

BEING BAPTIST

DISTINCTIVES THAT MATTER

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS

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Being Baptist: Distinctives That Matter

Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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How to Use *Truth for Living*

Truth for Living:

A comprehensive, trustworthy curriculum that presents the truth of God's Word without compromise. The curriculum plan includes through-the-Bible courses as well as topical courses. Perfect for adults who want a guide in using all of God's Word as God intended.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- **The FOCUS** of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- **The GOAL** of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Truth for Living* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the study. LEARNING THE DISTINCTIVES is the heart of the lesson. A series of study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical texts and information related to the distinctives. BEING BAPTIST helps the learner understand how to respond to the Biblical truths that define Baptists.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the study than you can probably cover in one class session.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. Most of the questions in the leader's guide are picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are in italics immediately following the questions.

Other Resources

The resource CD has PowerPoint presentations for every lesson. They incorporate the resource visuals and provide a good way for teachers and learners to track the lesson. The resource CD also has Prezi presentations for some of the lessons. Instructions for using the Prezi presentations are on the CD. Other resources include lesson outlines and verse cards.

Preface

What makes a Baptist distinct? Do those distinctions really matter? Does calling oneself a Baptist mean anything today?

Questions like these are answered in this study about *Being Baptist*. It will help learners understand that the distinctions really do matter because they reflect a careful handling of the Scriptures. The distinctives are a by-product of *Biblical* interpretation. They are a result of a high view of Scripture and a belief that the Scriptures are sufficient for faith and practice.

The first three lessons are of particular importance. They set the table for the rest of the course. They present the rules for interpreting Scriptures that are employed throughout the study. And they make the case for using the New Testament as the guide for the church's faith and practice.

The result of this course should be learners who are Baptist by conviction rather than by convenience. They should understand that "Baptist" is more than a name with a bunch of stereotypes attached to it. They should wear the name "Baptist" as a badge, realizing what it stands for.

To get the most out of this course, consider purchasing Dr. Kevin Bauder's book called *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order*. The commentary in this study follows Bauder's book closely. However, there are important sections of Bauder's book that are not included in this course because of space restraints. Some of those sections are referred to in the margins of this study. You will greatly benefit from having Bauder's expanded treatment of the Baptist distinctives. Bauder's book is available from RegularBaptistPress.org.

Pray that your learners would gain a clear understanding of what being Baptist is all about. Pray most of all that they would see the importance of handling Scripture in the way God intended.



Baptist Distinctives Matter



Topic

Baptist distinctives

Theme

The Baptist distinctives as a whole separate Baptists from all other groups.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will know the Baptist distinctives and will contribute to planning ways to teach them in his church.

Materials

- Resources 1–4

Scripture Focus

Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; John 1:1; Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20

Summary

Most Baptists don't know what the Baptist distinctives are or what function they serve. This lesson covers the function of Baptist distinctives and gives an overview of each one. The lesson ends with a challenge to the church to effectively teach the Baptist distinctives on an ongoing basis.

Outline

I. Denominational Labels

- Value
- Meaning

II. The Baptist Distinctives

- Functions
 - The distinctives set Baptists apart
 - The distinctives work as a bundle
- Descriptions
 - Absolute authority of the New Testament
 - Believer baptism
 - Pure church membership
 - Individual Christian responsibility
 - Congregational government
 - Separation of church and state

III. Personal Convictions

Memory Verse

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

GETTING STARTED

Five Things in Common

Have the learners pair up with someone they are not related to. Give the pairs four minutes to come up with five things they have in common.

ASK: What commonalities surprised you?

ASK: Which ones might other people consider unusual?

ASK: What did you find out that you did not have in common with your partner?

We could find things we all share in common if we thought about it long enough. That we are all Baptists means we share beliefs that make up the Baptist distinctions.

We are going to explore what *Being Baptist* is all about. We will find that our common beliefs are important to know and embrace. The distinctives that set us apart are *Distinctives That Matter*.

Five Elimination Questions

Have all the learners stand or raise their hands if they are unable to stand. Read the five elimination statements one at a time. When a learner doesn't agree with a statement, he must sit down or lower his hand.

- I believe coffee is a necessary part of a day.
- I believe chocolate should be a food group.
- I believe grocery shopping is a form of torture.
- I believe early morning is the best time to get work done.
- I believe mountain vacations are better than beach vacations.

Some people should still be standing after the last statement. Have that group of people come to the front of the classroom.

