

What makes a Baptist?

There is no one distinctive Baptist belief! Although probably most people think of believer's baptism as the distinguishing feature of Baptists, they are not the only Christians to practice it. Nor are they the only Christians to believe in congregational church government, or the priesthood of all believers. It is the combination of these various beliefs, which make Baptists distinctive.

The Lordship of Christ

Jesus is Lord is the distinctive confession of faith. As individuals and as churches, Baptists seek to make Jesus Lord of every aspect of their lives.

Baptism for believers

On the basis of the New Testament, Baptists claim that baptism is for believers only. Baptism is only for those who are able to declare Jesus is Lord. As a symbol of Jesus claim on their lives, Baptists practice baptism by immersion, in which candidates symbolize their desire to die to self and to live for Christ. As individuals and as churches, Baptists seek to make Jesus Lord of every aspect of their lives. Baptists believe that the Bible shows us God's way for living. As radical believers, Baptists seek to root their lives in the revelation of God's truth.

The local church

Baptists understand the church as a community of believers who gather together for worship, witness and service. In the Baptist model of a believer's church every member has a role to play, whether in teaching, faith-sharing, evangelism, social action, pastoring, guiding, serving, prophetic insight, praying, healing, administration or hospitality.

The priesthood of all believers

In a Baptist church, an illustration of the priesthood of all believers is the church meeting. This is the occasion when member's come together to understand in prayer God's will for their life together. In Baptist churches the final authority rests not with the ministers or deacons but with the members gathered together in church meetings.

It is the church meeting which, for instance, appoints ministers, elders, deacons, and others who exercise various forms of leadership within a local congregation, agrees financial policy and determines mission strategy. Church meetings tend to take place mid-week, normally on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Local churches will usually call a minister to serve among them. The minister functions as a church member with special responsibilities in caring for the members and leading in the church's mission. Their authority is in the affirmation of the congregation acting under God's guidance. They are almost invariably recognized by the wider family of churches.

Interdependence

Baptist churches have always come together in regional, national and international associations for support and fellowship. On the basis of the New Testament, Baptists believe that churches should not live in isolation from one another, but rather be inter-dependent.

How are Baptists different from other Christians?

In other Christian traditions, church membership is not always clearly defined. In a Baptist context, baptism involves not only commitment to Christ, but also commitment to Christ's Church. For Baptists, church membership involves a commitment not only to work together to extend Christ's Kingdom, but also to love one another and stand by one another.

Who'd be a Baptist?

The response to this question is a resounding "We would!"; spoken around the world by forty million people who are members of Baptist churches.

Baptist churches are found in almost every country in the world. As part of the worldwide Christian church, Baptists form one of the largest families of faith, alongside other Trinitarian Christian traditions such as Anglicans and Methodists, etc.

For Baptists the concept of a family is important. The church is not so much a particular place or building, but rather a family of believers, committed to Christ, to one another and to the service of God.

In this Baptist family everybody is equal, for everybody has a part to play in the service of God. There is no hierarchy of bishops or priests exercising authority over their members. Equality of status, however, does not mean that all have the same role. Each local Baptist church appoints its own leadership team to have particular responsibility for preaching, teaching and pastoral care.

Baptists are grass-roots people, with a particular emphasis on the local church. These local churches are self-governing and self-supporting, ranging in size from twenty or so members to many hundreds. Although each Baptist church is an independent entity, Baptists nonetheless have always believed in associating with one another - and so the churches come together in regional, national and international spheres to promote and support the fellowship of Baptists everywhere.

The Baptist way of being the church is living together in community - in a family.

Declaration of Principle

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.
2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'.
3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelization of the world.