

## Baptist Distinctives

### **B** Biblical Authority

The Bible is the final authority in all matters of belief and practice because the Bible is inspired by God and bears the absolute authority of God Himself. Whatever the Bible affirms, Baptists accept as true. No human opinion or decree of any church group can override the Bible. Even creeds and confessions of faith, which attempt to articulate the theology of Scripture, do not carry Scripture's inherent authority.

*"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe." ~ 1st Thessalonians 2:13*

### **A** Autonomy of the Local Church

The local church is an independent body accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church. All human authority for governing the local church resides within the local church itself. Therefore, the church is autonomous, or self-governing. No religious hierarchy outside the local church may dictate a local church's beliefs or practices. Autonomy does not mean isolation. Baptist churches fellowship with other churches around mutual interests and beliefs, but a Baptist church is not subordinate to any other body or group.

*"And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence." ~ Colossians 1:18*

### **P** Priesthood of the Believers

Every born-again believer has direct access to the throne of God. Therefore, since every child of God shares in the priesthood of the believers, all have the same right as ordained ministers to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ's name. This is first and foremost a matter of responsibility and servanthood, not privilege and license.

*"You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." ~ 1 Peter 2:5*

### **T** Two Ordinances of the Church

We practice believer's baptism by immersion because it preserves the picture of saving truth. No other form pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-5). We believe that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic ordinance, picturing Christ's body broken for our sins and His blood shed for our redemption. It is not a sacrament or saving ordinance, but it helps remind us of Jesus' death, and inspires us as we look forward to His coming. It is to be observed by regenerate, obedient believers.

*"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.'" ~ 1 Corinthians 11:23-24*

## **I Individual Soul Liberty**

Every individual Christian has the responsibility and liberty to believe, right or wrong, as his/her own conscience dictates. While we seek to persuade men to believe and practice the truth, a person must not be forced into compliance because the larger group may not hold the truth, and our heritage, as Baptists, has demonstrated the value of the individual believer.

*"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." ~ Romans 14:12*

## **S Saved and Baptized Church Membership**

Local church membership is restricted to individuals who give a believable testimony of personal faith in Christ and have publicly identified themselves with Him in believer's baptism. When the members of a local church are believers, a oneness in Christ exists, and the members endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

*"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls...Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." ~ Acts 2:41&47*

## **T Two Offices of the Church**

The Bible mandates only two offices in the church--pastor and deacon. The three terms--"pastor," "elder," and "bishop," or "overseer"--all refer to the same office. The two offices of pastor and deacon exist within the local church and not as a hierarchy of authority outside or over the local church.

*"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work....For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." ~ 1st Timothy 3:1-13*

## **S Separation of Church and State**

God established both the church and the civil government, and He gave each its own distinct sphere of operation. The government's purposes are outlined in Romans 13:1-7 and the church's purposes in Matthew 28:19 and 20. Neither should control the other, nor should there be an alliance between the two. Individual Christians in a free society can properly influence government toward righteousness through their personal involvement, but a denomination or group of churches must exercise control of the government.

*"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same:" ~ Romans 13:1-3*