

# HOW DOES WHAT WE BELIEVE AFFECT OUR STRUCTURES?

As can be seen from the different Baptist Principles described above, a Baptist Church is very different from other church groups. Some of the many implications on church practices that flow out of the Baptist Principles are:

## 1. A thorough understanding of what the Bible teaches regarding the Church.

Baptists all have the responsibility to ensure that what is being practiced in the church is something which is consistent with the truths contained in the Bible. Every Baptist must study the bible to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves. Each believer has the Holy Spirit living within them who will lead them into the truth of the Scripture. Leaders have the task of ensuring that members are being taught to truths of Scripture, and members have the responsibility of making sure that the leaders are keeping to the truths of Scripture.

## 2. The autonomy of the Local Church.

By this we mean that every Baptist church is free from the control of any outside body. Every Baptist church is independent from other Baptist Churches and from any Baptist Structure, except in areas where they have voluntarily associated themselves.

## 3. The importance of the role of Spiritual Church Members.

Church members must be Christians. If Jesus is the head of the church, the members of the church must ensure that every member has a personal relationship with the head of the church.

**THE PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP OF A BAPTIST CHURCH** are that a member can

- vote to have suitable people in the leadership of the Church;
- be part of the process of making decisions relating to the running and functioning of the Church;
- serve in the life of the Church;
- can be a good witness to their personal experience of being saved.
- enjoy the benefits of pastoral care.

**THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS OF A BAPTIST CHURCH ARE**

- To understand what the Church is;
- To share regularly in the worship in the Church;
- To regularly attend the Communion Services;
- To fulfil their ministry of prayer in the life of the Church;
- To do their share in the work of the Church according to their gifts and opportunities;
- To attend the quarterly and Annual General Meetings and thus help in proper church governance;
- To take their share in contributing to the finances of the church according as God has prospered them.
- To be a witness for Christ in the world.

## 4. The role of servant leadership.

God has gifted the church with certain individuals who are to be the church leaders. The bible talks of two groups of leaders, Elders and Deacons. The role of the Elder is to be primarily Spiritual Leadership and the role of the Deacon is to be primarily Practical Leadership. While we call these people the leaders of the church they have a delegated leadership. In a Baptist Church, their leadership is regulated by the Baptist Principles. A true leader is one who serves the church under the Lordship of Jesus, guided by the Authority of Scripture and helping the church achieve the aims and goals decided through the Congregational Principle.

# WHAT MAKES BAPTIST DIFFERENT?

Baptists are a group of Christians who believe in a certain set of principles which when held together make us different from other Christians. While most of what we believe is the same as other Christians (e.g. the Trinity, salvation by faith) some of the things we believe make us different from other Christians. Baptists form the largest group of Protestant Christians in the world, about 100 million or 12% of Protestant Christians.

## EVANGELICAL STATEMENT OF FAITH:

What the church believes that most Protestant Churches believe:

1. In the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in their original writings as fully inspired of God and accept them as the final authority for faith and life.
2. In one God eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. That Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary and is true God and true man.
4. That God created man in His own image, that man sinned and thereby incurred the penalty of death, physical and spiritual, and that all human beings inherit a sinful nature, which issues (in the case of those who have reached moral responsibility) in actual transgression involving personal guilt.
5. That the Lord Jesus died for our sins, a substitutionary sacrifice, according to the Scriptures and that all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of His shed blood.
6. In the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension into Heaven and His present life as our High Priest and Advocate.
7. In the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. That all who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are born again of the Holy Spirit and become children of God.
9. In the resurrection both of the just and the unjust, the eternal blessedness of the redeemed and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected the offer of salvation.
10. That the one true Church is the whole company of those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that the local Church on earth should take its character from this conception of the Church spiritual and therefore that the new birth and personal confession of Christ are essentials of Church membership.
11. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ appointed two ordinances – Baptism and the Lord's Supper – to be observed as acts of obedience and as perpetual witnesses to the cardinal facts of the Christian faith; that Baptism is the immersion of the believer in water as a confession of identification with Christ in burial and resurrection and that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of bread and wine as symbolic of the Saviour's broken body and shed blood, in remembrance of His sacrificial death until He comes.
12. That God has ordained marriage as a heterosexual relationship between a natural man and a natural woman.

# WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE? – Baptist Principles

## 1. The Direct Lordship of Jesus Christ.

By this we understand that Christ exercises His authority over the believer and the local Church directly, without delegating it to another. The implication of this principle is that Jesus is the head of the church. Everything we do in the church is to be guided by Jesus himself. Because Jesus is the head, and there can only be one head, the structure and governance of the church is directly influenced by this principle.

1. **Christ is Lord over all because he is God.** - The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. God rules over all things by his providential control (Ps. 103:19).
2. **Christ claims authority over both believers and unbelievers. - All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Christ].** (Matt. 28:18)
3. **Christ is worthy of the title Lord.** - Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world and as such is worthy of all praise and honour as Lord: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).
4. **The message "JESUS IS LORD" is the GOSPEL.** In the account of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius found in Acts 10, Peter says the following as part of his message to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: *v36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. He tells all present that JESUS is the "Good News", or GOSPEL, and that he is "LORD OF ALL".*
5. **The bible speaks OF HIS LORDSHIP PROPHETICALLY.**
  - 5.1. **DAVID prophesied about the LORDSHIP OF JESUS.** *Mark 12:35-37 – "While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? v36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' v37 David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.*
  - 5.2. **The ANGELS prophesied about the LORDSHIP OF JESUS.** *Luke 2:8-12 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. v9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. v10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. v11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. v12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*
6. **JESUS IS LORD over the CREATION** - *Colossians 1:16 For by him(JESUS) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. All creation is under The Lordship of Christ*
7. **JESUS IS LORD OVER THE LAW.** *Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. v9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work, v10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. WE READ LATER in: Matthew 12:8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.", Mark 2:28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." and Luke 6:5 Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*

## 2. The WORD OF GOD as the Final Authority in all matters of Faith and Practice.

Because Jesus Christ is Lord of the church, the best way to be guided by Him is to follow the instructions He gave us in the Bible. Therefore, the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. As Baptists we seek to discover how to administer the church, first from the Bible then from the traditions handed down to us from our predecessors.

*2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, v15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. v16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, v17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

## 3. A Regenerate Church Membership.

Membership of a Baptist Church is reserved only for people who are born again believers. By this we mean persons who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. Baptists believe that the CHURCH is the whole company of those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The local church, being a manifestation of the universal church, is a community of believers in a particular place where the Word of God is preached and observed. Because of our understanding of what the local church is, Baptists believe that the local church is fully autonomous and remains so notwithstanding any responsibilities it may accept by voluntary association.

*Acts 2:40-41 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." v41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

*Acts 2:46-47 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, v47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

**BELIEVER'S BAPTISM** is used by many churches as the outward sign of an inwardly regenerated life. The act of **BELIEVER'S BAPTISM** which is seen as an act of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and a sign of personal repentance, faith and regeneration, consists of the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, some churches accept the simple testimony of faith by believers as the outward sign of an inwardly regenerated life. Baptist churches that do not require that a person be baptised in order to qualify for church membership are called Open Baptist Churches.

## 4. The CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Baptists believe that each member has the privilege and responsibility to use his/her gifts and abilities to participate fully in the life of the Church. We recognise that God gifts His Church with Overseers (who are called Pastors or Elders) whose primary function is to lead in a spirit of servanthood, to equip and provide spiritual oversight, and Deacons whose primary function is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the Church. This principle further recognises that each member should participate in the appointment of the church's leaders, and that a constituted church meeting, subject to the direct Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, is the highest court of authority for the local Church.

## 5. The PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Baptists believe that each Christian has direct access to God through Christ our High Priest, and shares with Him in His work of reconciliation. This involves intercession, worship, faithful service and bearing witness to Jesus Christ, even to the end of the earth.

## 6. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Baptists believe that no individual should be coerced either by the State or by any secular, ecclesiastical or religious group in matters of faith. The right of private conscience is to be respected. For each believer this means the right to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and to act in the light of his conscience.

## 7. The SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Baptists believe that, in the providence of God, the two differ in their respective natures and functions. The Church is not to be identified with the State nor is it, in its faith or practice, to be directed or controlled by the State. The State is responsible for administering justice, ensuring an orderly community, and promoting the welfare of its citizens. The Church is responsible for preaching the Gospel and for demonstrating and making known God's will and care for all mankind.