

Seven Guidelines for Church Planting Which Reflect Baptist Ecclesiology

Submitted for consideration by
the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board
from the Theological Studies Division
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Guidelines for church planting should reflect the truth that the Church is founded upon the Word. The church is a community gathered by the redemptive work of the Triune God to worship Him and bear witness to His grace. The following guidelines detail the historical interpretation of Scripture by Baptists as embodied in articles 6, 7, and 8 of the 2000 *Baptist Faith & Message*. The following guidelines are developed from the respective sections of the 2000 confession.

(1) A new church must begin with a covenant. Covenants are usually written and are made between the people and God on biblical principles. The covenant must affirm at least three things: a) the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the church and its members, b) the divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible, and c) a church consisting only of twice-born (redeemed) believers who have given witness to their faith by baptism by immersion.

(2) The church's regular activities should include: a) the regular worship of God, b) the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, c) the edification of believers through worship, Bible study, and varieties of service through which Christ's commandments are fulfilled and the gifts of church members are exercised, d) meetings to bring the church's business in conformity with the will of Christ, and e) evangelistic and missionary efforts to reach the lost.

(3) Adoption of a structure of church governance which is in accord with democratic congregationalism responsible to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as revealed in His inerrant Word.

(4) Recognition that a church is not complete without pastoral leadership, therefore diligent effort should be made by the congregation to secure pastoral leadership upon the loss of a pastor. The officers of the church are pastors and deacons. The scriptural qualifications for the selection of officers should be followed, including the important qualification that only men may be called to the pastoral office.

(5) Baptism in the Triune name must be understood as an act of obedience which follows a person's profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Baptism symbolizes personal and communal identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism must be voluntarily given by the church and received by the individual prior to church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper.

(6) The Lord's Supper is to be regularly observed by the church membership and understood as an act of obedience to the command of Christ whereby, through the partaking of bread and fruit of the vine, they remember the atoning death of Jesus Christ and anticipating His second coming.

(7) The church must undertake to meet regularly on the Lord's Day in order to celebrate the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead through both communal and individual worship.

Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the *Baptist Faith & Message*

VI. The Church

(1) A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; (2) observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. (3) Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. (4) Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

(5) Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

(6) The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

VIII. The Lord's Day

(7) The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5-10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16; 3:16; Revelation 1:10.