

## BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

The following might not be all of the major distinctives, but they run like a thread throughout the history of Baptists:

- The church composed of a gathered people who have been **regenerated** or changed.
- The church having **democratic** forms of church government or polity.
- **The importance of each individual**, clergy and laity, so that all possess equal responsibilities and privileges as Christian servants.
- **The priesthood of each believer**, signifying that each person is capable of approaching the throne of grace without a priestly intercessor and of reading and interpreting God's word for himself or herself.
- The high regard for **Jesus Christ as Lord** and **Scriptures as God's Word**.
- The concept of the **New Testament alone as the sole and sufficient rule book** for a church and, therefore, no need for man-devised creeds.
- The right of the individual to be free of civil or ecclesiastical authority in the matter of the soul or, as usually expressed, **soul liberty**.
- The duty of the state to protect the believer and even the non-believer in the full exercise of conscience, or **religious liberty**.
- The expectation that each religious body will refrain from using the state to promote its own cause, or **separation of church and state**.
- The concept of **believer's baptism**, not infant baptism.
- The practice of the **two church ordinances – baptism and the Lord's Supper**.
- The concept of **independent, autonomous churches**, yet characterized by a cooperative spirit.
- **A God-called clergy**.
- An abiding concern for implementing the Great Commission through **missions**.

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## **BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

**The church composed of a gathered people who have been regenerated or changed.**

Believers comprise local churches and are members of the Body of Christ, having become in Christ what the Bible calls new creations.

One is not “born into church membership” nor can one inherit it. “Belief is...[a] personal, voluntary act . . . . . church membership follows the line of personal regeneration and faith.”

—J. Lansing Burrows

“Baptists maintain that... [a local church is a] body of baptized believers, meeting statedly for the worship of God and observance of the ordinances of his house.”

—Tiberius Gracchus Jones

**The church having democratic forms of church government or polity.**

Each Baptist church functions as a theocratic republic in which each member represents her or his understanding of God’s will. Baptists look to the Bible for guidance in our polity and how to govern ourselves.

Under Christ, the Head of the Body, each church’s members govern that church. As each member has rights and responsibilities under Christ the Head, each church has rights and responsibilities under Jesus Christ alone.

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**BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

**The importance of each individual, clergy, and laity, so that all possess equal responsibilities and privileges as Christian servants.**

Baptists affirm the equality of every believer in Christ. As a part of the Body of Christ, every believer enjoys benefits and has responsibilities in that Body.

“Every one must repent...believe...and obey for [oneself].”  
—Thomas Henderson Pritchard

**The priesthood of each believer, signifying that each person is capable of approaching the throne of grace without a priestly intercessor and of reading and interpreting God’s word for himself or herself.**

“We all stand on the same footing—all alike priests unto God, all alike the servants of Jesus Christ, all alike and equally the children of one Father . . . . .  
.....  
Every one must...come directly unto God in faith and love and worship and service.”  
—Elisha William Winfrey

“We recognize the divinely given right of the individual to interpret the Bible...God’s spirit is in the Word to guide all of God’s servants into the truth. It is for them as individuals to accept his guidance, follow his leadership, and heed his teachings.”  
—C. Wirt Trainham

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**BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

**The high regard for Jesus Christ as Lord and Scriptures as God’s Word.**

“The Word of God—what does it teach? is the only question which concerns a true Baptist . . . . .  
the scriptures are the only and absolute authority in religion.”  
—Alfred E. Dickinson

“We hold that the Bible is the supreme, the sufficient, the exclusive and absolute rule in all matters of religious faith and practice...”  
—Thomas Henderson Pritchard

Baptists look to Jesus and rely on the Holy Spirit to aid our understanding as we interpret the Bible.

**The concept of the New Testament alone as the sole and sufficient rule book for a church and, therefore, no need for human-devised creeds.**

“We hold that the Bible alone is a religious authority; and in regard to Christian institutions the direct authority is the New Testament.”  
—John A. Broadus

“...we do have a creed—a very full, authoritative one. It is called the New Testament.”  
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**The right of the individual to be free of civil or ecclesiastical authority in the matter of the soul or, as usually expressed, soul liberty.**

“Personality and competency in religion constitute the very basis of soul-liberty...”

—James Boardman Hawthorne

“[E. Y. Mullins said, ‘All souls have an equal right to direct access to God.’] It is possible and desirable to go further and declare that any interference with this right, any attempt to coerce or control this sacred function of the human person, is insufferable tyranny.”

