

Distinctive #1:

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY:

The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice.

I. HOW DO BAPTISTS DIFFER FROM OTHER CHURCHES REGARDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY?

- A. A mutual and common adherence to the whole Bible and its authority is the cohesive force among Baptists.*
- B. Other churches' policies:*
 - 1. LUTHERANS turn to Martin Luther as their leader. Their clergy must sign the Augsburg Confession to be ordained.
 - 2. METHODISTS follow their founder, John Wesley. They must agree to the Methodist Discipline.
 - 3. PRESBYTERIANS follow John Calvin and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith.
 - 4. THE REFORMED CHURCH follows Huldreich Zwingli and its confession of faith.
 - 5. EPISCOPALIANS' official doctrine is the Thirty-Nine Articles.

II. HOW DO THE CHURCHES APPROACH THE BIBLE?

- A. Rationalistic Approach – they would not disregard the Bible altogether but would deny certain parts of it and reject the supernaturalism of it.*
- B. Mystical Approach – “personal experience” serves in interpreting the Bible.*
- C. Ecclesiastical Approach – the church is the final authority, and interpretation of the Bible is in the hands of the church.*
- D. Baptist Approach – The soul of man bows to the authority of the Bible, making reason, the church, and personal experience all subordinate to it.*

III. APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

Historically, there have been two basic approaches to the interpretation of Scriptures.

A. The Allegorical Method of Interpretation

“Spiritualizers believe that since the Bible is spiritual in nature, the interpreter should penetrate behind the speech to the living Spirit. They believe that the written words of Scripture simply cannot contain all that is in the Spirit’s mind, and that to interpret the words literally is to miss the true meanings and the mystical, hidden senses.

B. The Literal Method of Interpretation

“When we interpret the Bible literally, we interpret its words and sentences in their natural, normal, and usual sense. This is the normal way in which we think, talk, and write, and this is the way God’s Word is to be understood.” Literal interpretation does not rule out the use of figures of speech, such as, symbols, metaphors, similes, and so on.

IV. APPROACHES TO REVELATION

- A. Baptist Approach – the Bible is the written revelation of God and is complete.*
- B. Catholic Approach – the Bible is part of the revelation of God and is incomplete.*

Quotes from The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism, by John A. Hardon. Question 59. – Where do we find the truths revealed by God? Answer – We find the truths revealed by God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Question 60. – How does Sacred Scripture compare with Sacred Tradition? Answer – Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are the inspired Word of God, and both are forms of divine revelation. Sacred Scripture is divinely inspired writing; whereas, Sacred Tradition is the unwritten word of inspired persons.

Question 90. – Who is authorized to interpret Scripture and Tradition? Answer - The Church's hierarchy, that is, the bishops under the pope, or the pope alone, is divinely authorized to decisively interpret Scripture and Tradition.

Distinctive #2

AUTONOMY OF EACH LOCAL CHURCH:

Each local church is sovereign and cannot be controlled by any board, hierarchical system, or other church. Autonomy means: independent, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.

I. DEFINITION OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH.

A. *Biblical definition*

A scriptural independent New Testament church is an organized band of baptized believers practicing the New Testament ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper and actively engaged in carrying out the great commission.

B. *Modern usage*

The word "church" is used as follows:

1. A local congregation of Baptist believers carrying out the great commission and practicing the ordinances.
2. A denominational group of congregations.
3. A universal body (the invisible church) of professed Christians.
4. A building used for specific religious worship.

NOTE: Uses 2, 3, and 4 have no Biblical authority.

II. THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE LOCAL NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The New Testament church was independent with regards to:

- A. Self-judgment of its own membership (1 Corinthians 5:13; Matthew 18:15-17).*
- B. Self-election of its own officers (Acts 6:5).*
- C. Self-determination of its relations with other local churches (Acts 15:1-30).*
- D. Self-judgment of its own internal affairs (1 Corinthians 11:17-24).*
- E. Self-ownership of its own possessions (Acts 5:1f).*

III. THE FOUNDATION FOR INDEPENDENCE

The autonomy of the local church is built on two New Testament principles:

- A. The competence of the individual to know God's will*

We must accept the fact that God may direct His children individually.