ASK: What would those of you who are seated call this group of people based on their common beliefs? Let several learners give suggestions. Some of them might be humorous. That's fine. Have the learners who are seated agree on a name for the group with the common beliefs.

ASK: How do those of you in the group feel about the name you've been given?

Have the learners return to their seats.

All of us are like this group in that we have common beliefs that other people recognized. Those other people named us according to those common beliefs. That name is "Baptist."

We are going to explore what *Being Baptist* is all about. We will find that our common beliefs are important to know and embrace. The distinctives that set us apart are *Distinctives That Matter*.

LEARNING THE DISTINCTIVES

I. Denominational Labels

A. Value

Denominational labels are going out of style. That is unfortunate. Those labels are a kind of shorthand. They stand for sets of ideas. When people say, “I am a Lutheran,” or “I am a Presbyterian,” they are not just identifying themselves with an organization or a social group. They are identifying themselves with a combination of convictions. Each of the major denominational labels stands for a set of ideas. At one time, Christians thought these ideas were so important that they deserved labels. They used the labels to distinguish one set of convictions from another. They wore their labels as the badge that identified their distinctive beliefs.

ASK: Do you consider your denominational label as a badge? Explain. (Q3)

Unlike some denominations, Baptists did not choose their own label. Their opponents gave it to them as shorthand for the doctrines and practices that distinguished Baptists from other Christians. Because Baptists were strongly committed to these ideas, they embraced the label. They were pleased to accept a name that stood for important teachings.

ASK: Are you pleased, displeased, or indifferent when it comes to the Baptist label? (Q4)

Most people who wear the name “Baptist” no longer know the ideas it stands for. If asked to name the characteristic teachings of their group, most merely observe that their churches perform baptisms by immersing rather than sprinkling or pouring. Increasingly, church members display an astonishing lack of knowledge about just what Baptists believe.

ASK: What do you think the name *Baptist* stands for? (Q5)

Sadly, ignorance of the meaning behind the Baptist name is too often shared by Baptist leaders. It is not difficult to find lists of Baptist distinctives, but such lists are often marred by one of two faults. The first fault is that many of the lists were compiled by writers who really did not know what Baptists believe. Consequently, their lists either omit important teachings, or they add teachings upon which Baptists have never agreed. Sometimes they do both.

The second and more serious fault is that some lists have been compiled by people with theological axes to grind. Some groups would like to claim to be the only true Baptists. They attempt to bolster their claim by trying to define all other Baptists out of existence. Their lists are little more than propaganda tools.

This point becomes obvious each time someone seeks a current, nontechnical resource that would explain what a Baptist is. Not a single work could be heartily recommended without reservation. Every pamphlet or book available required, at best, a guarded endorsement.

That is surprising. Baptists used to publish many good statements of their beliefs. Some older works were worthy of recommendation virtually without reservation. But that is no longer the case.

ASK: Describe your desire to know what Baptists believe. (Q6)

B. Meaning

A need existed for a short book that would explain Baptist thought and practice to ordinary church members and, perhaps, to those who are training for ministry. Kevin Bauder's book *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order* undertook this task. This course is based on Bauder's book. His book answers the question, What is a Baptist? for people who are not theological experts. It does not, however, try to defend all of the distinctive Baptist beliefs in detail, though it does usually indicate where the main proofs lie. The book is now the definitive volume on Baptist distinctives, and it no doubt will be for years to come.

This course has the same goal as Bauder's book with an added goal of challenging learners to conduct themselves according to their Baptist beliefs. The lessons will help learners understand how to live as Baptists, hence the course name *Being Baptist*.

Both this course and Bauder's book explain the ideas and practices that set Baptists apart from other Christians. They address this explanation primarily to those who have either grown up in or entered Baptist circles without understanding the beliefs that shape the Baptist mind and heart. Secondly, they offer an explanation to non-Baptists who are curious about Baptist beliefs. However, neither one is a defense to answer all the arguments of those who disagree. And neither of them treats exhaustively every aspect of Baptist theology. Both resources are overviews, not for the theological professional, but for the thoughtful inquirer.

II. The Baptist Distinctives

Baptists are defined by their characteristic beliefs. Taken together, these beliefs are called the Baptist distinctives. Before we actually begin to explore these distinctive teachings, we need to understand how they function.

