

*Parenting Tools:*

## **What Distinguishes Us as Baptist?**



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### *What Distinguishes Us as Baptists?*

The goal of this brief article is to share some Baptist distinctives; that is, to explain what distinguishes Baptist theology from other Protestant denominations. The goal is not necessarily to share the entirety of our core beliefs (matters like who God is, doctrine of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, and salvation) but to share the aspects of Baptist theology that make it a unique denomination. The Baptist distinctives are as follows:

#### **Centrality of God's Word**

Baptists believe that God's word is authoritative and sufficient for faith and practice. It is authoritative since it is God breathed and written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is completely sufficient in that it is able to take the man of God and equip him for every good work. Thus, Baptists distinguish themselves from Catholics and some Pentecostals. Catholics claim an authority in church tradition and in the Pope that is equal to Scripture. Often times, some Pentecostals may value prompting from the Holy Spirit as equal to the authority of Scripture. We believe, however, that Scripture alone is inerrant and infallible. We believe that the Holy Spirit will only prompt believers to be aligned with what God has already revealed in Scripture.

(2 Timothy 3:16–17 & 2 Timothy 3:16–17 )

#### **Church membership for believers only**

Church membership is when a person joins a church's congregation, making a covenant to agree on biblical doctrine, submit to the biblical leadership of pastors, and use abilities and gifts to biblically serve others in the church. Baptist belief is that the church membership should be made up of believers only. In Christ alone, believers have been made one and are a dwelling place for God. It is

easy to assume that a person cannot fulfill the role of a church member without first believing in Christ. Because of this belief, Baptist churches withhold church membership from unbelievers. Practically, some of the ways this belief applies is that we do not allow for children to become members until they become believers themselves. Also, each person who becomes a member of our church makes a public confession of his or her belief in Jesus. This distinctive helps ensure the purity of the church and allows the church to engage in church discipline if necessary.

(Ephesians 2:18–22, 1 Corinthians 5:6–7, 9–13)

### **Ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism**

The word “ordinance” derives from the idea that Jesus has ordained an activity in the church. Baptists believe that there are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptists call these activities ordinances as opposed to “sacraments.” Some Protestant denominations call these two ceremonies sacraments and their belief of them is that these ceremonies dispense the grace of God as people partake in them. Baptists, however, do not believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper dispense God's grace, but rather Baptists believe these ceremonies are a symbolic picture of God's grace already having been dispensed when a person believes in Christ. In seeking to avoid confusion between the terms and differences of belief about these ceremonies, Baptists have called these ceremonies ordinances.

Because Baptists conclude that these events are not dispensing God's grace but are rather symbolic of what has already taken place in the life of a believer, we believe that only believers get to partake of the ordinances. Baptism is an ordinance that a person does after he or she believes in Jesus. Likewise, partaking of the Lord's Supper is done after a person believes. In baptism, when a person is immersed fully in the water and comes out, it symbolizes that he or she has died with Christ and is raised to newness of life. In the

Lord's Supper, when a person eats the bread and drinks the cup, he or she proclaims remembrance that Christ has died for our sins. Practically, some of the ways these beliefs apply is that Baptists do not baptize infants. Baptism is a one-time event taking place after a person's conversion. The Lord's Supper is done repeatedly and is available only to those who believe in Christ.

(Romans 6:3–4 , 1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

### **Priesthood of believers**

The term priesthood of believers refers to the ability of each believer to approach God personally. Believers do not need a human mediator to go before them in order to pray or confess their sins. In the Old Testament, Israelites would have to go through a priest who would offer animal sacrifices on their behalf. But in the New Testament, Jesus has become our once-and-for-all sacrifice, replacing and fulfilling what the Old Testament sacrifices were meant to accomplish. In light of Christ, Baptists believe that each believer has direct access to God. John 14:18–20 shares that God has not left us as orphans but rather, just as Jesus was in the Father, we, too, get to be in Christ. By implication, if Jesus is in His Father, and we are in Christ, then we have direct access to the Father.

(John 14:18–20 , 1 Peter 2:5)

### **Cooperation of autonomous churches**

Baptists believe in the church at large and also local churches. We believe that the Bible speaks about all believers making up one church, and yet there is also a sense where the Bible speaks about local, individual churches. Baptists believe that each local church is autonomous or self-governing. Practically, this means that each church elects their own pastors, elders, or deacons and manages their resources as they see fit.

Meanwhile, while Baptist churches are autonomous, they also realize the importance of cooperation. There is a strong idea that we can do more together than if we were completely independent. Because of this, our church is part of the Southern Baptist Convention. By pooling our resources together and cooperating with other like-minded churches, Southern Baptists are able to send more missionaries and advance the kingdom of God in a greater way than if we were independent of each other.

(Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12 & 27, 2 Corinthians 8:1–4)