1. The Bible is the authority for each person (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
2. A responsibility to obey implies a knowledge of His will in life (Acts 5:29).
3. The dedicated Christian will know God's will (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 5:17-18).
4. The Holy Spirit is the teacher of each (John 14:26).

5. All believers are equal before God (Gal. 3:28).
- B. The responsibility of the church to carry out God's will is based on the foundation that its members know God's will.***
1. Christ instructed the church to act as a whole (Matthew 18:15-17).
 2. The early church acted as a body (Acts 13:1-3; 15:23-26).
 3. The responsibilities of the church and the state are separate (Matthew 22:17-21).

IV. THE AUTONOMOUS PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

- A. The local church is neither subject to nor part of any other organization within its own constituency.***
1. It is composed of individuals not organizations (Acts 2:41-42).
 2. Organizations within the church exist for fellowship and do not control the local church.
- B. The local church is not subject to any ecclesiastical powers without its own constituency.***
1. It has no denomination, convention, or other hierarchical body in authority over it.
 2. The final governing authority in the autonomous Baptist church is the church itself directed by its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- C. The local church is not subject to the state nor the state to the church (Matthew 22:17-21).***

Forms of church governments:

- **Papal** – a hierarchical system of totalitarian authority.
- **Episcopalian** – this word means bishop; the authority of church governments rests with the bishops. This board of men rule the churches under them.
- **Presbyterian** – this word means elder. Elders are chosen to rule the church denomination as well as the churches.
- **Congregational** – the final authority remains with the people. Certain responsibilities are delegated to individuals, but it is the members themselves who own the property, call their pastors, and control the church. They answer to no outside board and recognize only Jesus Christ as their Head. Baptists have always believed the Scriptures teach this form of government.

CONCLUSION:

Baptist churches are not part of a larger body. They may fellowship with one another to accomplish missionary work that one could not accomplish alone, but each church remains a separate entity. Their efforts together may place a moral obligation on each other but neither a legal nor organizational obligation. They remain independent.

TWO LESSONS:

- The church of the New Testament was a church that owned, controlled, and perpetuated itself.
- There is no New Testament instance of a local body of believers being more loyal to some outside and external association, institution, or convention of Churches than they were to their own local church.

Distinctive #3

PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS:

Every “born-again” believer may pray directly to God through Jesus Christ, the High Priest, without a human intercessor.

The Old Testament priests were the only ones who dared enter the presence of God. They were ceremonially cleansed and solely acceptable to stand before the Holy God. Today, believers *are* “*washed . . . from . . . sins in His own blood*” (Rev. 1:5-6). We are cleansed and able to approach God through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).

I. THE MEANING OF PRAYER

- A. Prayer is communion with God.*
- B. Prayer is worship by which believers fellowship with and petition God.*
- C. Prayer can be both public (Acts 4:24-31) and private (Matthew 6:6).*

II. THE BASIS OF PRAYER

- A. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between man and God the Father (1 Timothy 2:5).*
 - 1. This is the significance of the veil of the Temple renting in twain at the crucifixion of Christ (Matthew 27:51).

2. Since then, no human saint or “priest” is needed to assist you in approaching the Father.
- B. *Jesus Christ is not only the believer’s Savior and Lord, but also his High Priest.***
1. The believer’s privilege of immediate access to God (Hebrews 4:14-16).
 2. Every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5,9; Rev. 1:5-6).

III. THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER

- A. *For personal peace (Philippians 4:6-7)***
- B. *For Christian service (Ephesians 6:18-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)***
- “Prayer is the nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.”
- C. *For God’s glory (2 Corinthians 4:15; Heb. 13:15)***
- D. *A simple acrostic to remember the components of prayer is ACTS.***
- A** doration -- praise and worship of the soul to God (Ps. 95:6)
- C** onfession -- repentance from every known sin (Ps. 32:5)
- T** hanksgiving -- (Philippians 4:6)
- S** upplication -- intercession, requests, petitions, desires (1 Timothy 2:1)

IV. SOME HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

- A. *Sin (Psalm 66:18)***

- B. Unbelief (James 1:6-7)***
- C. An unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:25)***
- D. Asking amiss (James 4:3)***
- E. Spousal conflict (1 Peter 3:7)***

CONCLUSION: What are our responsibilities as New Testament priests?

