

The Church part 2

1. What is the one distinctive Baptist belief?

- 1908, E. Y. Mullins wrote about “Soul Competency”
- You are free to believe what you want, but you are responsible to God for your choices.
- All other Baptist distinctive have their root in Soul Competency
 - Authority of Scripture
 - Rejection of Creeds
 - Believer’s Baptism
 - Regenerate Church Membership
 - Local Church Autonomy
 - Separation of Church and State
 - Missions and Evangelism
 - Priesthood of all Believers

2. What do we mean that all believers are priests?

- Every member of the local church is a priest and a servant before God with equal privileges and responsibilities within the life of the church. The functions of individual members are different, not their status.
- You can go directly to God without going through a priest.
- You have the right to read and interpret Scripture for yourself, under the leadership of the Spirit.
- You have a role to play within the body of Christ. No one else can do your work for you.

3. How should a church be organized to carry out its functions?

- Polity – how a church is organized and governs itself.

The lack of a clear and fixed organizational pattern in the NT has led historians and scholars to identify three main forms of church organization

- **Episcopalianism**
 - Governed by various hierarchies of bishops, who hold the major authority
 - Priests under them, with deacons under them
 - Believe in “apostolic succession”
 - Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, some Lutheran
 - Not found in the Bible, at least not explicitly.
 - Development of the 2nd century church.
 - Top-down model.
- **Presbyterianism**
 - Governed by elders, who form a kind of committee to handle church affairs.
 - Teaching elders – the principle minister, ordained
 - Ruling elders – chosen by the congregation and admitted to their office by ordination.
 - May not preach, baptize, or administer communion
 - Assist in the government of the church and in the exercise of discipline.
 - Church of Christ, some Pentecostal, some non-denominational
 - Presbyterian Church
 - Presbyteries, made up of congregations in a local district. They examine, ordain, and install ministers.
 - Synods occupies larger boundaries
 - General assembly, meets annually, made up of lay and clergy delegates.
 - Settles all matters of policy and doctrine
- **Congregationalism**
 - Democratic society in which all members participate and bear responsibility
 - Each church is an autonomous spiritual body under the leadership of Christ
 - All members have equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities in the church

- Each member ought to be meaningfully involved in the functioning of the church
- Organization must serve the purposes of the church
- Organization should be suited to the needs and situations as they develop
- Churches are interdependent with other churches for mutual support and effort
- Baptists believe the congregational pattern is the most strongly supported in Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, Galatians 6:1, Acts 6:2-4, 13:1-3, 15:22-35.

4. How is a Baptist Church like an institution?

- Corporations and Committees, officers, etc.
- Roberts Rules of Order for Business meetings
- Fair and consistent, Logical, rational, clear lines of authority and accountability
- A *committee* exists for the purpose of protecting and guiding the institution of the church.
 - Committees serve corporate, “official business” functions on behalf of the church.
 - The purpose of our committees is not necessarily to allow us to accomplish the mission of the church, but to keep the church operational so that it can accomplish the mission.
 - Therefore, committees are necessary and important in our form of church government.
 - Committees have a set number of members who are selected by a Committee on Committees and approved by the church. Certain rules to follow.
- Ideally, the fewer the committees the better because of their limited membership and tendency to be focused on maintaining the church rather than accomplishing the mission of the church.

5. How can the church function as a living organism?

1. Paul said the church is a body, not a machine. Newtonian physics explains how machines work.
 - Laws, cause and effect, predictable, reasonable, observable, machinery, clockwork
2. We need to learn from nature. Newtonian Physics could explain some of the universe, but not all of it.
 - Quantum Mechanics, Molecular Biology and Chemistry, Nonlinear Mathematics, Systems Theory, Chaos Theory
 - All help us to understand the things in nature that traditional physics could not explain.
1. A living system creates, organizes, and renews itself.
 - Pays attention to itself as a whole and its parts, as well as the environment; learns, develops.
 - A living system will change itself in order to preserve that self.
 - Change is prompted only when an organism decides that changing is the only way to maintain itself. FBC Rockport is not the same as it was 120 years ago, and yet it is.
2. In a living system, each organism maintains a clear sense of its individual identity within a larger network of relationships that help to shape its identity. Like cells in the body, organs, systems.
3. A living system is a set of processes that are made visible in temporary structures.
 - Process – oxygen is exchanged with carbon dioxide, yet none of the cells remain.
 - We need to emphasize processes and relationships rather than structures, which can change.
4. A living system has a great deal of freedom in how it develops while operating within a clear set of standards or boundaries that define its nature or purpose. Fingerprints, individual appearance.
 - Scripture defines our purpose, but we must have freedom to engage with our environment and develop accordingly.
5. A living system uses self-reference during times of change – it always changes in such a way that it remains consistent with itself. No fins grow suddenly on us.
 - When we have a clear sense of who we are, we have the freedom to change as needed.
6. A living system demonstrates stability over time. Parts of the system may be in chaos, but overall, over time, the system endures and is stable.
7. The parts of a living system are connected by invisible fields.
 - Observe the effects of the connections, not the connections themselves.