

# **What is a Baptist church?**

Churches, like people, are unique. Each one is different. What kind of church do you have in mind when you say "Baptist"?



# **What Is a Baptist Church?**

A Baptist church is people. But not just **any** people. They are children of God.

## **Children of God?**

Yes, according to the Bible, the highest authority which Baptists acknowledge. For instance, in John 1:11-12, the Bible records: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." God created all persons. But the distinction of being children of God is reserved for those who "received him" (Christ).

The members of a Baptist church have received Christ. They have repented to God of their sins, and have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 20:21; 1 John 4:15). They are children of God. God is their father. They are his heirs, jointly with Christ (Rom. 8:17). They are no longer lost, unrepentant creatures of God. They are saved, pardoned from sin, and born again as children of God (1 John 1:9; John 3:7).

**How do these children of God come to be a church?**

Children of God become a church when they voluntarily band together to form a fellowship of believers in Christ.

### **A fellowship of believers?**

Right. 1 John 1:7 states in this way: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another."

The early Christians valued this fellowship highly (Acts 2:42). Paul wrote to the church in Philippi: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you . . . for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:3, 5).

A Baptist church is not a mere man-made institution (Matt. 16:17-18; 1 Tim. 3:15); it belongs to God. It is a spiritual fellowship of children of God and is characterized by love for one another (Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:14.)

Baptists love one another. They love God. They assemble themselves together to worship God. They encourage one another to love God and man. They encourage one another to do good works. (Heb. 10:24-25.)

### **Who is in charge of a Baptist church?**

Baptists believe that Christ is "in charge."

### **Christ?**

Yes. A church is somewhat like a human body. It has many parts. Each part has a



particular contribution to make to the whole body (Eph. 4:16). But in order for the body to have unity, direction, balance, and control, it must have a head.

**And that's where Christ stands in a Baptist church?**

Exactly! "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). (See also Eph. 1:22; 4:15.)

**Where does this put the pastor?**

The pastor, and any other ministers a church may have, are to equip God's children for the work of service (Eph. 4:11-12). The minister works in a variety of ways, such as preaching and teaching, in order to equip the members to serve. He watches over the members like a shepherd (Acts 20:28). He is God's servant for this purpose.

**But isn't much of this true of some churches other than Baptists? How do you tell a Baptist church from any other fellowship of the children of God?**

There are several things which distinguish a Baptist church from churches of other denominations. One is its autonomy under the Lord Jesus Christ. Another is its observances of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Ordinances?**

Ordinances. Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 22:14-20).

A person must repent of his sin and profess faith in Christ as his Saviour in order to become a child of God. Then he attests his salvation by being baptized—immersed in water—by one who is authorized by a church to baptize him. This establishes initially his identity with a fellowship of children of God. Should he seek to join another Baptist church, the church which initially authorized his baptism verifies to the receiving church that the person has professed faith in Christ, and been baptized. Subsequently, each Baptist church which one might seek to join receives verification to its satisfaction from the church where the person was a member just previously.

**What about the Lord's Supper? How do Baptists stand on that?**

In a Baptist church the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal to commemorate the death of Jesus (Luke 22:19). The elements of the meal represent the body and blood of Christ. Only baptized believers participate in the Lord's Supper. As the participants consume the bread and the fruit of the vine, they are reminded by these symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ. It is a fitting memorial to Christ.

**Isn't there more to a Baptist church?**



There's more! There are the impelling responsibilities both at home and abroad to lead men to learn of God, to worship him, to proclaim his gospel, and to minister to persons in his name. A Baptist church exists to perform these functions. Baptist churches voluntarily band together in associations and conventions in order to do together what they cannot do alone in carrying out the instructions of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20).

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