- To offer up prayer and praise to God (1 Peter 2:5)
- To declare the praises of God before others (1 Peter 2:9)
The word “praises” could be translated “eminent qualities,” “excellencies,” or “virtues.” As believer-priests, we should live so that our heavenly Father’s qualities are evident in our lives. We are to serve as witnesses of the glory and grace of God, who called us “out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). This is witnessing.

Distinctive #4

TWO ORDINANCES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH:

There are two ordinances of the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

What is an ordinance? “An outward rite appointed by Christ to be administered in the church as a visible sign of the saving truth of the Christian faith.”

I. BAPTISM

A. *The Meaning of Baptism*

New believers identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection through baptism (Romans 6:3-5). It is an outward symbol of an inward reality. That reality is conversion. The believer identifies with the Lord, showing he has died with Christ, been buried with Christ, and has been raised to walk a new life. Saving faith always precedes baptism (Acts 8:12, 35-39; 9:17-18; 10:44-45; 16:30-34).

B. *The Mode of Baptism*

Does it matter how a believer is baptized? Baptists believe the answer is “yes.” Baptism by immersion is the only correct way. Why?

1. The word “baptize” means immerse.
Transliterated word.
2. Only immersion correctly pictures that which baptism symbolizes - death, burial, and resurrection. Sprinkling and pouring cannot symbolize this.

3. The context of Scripture relating to baptism demands immersion. Large amounts of water are mentioned. (Matthew 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:39).
4. History records the practice of immersion was used by the early church until about AD 250.

II. THE LORD’S SUPPER

“Holy Communion is one of the sacraments instituted by Christ Himself.” The dictionary states “sacrament” symbolizes or confers grace. Baptists do not believe baptism and the Lord’s Supper confer grace, they are not sacraments, but ordinances.

A. Various views of the Lord’s Supper

1. The Lutherans believe in “consubstantiation” in which they claim the “real presence” of the Lord in a special way.
2. The Roman Catholic view is called “transubstantiation” and is a claim by the Roman Catholics that their priests “transform” the bread and cup into the literal body and blood of Christ. This was set forth in the Council of Trent.
3. The Baptist position concerning the Lord’s Supper is that it is a memorial table, picturing the body and blood of Christ and serving only as a reminder of His sacrifice.
 - a. The ordinances were instituted by Christ on the eve of His death (Matthew 26:26-30).
 - b. Purpose – memorial service (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).
 - c. Two-fold aspect:

- (1) Worship (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).
- (2) Examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32).

B. Who should participate in the Lord's Supper?

Great confusion exists here; let us allow the Bible to speak for itself. The pattern of Acts 2:41-42 is as follows: The early Christians: believed, were baptized, belonged to the church, and then broke bread. Acts 18:8 reveals how the Corinthians believed the gospel and were baptized. The Corinthian church was a baptized body of believers to whom Paul wrote “. . . keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2). The Lord's Supper was given to a local church and not to individuals. It is not to be administered to individuals (e.g., among Christian businessmen organizations, at camps, in theological schools, and so on).

CONCLUSION:

The ordinances were given by Christ (commanded by Christ, given to Christians at large, and were understood and obeyed by the apostolic churches). They are not sacraments. They neither give salvation, help salvation, nor keep salvation. We observe the ordinances due to commandment (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

Distinctive #5

INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY:

Each individual has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. He can interpret the Scripture and worship God as he believes the Bible teaches.

I. THE INDIVIDUALITY OF ALL PEOPLE

A. *People were created as individuals.*

1. There are no two alike.
2. We are not created as robots, but with self-consciousness and self-determination.
3. Each is created with an intellect, emotions, and will.
4. Freedom of choice was given in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6-7).

B. *People have individual wills.*

1. We can choose to accept Christ as Savior.
2. We can choose to serve Him or disobey.
3. We have a right to disagree with others (Romans 14:5).

