priesthood of the believer.

The Autonomy of the Local Church and Cooperation Baptists began with the idea that Christ was not mediated through pope, bishop, or king but through the congregation of believers who were responsible for administering the ordinances, preaching, ordaining and determining its own ministry. Yet like-minded Baptist churches chose to share fellowship and worked together for mission support.

Regeneration: Dramatic Event and Sustaining Process A Baptist church is made up of believers who have experienced grace through the power of God that makes all things new. For some this is a dramatic conversion experience as Christ is proclaimed as Lord. For others conversion is through a gradual nurturing process of spiritual development leading to the conversion commitment to Christ as Lord.

Ordinances: Sacraments and Symbols The Lord's Supper and baptism are spoken of as ordinances of the church, symbolic observances commanded by Christ. By some they are referred to as sacraments, outward and visible signs of an inward grace. Whichever term is used the power and spiritual significance is recognized.

Doctrinal Statements: Confessional and Selectively Creedal Confessions of faith have many uses in Baptist life. The confessions can be used as guidelines or rejected. Some churches organize around these statements of belief, ordain ministers, and deal with questions of orthodoxy using them. Some have tried to impose them on others, receiving varied responses.

Religious Liberty and Christian Citizenship Baptists were among the first to move beyond the call for religious toleration to a call for radical religious liberty insisting the state could not judge in religious matters. They would be loyal citizens as long as the state did not make them violate their commitment to Christ.

Diversity: Theological and Ecclesial Baptist theology covers a wide range of belief from fundamentalist to liberal, from general atonement to limited atonement. While the congregation is at the center of the ecclesial order, diverse Baptist groups show varying relationships on the local, regional, national and international levels.

For a more complete study see Chapter One in Dr. Bill Leonard's book *Baptist Ways, A History*. These principles were taken from that book.