

Baptist Distinctives: Local, Autonomous Church

Introduction: Baptists & Authority

1. Baptists Believe in Civil Authority
2. Baptists Believe in the Authority of the Bible
3. Baptists Believe in Jesus' Authority
4. Baptists DO NOT believe in individual autonomy
5. Baptists DO believe in the independent, local autonomous church

The Main Idea: Baptist churches are local & autonomous, meaning we are independent, self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating body of believers under one head, Jesus Christ the Lord, and no other.

King Jesus Is The Head Of The Church

1. Head of the Church Universal – All who have and will believe
2. Head of the Church Local – We listen to Him through His Word
3. Baptists believe we are Autonomous – “A law unto self” → But NOT from Jesus
4. **See Col 1:18, Daniel 7:14, Eph 1:22-23**

The Bible Is Our Authority

1. King Jesus speaks to His Church and Guides it through His Word (**James 1:22-25**)
2. God is In Charge! = No man, group, government
3. Christ governs the Church through His Word –
4. No hierarchy

Types of Church Government

1. Episcopal, Monarchical – Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church
 - a. Pope, Bishops, Priests
 - b. Monarch of England, (King Henry VIII, 1531)
2. Oligarchic – Synod, Presbytery
 - a. Synod of the Lutheran Church
 - b. Sessions of the Presbyterian Church
3. Democratic Republic – Baptists, Congregational
 - a. The Congregation has the Responsibility for Polity and Practice

4. Rome's Biblical Defense
 - a. **Matthew 16:13-19** – Peter is the 1st Pope
 - b. Response: Petros – Rock, Peter; Petra – Stone, Message of Christ's Identity
 - c. **1 Peter 5:1** – Peter is a fellow elder with no rule
5. Presbyterian Church's Defense
 - a. **Acts 14:23, Acts 15**
 - b. Congregations elect elders as representatives to be sent to presbyteries
 - c. Presbyteries form a general assembly
 - d. This group of ruling elders determines polity and doctrine for local churches
 - e. Response: Acts 15 is a meeting to determine the legitimacy of Gentile believers and their inclusion into the church apart from circumcision
 - f. This is NOT a normal determination of practice and belief for local churches

Biblical Defense Of Local Church Autonomy

1. *The Baptist Faith & Message, Article VI*
2. **Revelation 1:10-13, 20; 2:5**
 - a. Seven Lampstands = Seven Local Churches
3. Local Church is Self-Governing
 - a. God gives its own elders & teachers (**Eph 4:11-12**)
 - b. Churches elects its own deacons (**Acts 6**)
 - c. Churches takes care of own Treasury (**1 Cor 16:1-2**)
 - d. Churches are Self-Propagating (**Matt 28:18-20**)
 - i. Not Isolationists: SBC and EIBA Cooperation
 - e. Churches take care of its own Church Discipline
 - i. **Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5**
4. Churches are local and autonomous, no outside group or civil government can impose on the polity and practice of the Church – Christ is the Head!

The Historical Result: The Separation Of Church & State

1. First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, 1789
 - a. James Madison – a Baptist was influenced by pastors John Leland and Isaac Backus
2. Religious Freedom is a Product of Independent Autonomy of the Local Church
3. Not meant to keep the Church from being influential in government
4. Is meant to keep government out of church