

Understanding Baptists (or at least trying to)

“All the different Baptists Where do they all come from?”

- Alliance of Baptists Church (1987)
 - Membership: est. 35,000 in 142 churches (2016)
- American Baptist Association (1905)
 - Membership: 203,374 adherents in 1,368 congregations (2010)
- American Baptist Churches in the USA (1814 or 1845)
 - Membership: 1,240,000 members in 5,402 churches (2015)
- Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (1997)
 - Membership: est. 7,000 members; 59 churches (2016)
- **Baptist General Convention of Texas** (1848)
(Main denomination of SMBC, now known as “Texas Baptists”)
 - Membership: 2,038,537 in 5,375 churches (2023)
- Conservative Baptist Association of America (1947)
 - Membership: 200,000 in 1,110 congregations (2016)
- Converge Worldwide (Baptist General Conference) (1852)
 - Membership: est. 260,000 in 1,289 churches (2016)
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (1991)
 - Membership: est. 750,000 in 1,800 churches (2023)
- Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International (1994)
 - Membership: Unknown in est. 2,500 congregations (2016)
- General Association of General Baptists (founded in 1823, org. 1870)
 - Membership: 95,000 in 816 churches (2016)
- National Association of Free Will Baptist (1935)
 - Membership: 185,798 in 2,369 churches (2012)
- National Baptist Convention of America (1895)
 - Membership: Not available, but est. 246,044 in 575 church (2010)
- National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (1895)
 - Membership: Not available but estimated 5,000,000 in 10,000 churches (2012). This is the largest body of African American Baptists in the US. They shared a common history with NBC of America denomination throughout the formative years of the two groups (which is why the name is so similar to the prior entry).

- National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (1988)
 - Membership: Statistics not kept, but claims 2,500,000 members (2012) in 1,283 congregations (2010)
- National Primitive Baptist Convention, USA (1907)
 - Membership: est. 53,630 in 547 churches (2000)
- North American Baptist Conference (1865)
 - Membership: 65,000 in 410 churches (2014)
- Old Regular Baptists (Founded: 1825, 1892)
 - Membership: est. 15,218 in 326 churches (1995)
- Original Free Will Baptist Convention (1961 with roots to 1912)
 - Membership: est. 30,000 in est. 250 churches (2010)
- Primitive Baptists (1827)
 - Membership: est. 50,000 in 1,600 churches (2000)
- Progressive National Baptist Convention, INC. (1961)
 - Membership: est. 1,010,000 in 1,500 churches (2012)
- Progressive Primitive Baptists (1909)
 - Membership: 95 churches (2016)
- Separate Baptist in Christ (1877 & 1912 with roots to the colonial period)
 - Membership: est. 8,000 in 100 churches (2012)
- Seventh Day Baptist General Conference (1802 with roots 1671)
 - Membership: est. 5,000 in 110 churches (2016)
- Southern Baptist Convention (1845)
 - Membership: 12,722,266 in 46,876 churches (2024)
- United American Free Will Baptists (1901 with roots to the early 19th century)
 - Membership: 11,200 in 75 churches (2007)

Baptist Beginnings: Three Theories

1. The Jerusalem-Jordan-John theory
2. The Anabaptist spiritual kingship theory
3. The English Separatist descent theory

As different as all three theories are,
a common thread they share centers around a key Baptist distinctive of **freedom**.

Baptists have historically advocated for Freedom

Notable Baptist figures who championed freedom early on in England & America

- Thomas Helwys (1556-1616, England)
- John Smyth (1554 – 1612, England)
- John Bunyan (1628-1688, England)
- Roger Williams (1603-1683, Rhode Island)
- Isaac Backus (1724-1806, New England)
- John Leland (1754-1841, Virginia & Massachusetts)

Four Freedoms historically championed by Baptists

Religious Freedom

The historic affirmation that Christians should be free to exercise their faith in personal conscience without the coercion or the prohibition of any civil government.

We believe that faith is a voluntarily made commitment of life.

This freedom OF religion, freedom FOR religion, and freedom FROM religion is implemented through the practice of the separation of church and state.

Soul Freedom

The historic affirmation that every individual has the right and responsibility to relate directly to God without the interference of any human creed or human minister or human government. We enjoy this right through what is called "soul competency" or the equal access we have to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The reality of this equal access is known as "the priesthood of all believers" before God.

Church Freedom

This is the historic affirmation that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain persons whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ, of whose unity and mission Baptists are proudly a part.

We have called it church autonomy, the freedom of an individual church from any larger denominational group.

Bible Freedom

The historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible is the unique record of the revelation of God and the only authority for what we believe and how we behave. The written Word (Scripture) giving witness to the Living Word (Jesus our Savior) must be central in the life of the individual and church. Christians are both free and obligated to study, interpret, and obey the Scriptures for themselves and in community with others.

Challenges and Applications of Freedom for Baptists (then and now)

With freedom comes great responsibility

For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Galatians 5:13-14 CSB

Examples:

Individual Freedom is not an open license to divide the body of Christ

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

1 Corinthians 1:10 CSB

Examples:

Guard and continue the efforts for religious freedom

*For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.
Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you
will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good.*

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.

They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer

-Romans 13:3-4 NIV

Jesus commanded faith and submission to him but never coerced it.
(see Matt. 19:26; 23:37)

Examples:

Join in the freedom that Christ (and Baptists) invite you to experience

- **Freedom to follow Christ** (Matthew 7:24; 16:24)
- **Freedom to read and interpret the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- **Freedom to be baptized** (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12)
- **Freedom to choose and support a church** (Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 9:7)
- **Freedom to build up, serve, and be a functioning part of that church**
(Ephesians 4:11-16)
- **Freedom to witness and minister** (Matthew 28:19-20)

Concluding Question & Thought

Are you Baptist due to...

- **Conditioning?**
- **Convenience?**
- **Conviction?**



For the entire statement of primary doctrinal beliefs of South Main Baptist Church and Texas Baptists (aka Baptist General Convention of Texas); please find the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message through this QR code.