C. *God directly instructs individuals.*

1. The Holy Spirit teaches people.
1 John 2:27 “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” The Holy Spirit does the anointing (v.20).

2. The Holy Spirit teaching you does not negate the need for human teachers (Ephesians 4:11-14).

D. God deals with people as individuals.

1. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).
2. God looks on all as sinners and receives anyone who turns to Him regardless of race, sex, color, social standing, intelligence, etc.
3. You are individually responsible before God for your salvation (John 1:11-13).
 - a. “*Not of blood*” that is, not by inheritance
 - b. “*Nor of the will of the flesh,*” that is not by individual effort
 - c. “*Nor of the will of man,*” that is, not by institutional decree
 - d. “*But as many as received Him . . .*”
4. Each person has “individual soul liberty” to choose his own church, determine his own fate, and decide what the Bible teaches (or deny the Bible altogether).

E. God judges people as individuals.

With self-determination comes responsibility for what we determine. God will judge.

1. Great White Throne
Revelation 20:13 “ . . . and they were judged every man according to their works. ”
2. Bema
2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body . . . ”
Romans 14:12 “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

II. AN APPLICATION OF THIS DISTINCTIVE

This belief leads Baptists to the following:

- A. *Baptists reject the doctrine of infant baptism.***
Individuals must decide for themselves. It cannot be forced upon them.
- B. *Baptists do not practice infant church membership.***
Members must be saved, scripturally baptized, and request church membership.
- C. *Baptists believe in religious liberty.***
Each individual has the legal right to worship as he may see fit, and no nation has a right to establish a “state church” or make or enforce a law compelling any one to support any ecclesiastical institution.

CONCLUSION:

We believe that neither civil nor ecclesiastical councils can enter the realm of the soul or dictate in matters of conscience. We cannot force our views upon another. Witness – YES! Coerce – NEVER!

Distinctive #6

SEPARATION:

We believe in separation in three realms: political separation, ecclesiastical separation, and personal separation.

I. POLITICAL SEPARATION: SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Every believer should respect, sustain, and obey civil authority, that is, as long as it does not violate his conscience or Scriptural convictions.

A. God established civil government.

1. God's three institutions are the home (Genesis 2:20-25), the church (Matthew 16:18), and civil government (Genesis 9).
2. Man corrupted himself in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had children (Genesis 4-5). With no social laws, every man followed his own conscience. Wickedness prevailed. God destroyed man with a flood (Genesis 7). God established a covenant with Noah that included civil government; its basis was the ultimate human retribution of capital punishment (Genesis 9:5-6). This Scriptural law has never been rescinded.

B. The Christian's duty to government

1. Pray for it (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
2. Submit to it (Titus 3:1).
3. Support it (Romans 13:1-7).
4. Honor it (1 Peter 2:17).

C. *The church's relationship to government*

There are four positions held in the religious world.

1. The church is ABOVE the state, a theory held by the Romanists who hold that their ecclesiastical head is the vicar of Christ on earth.
2. The church is ALONGSIDE the state, a theory held by state churches of various countries.
3. The church is UNDER the state, a theory held by totalitarian governments.
4. The church is SEPARATE from the state, the position championed by Baptists everywhere and held by those governments that have written religious liberty into their fundamental laws.

II. ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

We believe that, as a church, we must separate from apostasy (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; Romans 16:17; 2 John 10-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).

III. PERSONAL SEPARATION

We believe that a Christian is to be personally separated FROM the world UNTO Christ.

- A. *FROM the world (Romans 12:1-2).*
- B. *UNTO God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).*
- C. *How do you take the question out of questionable activities?*
 1. LOOK UP (Colossians 3:2)

- a. Does it violate a direct command from God?
 - b. Will God be glorified through my participation in it?
 - c. 1 Corinthians 10:31 “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”
2. LOOK IN (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- a. What effect will it have on me?
 - b. On my body? Smoking, drinking, drugs, steroids, etc.
 - c. On my mind? What kind of thoughts will result from my participation in it? TV, music, books, magazines, etc. (Philippians 4:8)
 - d. How would I feel if Christ returned while I was involved in this activity?
 - e. Would I want everyone to know that I did it? (John 3:20)
 - f. Can I pray and thank God for it?
3. LOOK OUT (1 Corinthians 8:12)
- a. What effect will it have on the unsaved?
 - b. On the saved? It is a sin to cause a brother to stumble.