A. Functions

1. The distinctives set Baptists apart

The distinctives are what set Baptists apart from other Christians. Therefore, no belief that is held universally by Christians can qualify as a Baptist distinctive. Some teachings set all Christians apart from other religious people. These "Christian distinctives" are known as essentials, or fundamentals. All true Christians affirm the fundamentals. Because Baptists are Christians, they also believe the fundamentals. A person who denies one of the fundamentals cannot be a Baptist because that person is not a Christian (though too often such persons dis-

honestly continue to call themselves Christians and even Baptists). By the same token, Methodists and Presbyterians affirm the fundamentals, for they, too, are Christians. A person who denies a fundamental doctrine cannot rightly be called a Methodist or a Presbyterian. The fundamentals are the common property of all true Christians, whether Baptist, Lutheran, Calvinist, or Wesleyan. Therefore, a fundamental doctrine is not really a Baptist distinctive, even though all genuine Baptists believe it.

ASK: What are the fundamentals of the Christian faith? (Q7)

RESOURCE: Display resource 2. Point out any of the fundamentals the learners failed to mention. Use the illustration to help them make the distinction between fundamentals and Baptist distinctives.

The fundamentals of the faith include the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures (Ps. 12:6, 7; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20); the deity and virgin birth of Christ (John 1:1; Heb. 1:8, 9; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23); the sufficiency of Christ's substitutionary atonement (Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12–14); the literal, bodily resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:36–46; 1 Cor. 15:1–4, 15:14, 15); and the literal, bodily second coming of Christ (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 22:12).

READ: John 1:1. ASK: Why is the deity of Christ a fundamental of the faith? (Q8) If Christ is not God, then His death on the cross was meaningless and we are still in our sins.

READ: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23. ASK: Why is the Virgin Birth a fundamental belief for Christians? (Q9) If Christ was not born of a virgin, He would be a mere man and unqualified to die for the sins of the world.

READ: 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20. ASK: Why is the infallibility and inspiration of Scripture a fundamental of the faith? (Q10) If the Scriptures were not inspired and infallible, we couldn't be sure of anything they said about God and salvation.

The trend is for people who deny the fundamentals to call themselves Christians or even Baptists. But remember that those labels still have meaning. Those who abuse those labels cannot actually change what it means to be Baptist, any more than a person could call his cat a dog and thereby change what it means to be a dog.

ASK: Should Baptists abandon the Baptist label because some groups abuse the label? Explain. (Q11)

2. The distinctives work as a bundle

While the Baptist distinctives set Baptists apart, we must not say that *only* Baptists hold *any* of the Baptist distinctives. Baptists are characterized by several beliefs. Not one of those beliefs is absolutely unique to Baptists.





RESOURCE: Display resource 3. Use the illustration to show that the bundle of distinctives is what makes Baptists distinct from other groups.

No matter which Baptist distinctive you choose, you can find other Christians who acknowledge it. No single distinctive *by itself* is sufficient to distinguish Baptists from all other groups of Christians.

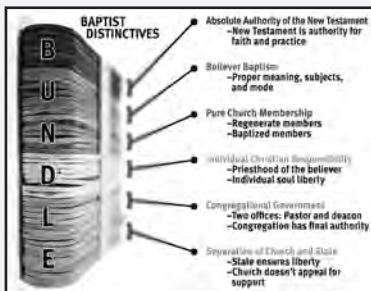
What makes Baptists different is that they alone hold the combination of beliefs that are known as the Baptist distinctives. Each individual belief is held by some other group, but no other group holds the whole bundle. Baptists are distinguished, not by the individual teachings, but by the combination of teachings that make up the Baptist distinctives.

While each of the Baptist distinctives is held by *some* other Christians, no Baptist distinctive is held by *all* other Christians. Therefore, each one of the distinctives sets Baptists apart from some other Christian group. When all of the distinctives are added together, the combination ends up setting Baptists apart from all other Christians.

B. Descriptions

This course puts six distinctives in the Baptist distinctives bundle. Seeing the six parts of the bundle side by side before examining each one in-depth will help us gain more from this course as we progress through it.

RESOURCE: Display resource 4 as an overview of the Baptist distinctives.



1. Absolute authority of the New Testament

Biblical authority is often listed as a Baptist distinctive. But the true distinctive is more specific. Baptists consistently affirm the absolute authority of the New Testament in all matters of church faith and order. Baptists insist that the only divinely inspired textbook on the church is the New Testament. When Baptists speak about the church, they often specify that it is the “New Testament Church” that they have in mind.

ASK: How is this distinctive evident in our church? (Q12)

2. Believer baptism

Believer baptism is the obvious Baptist distinctive. It’s hard to miss a person soaking wet in a baptismal! Sometimes believer baptism is the only distinctive a Baptist knows.

