

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

Baptist distinctives are those convictions that, taken as a whole, distinguish Baptists from other Christian groups/sects. While other Christian sects might embrace some of these positions, Baptists alone embrace all of them. Furthermore, Baptists believe these convictions are the proper Biblical positions in each of these areas; thus, they are convictions, not merely preferences. Although none of these distinctives are salvific, and they do not distinguish between genuine believers, they are issues of doctrine and church polity that if not held in common make the close fellowship of believers difficult, if not impossible. An acrostic based on the word B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S is often used to remember these distinctives.

B = Biblical Authority

The Bible is our sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. The Bible is our standard, against which all other truth claims are evaluated. Creeds, confessions, traditions, alleged continuing revelation, and even science (falsely so-called) are allowed no authority. Cf. Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17

A = Autonomy of the Local Church

The universal or invisible Church is comprised of all believers from the day of Pentecost to the Rapture. A local church is an assembly of believers with ordained leaders (see "T" below) that regularly meet in a specific geographical location. As a local body of believers, it is accountable directly to the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of the Church. There is no ecclesiastical authority higher than the local church. It is not accountable to any other local church, nor to a denominational hierarchy, nor to a state. Cf. Philemon 2; Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; Acts 5:29

P = Priesthood of All Believers

Since the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, all believers have the privileges and prerogatives of priests, having equal access to the Lord Jesus Christ as our High Priest, who alone acts as mediator between God and men. Cf. Revelation 1:6; Hebrews 4:15-16; 10:19-22; 1 Timothy 2:5

T = Two Offices

The local church has two (and only two) scripturally-ordained offices, that of pastor/elder/bishop/overseer and deacon. Cf. Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1,8; Titus 1:5

I = Individual Soul Liberty

Every person is free to believe whatever he/she wishes, according to personal convictions. Personal belief cannot and should not be mandated or compelled, neither by the Church nor the State; rather, religious liberty is to be extended to all persons. Cf. Acts 15:39; Romans 14:1-21

S = Separation of Church and State

Although the Church and State are both divine institutions, they have non-overlapping spheres of authority. The State has no authority over the Church, and vice-versa. The State has no authority to compel what God has forbidden, nor forbid what God has commanded. Cf. Acts 5:29

T = Two Ordinances

The local church recognizes and observes two (and only two) ordinances, that of believer's baptism by immersion in water and the Lord's supper. Both ordinances are symbolic and memorial in nature; neither are sacramental, in that they are not means of imparting grace to those who observe them. The baptism of a believer, upon his confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by immersion in water is a picture of his identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's supper is a memorial in which the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf is regularly remembered and honored. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:2,23-26; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 8:36-37; 19:1-5

S = Saved Church Membership

A local church is comprised of regenerate members only. Thus, membership requires a statement of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and baptism. Cf. Acts 8:36-37; 1 Timothy 3:15