

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

These teachings maybe remembered by associating them with the letters that form the word **“BAPTISTS.”**

1. 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. 2

Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

2. 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. Thus the church is autonomous, or self-governing. No religious hierarchy outside the local church may dictate a church's beliefs or practices. Autonomy does not mean isolation. A Baptist church may fellowship with other churches around mutual interests and in an associational tie, but a Baptist church cannot be a “member” of any other body. Colossians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 19, 23.

3. Priesthood of the Believer- “Priest” is defined as “one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion, especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.” Every believer today is a priest of God and may enter into His presence in

prayer directly through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. No other mediator is needed between God and people. As priests, we can study God's Word, pray for others, offer spiritual worship to God. We all have equal access to God-whether we are a preacher or not. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 5:9, 10.

4. Two Ordinances- The local church should practice two ordinances: **(1) baptism of believers by immersion in water**, identifying the individual with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and **(2) the Lord's Supper, or communion**, commemorating His death for our sins. Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

5. Individual Soul Liberty- Every individual, whether a believer or an unbeliever, has the liberty to choose what he believes is right in the religious realm. No one should be forced to assent to any belief against his will. Baptist have always opposed religious persecution. However, this liberty does not exempt one from responsibility to the Word of God or from accountability to God Himself. Romans 14:5, 12; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Titus 1:9.

6. Saved, 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 can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 4:3.

7. Two Offices- 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, not as a hierarchy outside or over the local church. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Acts 20:17-38; Philippians 1:1.

8. 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. Christians in a free society can properly influence government towards righteousness, which is not the same as a denomination or group of churches controlling the government. Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 15:17-29.