CONCLUSION:

The Christian has the privilege of living a holy life for Christ. This is also our duty. It is far from boring; and it is not restrictive. It is a joy to please our great God and Savior. Make sure the activities you are involved in and the habits you have are ones that will glorify God. A good motto for a Christian to have is: *1 Corinthians 10:31* “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Distinctive #7

TWO OFFICERS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH:

The offices of pastors and deacons are the only Bible-recognized offices in the local church. The congregation chooses both.

I. THE OFFICE OF PASTOR

A. *His Titles*

1. Pastor – one who feeds and nourishes
2. Bishop – one who administrates or oversees
3. Elder – one who leads, counsels

NOTE: All three titles refer to the same office. (1 Peter 5:1-4); Titus 1:5-7).

B. *His Qualifications (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7)*

1. Blameless, that is, above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2)
2. The husband of one wife, that is, fully devoted to one woman (1 Timothy 3:2)
3. Vigilant, that is, discreet (1 Timothy 3:2)
4. Sober, that is, self-controlled (1 Timothy 3:2)
5. Of good behavior, that is, orderly in conduct (1 Timothy 3:2)
6. Given to hospitality, that is, fond of guests (1 Timothy 3:2)
7. Apt to teach, that is, teaching ability (1 Timothy 3:2)
8. Not given to wine, that is, not a drinker (1 Timothy 3:3)

9. No striker, that is, he doesn't settle disputes by fighting, rather he reacts calmly (1 Timothy 3:3)
10. Not greedy of filthy lucre, that is, not greedy of dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:3)
11. Patient (1 Timothy 3:3)
12. Not a brawler, that is, reluctant to fight (1 Timothy 3:3)
13. Not covetous, that is, free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:3)
14. One who rules his house well, that is, manages his house excellently (1 Timothy 3:4)
15. Having obedient children (1 Timothy 3:4)
16. Not a novice, that is, not a new convert (1 Timothy 3:6)
17. Having a good report among unbelievers, that is, a good reputation among those outside the church (1 Timothy 3:7)

C. *His Responsibilities*

1. Preach (Acts 20:28; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 5:1-5)
2. Teach (Ephesians 4:11)
3. Rule (1 Timothy 5:17; Heb. 13:17)
4. Work (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)
5. Pray (Acts 6:4; James 5:14-16)
6. Train (Ephesians 4:12)
7. Evangelize (2 Timothy 4:5)

II. THE OFFICE OF DEACON

A. *His Qualifications (Acts 6:2-7); 1 Timothy 3:8-13*

1. Of honest report (Acts 6:3)

2. Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3)
3. Filled with wisdom (Acts 6:3)
4. Grave character, that is, a man of dignity (1 Timothy 3:8)
5. Not double-tongued, that is, not have hypocritical speech but rather speech characterized by integrity, consistency, and honesty (1 Timothy 3:8)
6. Not given to much wine (1 Timothy 3:8)
7. Not greedy of filthy lucre, that is, dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:8)
8. Possessing faith with a pure conscience (1 Timothy 3:9)
9. Tested and proved (1 Timothy 3:10)
10. Blameless, that is, beyond reproach (1 Timothy 3:10)
11. The husbands of one wife, that is, fully devoted to one woman (1 Timothy 3:12)
12. Ruling the children and homes well (1 Timothy 3:12)

B. His Responsibilities

The word “deacon” means servant. The office is a serving office. A deacon is to assist the pastors in serving the church.

Discipler Report Back

K

I met with _____ on
____ / ____ / ____ and reviewed the contents of this
lesson. My comments regarding the discipleship time
together are:

*(make comments only if they are needed to help the Pastoral
staff assist you in ministering to this person)*

Discipler's Name _____

*Please drop this off at the Hospitality Booth in the
church foyer on the first service after conducting
this session. This will help the Pastoral staff stay
current with the status of our new converts and
new members being disciplined.*

Thank You