—Robert Healy Pitt

**The duty of the state to protect the believer and even the non-believer in the full exercise of conscience, or religious liberty.**

“The liberty to worship God according to the dictates of conscience is the dearest of all human rights. Baptists have been unswervingly loyal to the principle of religious liberty. They have not only claimed it for themselves, but have accorded it to others—Jews and pagans as well as Christians.”

—Jeremiah Bell Jeter

“It is no accident that wherever Baptist views have prevailed... [people] have been left to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. We see from the suffering endured by our Baptist fathers at what cost the liberty we now enjoy was obtained...”

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**The expectation that each religious body will refrain from using the state to promote its own cause, or separation of church and state.**

“The United States has made one distinctive contribution to civilization: the separation of church and state. The State has no religious function.

Religion is purely voluntary . . . . .

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The Christian religion does not need any assistance from the State . . . . .

Christianity prospers most when freest.”

—George White McDaniel

**The concept of believer’s baptism, not infant baptism.**

Upon one’s profession of faith, Baptists offer immersion as the mode of following Jesus Christ in baptism, an act of obedience to the command of Christ and a symbol that testifies to His death, burial, and resurrection and to the hope believers share in Him.

Following Christ in baptism makes a public statement that one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and believes that God has raised Him from the dead.

“The one sufficient reason the Baptists have for rejecting infant baptism is that the Bible does not teach it.”

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### **The practice of the two church ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper.**

“We hold that the...ceremonies of a [church] ought to be such...as the New Testament directs. As to ceremonies, there are but two and both are very simple in nature and in meaning—Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”

—John A. Broadus

“Baptists hold that...immersion of a professed believer in Christ into water in the name of the Holy Trinity constitutes Christian baptism.”

—Thomas S. Dunaway

“To be baptized is a command of our Lord. It is a test of our obedience and submission to Christ. Baptism (and the Lord’s Supper) are the positive institutions of the New Testament—a test and a pledge of complete submission to God’s authority and of unquestioning obedience . . . . .

Our Lord intended [the Lord’s Supper] be simply a commemoration of his sufferings and death for our redemption. In partaking of the Lord’s Supper we profess to be in communion with our Lord and Savior and declare our fellowship with him.”

—J. Lansing Burrows

“The Lord’s Supper is a social or ecclesiastical duty. This is indicated by the term *communion* or joint participation. It is an act through which church members partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of Christ’s supreme sacrifice.”

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**BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

**The concept of independent, autonomous churches, yet characterized by a cooperative spirit.**

“We hold that churches were designed, as shown in the New Testament, to be independent. They have no right to control over one another. Ample warrant there is for cooperation...and consultations...without assuming...in any sense to rule one another.”

—John A. Broadus

“That true unity which gives real strength, and produces the highest efficiency, comes from within rather than without . . . . .

.....  
The true churches of Christ, however distinct and independent...are essentially one. They breathe the same spirit, speak the same language, mind the same things . . . . .

.....  
No more surely do the social and religious instincts of the individual Christian lead him to seek companionship with his Christian brother, than do similar instincts lead the individual church to seek communion and cooperation with its sister churches.”

—Tiberius Gracchus Jones

Baptists share their resources for Christian purposes such as missions, education, and meeting human needs, including those of church leaders. This follows the example of the churches in the New Testament. We give our time, talents, and money in the cause of Christ. We cooperate to use God’s resources for God’s purposes in more effective and efficient ways.

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## **BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES**

### **A God-called clergy.**

“The Baptists believe in a divine call to the ministry, and that the prescribed qualifications for this office are [one’s] piety and...knowledge of gospel truth, an aptness to teach and a burning desire for the salvation of souls and the glory of God. While we believe in an educated ministry as far as possible and encourage learning, we feel we have no right to prescribe a certain amount of learning before we will recognize a divine call to the ministry.”

—Thomas S. Dunaway

In calling a minister, a Baptist church affirms its autonomy, the soul liberty of the minister and of the members, the call of God in the candidate’s life and in the church’s life, our Baptist way of church governance, and the importance of each member.

### **An abiding concern for implementing the Great Commission through missions.**

“My heart echoed the searching questions: ‘What are churches for but to make missionaries? What is education for but to train them? What is commerce for but to carry them? What is money for but to send them?

And what is life itself for but to fulfill the purpose of missions—the enthroning of Jesus Christ in the hearts of [people] everywhere?”

—Blanche Sydnor White

“..Tell the story of Calvary...[and] help us mightily in bringing the salvation of the world.”

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