How does the Baptist approach to water baptism differ from the perspectives of the other denominations? Baptists generally argue that their approach is defined by three emphases. They insist that valid, Scriptural baptism requires, first, proper subjects; second, a proper meaning; and, third, a proper mode. To these three, some Baptists add a fourth emphasis, maintaining that valid baptism must occur under proper authority or a proper administrator.

3. Pure church membership

Baptists emphasize pure church membership. The three central themes of pure church membership are regenerate, or spiritually reborn, membership, bap-

tized membership, and church discipline. True Baptist churches will not accept the unregenerate and those not properly baptized into their membership. Baptists also hold members accountable to a holy standard, and they practice church discipline to keep the membership pure.

ASK: What pressures on a church might tempt it to compromise their belief in a pure church membership? (Q13) A need to add members to increase the church budget. A desire to be seen as a loving and inclusive church.

4. Individual Christian responsibility

Baptists believe that every Christian has received tremendous privileges and, consequently, bears tremendous responsibilities. We also believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has made each believer competent to fulfill these responsibilities in company with other believers. Baptists typically discuss these privileges, responsibilities, and competencies under two headings: the priesthood of the believer and the soul liberty of the believer.

Baptists understand the priesthood of the believer to mean that Christians require no separate priesthood other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Christ is the only mediator between humans and God, each believer has the privilege and duty of direct access to God.

ASK: How important to you is your direct access to God through prayer? (Q14)

Soul liberty is the responsibility that all believers share to understand and obey God's requirements for themselves. This duty cannot be delegated or assigned to another believer. Each individual believer is personally responsible for understanding and obeying God.

5. Congregational government

Baptists believe that churches ought to be governed congregationally. They believe that the final authority under Christ for making the church's decisions is invested in the congregation as a whole. Baptists believe that congregational government does the most justice to the pattern and teaching of the New Testament.

ASK: How have you seen congregational government worked out in our church? (Q15)

6. Separation of church and state

Lastly, Baptists have been identified by their belief in separation of church and state. Baptists believe that the coercive power of the state must not be used to enforce matters that should be left to the conscience before God. And Baptists believe that Christianity should not appeal to the state for support or advantage. The state's role then is to ensure that people have liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

ASK: In what ways might the separation of church and state be threatened

in years to come? (Q16) The state could call some of the teachings of the church unconstitutional. The state could try to enforce hiring practices on churches, requiring them to hire pastors regardless of their gender or “sexual orientation.”

III. Personal Convictions

Being Baptist is not something we should take lightly. We should be Baptist by conviction rather than by convenience. We should know what being a Baptist means and recognize the connection between our beliefs and our approach to Scripture. We come to Baptist convictions through a consistent, Biblical hermeneutic (principle and method of interpretation). Neither preference nor opinion is the source of our Baptist distinctives. They come neither by traditions nor consensus. They come from God’s Word as we study it as God intended.

READ: Acts 20:27. **ASK:** What was Paul’s conviction when it came to sharing God’s truth? (Q17) *He shared the whole counsel of God. He didn’t hold back teaching some doctrines, relegating them as unimportant.*

We should learn the Baptist distinctives well and commit to passing them on to future generations. We should commit to raising Baptist children because we recognize the importance of a consistent approach to all Scripture.

READ: 2 Timothy 2:2. **ASK:** What pattern did Paul command Timothy to follow? (Q18) *Paul told Timothy to pass what he taught to him on to faithful men who would be able to teach others also.*

BEING BAPTIST

Learning Distinctives

ASK: How did you come to be a Baptist? (Q19)

ASK: What did you learn about the Baptist distinctives from this overview lesson? (Q20)

Raising Baptists

ASK: Why is it important to teach the Baptist distinctives to the next generation? (Q21) *So they will choose to be part of a Baptist church when they are on their own. So they won’t end up in a church that compromises Biblical truth.*

ASK: How might our church effectively teach the distinctives on an ongoing basis? (Q22) *Teach this course on a regular basis. Give new members a copy of Baptist Distinctive and New Testament Church Order by Dr. Kevin Bauder. Preach on each distinctive. Purposefully point out when the distinctives are evident in the life of the church. Have individuals saved out of other church backgrounds give their testimonies about the importance of being Baptist.*

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a “Being Baptist” statement for lesson 1 or use the following: Know and teach the Baptist distinctives.

Encourage learners to memorize 2 Timothy 2:2. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

