

BEING BAPTIST

DISTINCTIVES THAT MATTER

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS

The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

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Being Baptist: Distinctives That Matter

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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 you understand that the Baptist 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 study. 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.

Studying this course should result in being a Baptist by conviction rather than by convenience. You should understand that "Baptist" is more than a name with a bunch of stereotypes attached to it. It is a name you should wear as a badge, realizing the important Biblical truths it represents.

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. You will greatly benefit from having Bauder's expanded treatment of the Baptist distinctives. Bauder's book is available from RegularBaptistPress.org.

Baptist Distinctives Matter

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

Theme

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

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

Baptists could have named themselves the Potluckians for all the potlucks they seem to have. Or maybe the Studinarians to reflect the amount of time and effort they put into studying the Bible. But Baptists didn’t get to name themselves; their opponents beat them to it. Baptists should be glad for their name. Their opponents could have picked the name “dunkers”. “Faith Dunker Church” or “Grace Dunker Church” aren’t appealing.

1. What might you name Baptists?
2. Give some reasons for the new name.

This study will explore what *Being Baptist* is all about. You will find that common Baptist beliefs are important to know and embrace. The distinctives that set Baptists apart are *Distinctives That Matter*.

LEARNING THE DISTINCTIVES

Denominational Labels

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.

3. Do you consider your denominational label as a badge? Explain.

Baptists’ opponents gave them their name 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.

4. Are you pleased, displeased, or indifferent when it comes to the Baptist label?

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.

5. What do you think the name *Baptist* stands for?

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.

6. Describe your desire to know what Baptists believe.

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.

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.

The Baptist 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 dishonestly 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.

7. What fundamentals of the Christian faith can you name?

The fundamentals of the faith include the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy 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).

8. Read John 1:1. Why is the deity of Christ a fundamental of the faith?

9. Read Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23. Why is the Virgin Birth a fundamental belief for Christians?

10. Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20. Why is the infallibility and inspiration of Scripture a fundamental of the faith?

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.

11. Should Baptists abandon the Baptist label because some groups abuse the label? Explain.

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.

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.

Descriptions of the Distinctives

This study 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 you gain more from this study as you progress through it.

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.

12. How is this distinctive evident in your church?

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.

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

13. What pressures on a church might tempt it to compromise their belief in a pure church membership?

Baptists believe that every believer has received tremendous privileges and, consequently, bears tremendous **individual Christian 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.

14. How important to you is your direct access to God through prayer?

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.

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.

15. How have you seen congregational government worked out in your church?

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.

16. In what ways might the separation of church and state be threatened in years to come?

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.

17. Read Acts 20:27. What was Paul's conviction when it came to sharing God's truth?

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.

18. Read 2 Timothy 2:2. What pattern did Paul command Timothy to follow?

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19. How did you come to be a Baptist?

20. What did you learn about the Baptist distinctives from this overview lesson?
21. Why is it important to teach the Baptist distinctives to the next generation? Add to the following list:
22. So they will choose to be part of a Baptist church when they are on their own.
23. So they won't end up in a church that compromises Biblical truth.
24. How might your church effectively teach the distinctives on an ongoing basis?