

BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

B - BIBLICAL AUTHORITY (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20, 21)

As Baptists, we believe that the Bible, the word of God, the A.V. 1611 King James Bible is the foundation and supreme authority for all matters of doctrine and church polity (governance). In other words, the Holy Bible is the ultimate authority for faith and practice. 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.

A - AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH (Acts 9:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 14:33)

The local church is an independent body accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church. (Colossians 1:18). All human authority for the doctrine and practice of the local church lies within the local church itself. In other words, the local church is completely self-governing and autonomous, not subject to any external control, even choosing the level of external influence it will expose. 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.

P - PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER (1 Peter 2:5, 9; 1 Timothy 2:1; Hebrews 4:16; 13:15; Romans 12:1-2)

Every born-again believer has direct access to the throne of God. Therefore, since every child of God shares in the priesthood of the believers, all have the same right to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ's name. This is first and foremost, a matter of responsibility and servanthood, not privilege and license. We need no priests; we are not priests in the Old Testament sense; we are responsible to no priests, but we are responsible to function as priests in a sense. God holds each individual for his own standards, behavior, belief, and service.

T - TWO ORDINANCES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:36-39 & 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Baptists recognize and practice two local church ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We practice only believer's baptism by immersion, which is the only acceptable mode for baptism because it alone preserves the picture of saving truth. No other form pictures Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-5). We believe that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic ordinance, picturing Christ's body broken for our sins and His blood shed for our redemption. It is not a saving ordinance, but it helps us remember His death and inspires us while looking forward to His coming. It is to be observed by regenerate, obedient believers.

I - INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY (Romans 14:12; Acts 17:28; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 16:13-17)

Soul Freedom or "individual soul liberty" basically is the God-given freedom and the ability, of persons to know and respond to God's will. As Baptists, we believe that human beings are not puppets or machines but instead have free will. Every individual Christian has the liberty to believe, right or wrong, as his/her own conscience dictates. While we seek to persuade men to choose the right, a person must not be forced into compliance, realizing that it is not always the larger group who holds the truth when, in fact, our heritage as Baptists has demonstrated the worth of every individual's belief.

S - SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER (Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 3:23; Ephesians 4:30; 5:30-32)

The Scripture is clear that once a person becomes a Christian, the believer's salvation is secure. Our faith rests not on the feelings of man but on the facts found in the Bible. Assurance of our salvation is a feeling. The security of the believer is a fact. We are secure whether we feel safe or not. When we speak of the eternal security of the believer, we mean that once the Spirit of God has regenerated a sinner, once he has received a new life and a new nature, has been made partaker of the divine nature, once he has been justified from every charge before the throne of God, it is absolutely impossible that that man should ever again be a lost soul.

T - TWO CHURCH OFFICES (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:28)

The Bible mandates only two offices in the church--pastor and deacon. The terms--"bishop," "elder," "overseer," or "pastor" all refer to the same office, while "deacon" is its own office unto itself with its own requirements. An elder is an ordained minister who may be a pastor or a deacon. All pastors are elders, but a deacon does not have to be an elder. A pastor or elder is an ordained occupation, but a deacon does not have to be ordained. Both offices are not a hierarchy over the local church. A denomination or committee did not create them.

S - SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE (Romans 13:1-3; Matthew 22:21; 1 Peter 2:13-16)

Separation of church and state implies that there should be no essential union between organized religion and human government. Human government should not seek to control the internal affairs of organized religion or of individual religious beliefs or practices. Also, no denomination or organized religion should control human government. God established both the church and the civil government, and He gave each its own distinct sphere of operation. The government's purposes and the church's purposes are outlined in scripture. Neither should control the other nor should there be an alliance between the two. Christians in a free society can properly influence the government toward righteousness, which is not the same as a denomination or group of churches controlling the government.