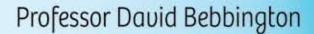
# What Baptists Believe

MADE



CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH DUHDEE

### Contents

Introduction	
The Bible	
The Gathered Church	
Believer's Baptism	6
Independence of the Local Church	8
Congregational Church Government .	10
The Ministry	
Church Membership	14
Freedom	16
Mission	. 18

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

First published by Stirling Baptist Church, 2019

Re-published with the permission of Professor David Bebbington and Stirling Baptist Church

# CENTRAL+

Central Baptist Church | 8 Ward Road | Dundee DD1 1LXCentral Baptist Church Office | 9a Ward Road | Dundee DD1 1LP t : 01382 201255 | w : www.centraldundee.com

Central Bantist Church is a Scottish Charity SCOO

### Introduction

Baptists have a number of distinguishing convictions. In many cases, however, the Baptist view is shared by certain other Christians. The attitude of Baptists to the Bible is common to most Protestants, their churchmanship is equally that of the Congregationalists and even their beliefs about baptism are also held by Christian Brethren, Pentecostalists and some others. But the combination of convictions offered for discussion in this booklet is unique. It is the combination that makes Baptists Baptists.

This is not a set of Bible studies. Baptist convictions cannot be found set out systematically in certain passages of the Bible. If they were available in that form all Christendom would be Baptist. Rather, they are based on sections scattered about the Bible. Mention is often made of particular verses or groups of verses, and users of this booklet may like to refer to them. A whole passage of the Bible is nevertheless specified at the beginning of each study. A few comments are made in order to bring out its significance for the subject under scrutiny. The biblical extract by itself is rarely sufficient to demonstrate the validity of a Baptist principle, but it is hoped that the passage will point in that direction. As the first study suggests, Baptist convictions are worthless if they are not founded on the Bible.

Questions of church order are of much greater importance than many Evangelical Christians have supposed them to be. This booklet may help Baptists – and, of course, other Christian people – to consider some of the reasons for Baptist convictions. It is written in the belief that they are true.

#### 2 Chronicles 34

Q

ŝ

14 While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses. 15 Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. 16 Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. 17 They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the Lord and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen." 18 Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it before the king. 19 And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. 20 And the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, 21 "Go, enquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

29 Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. 31 And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32 Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin join in it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 And Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and made all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.

# The Bible

#### 2 Chronicles 34 : 14-21, 29-33

During repairs to the temple in about 623 BC, the Book of the Law of God was rediscovered. There followed a transformation in national life. Realising that failure to obey God's commands was sinful, King Josiah ensured that his people heard the law and agreed to abide by it. Judah submitted to its authority. Christians possess a fuller version of the same book in the Bible. It contains not only the law of Moses but also the rest of the Old Testament, together with the New Testament. All believers of whatever domination recognise that it has authority over their lives.

Baptists, however, would wish to go further than many other Christians. Like others, they know that supreme authority belongs to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Like others, they believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world today, especially in the church, guiding the followers of Jesus into the truth (John 16:13). Like others they have often seen the value of knowledge of the Christian tradition in the past, giving a perspective on truth beyond the confines of their own generation. Like others they have included in their ranks people who have understood the importance of reason as a gift of God. But with remarkable consistency Baptists have declared that the Bible is the primary channel through which the authority of Jesus is known and possible guidance by the Spirit is tested. The Bible stands above both tradition and reason.

Confidence in the supremacy of the Bible as a court of appeal in the Christian faith has grown in recent years. Those who raised Christian tradition to a position of parity with the scriptures have been reconsidering. Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholics have increasingly acknowledged that study of the Bible must take precedence over acceptance of what is customary. Again, biblical scholarship has growingly felt its task to be the explanation of the message of scripture, not discussion of its alleged disharmonies. Reason has not tried to dissect the Bible, but humbly to expound it.

Baptists have other reasons for according great respect to the Bible. It is, after all, the only detailed sourcebook for information about Jesus and his background. Partly for that reason Baptists hold that the Bible is uniquely inspired as a revelation of God's message to humanity. The writers of the New Testament were extremely close to their subject, both in time and sympathy. They, like Jesus himself, considered the Old Testament to be authoritative. So, Baptists conclude, the whole Bible must be treated as possessing supreme authority for Christian faith and practice. Although they want to make due allowance for the different cultural context in which the Bible was written, Baptists know they cannot pick and choose which bits to apply, subordinating the text to their own whims. Nor do they feel at liberty to apply biblical teaching only to the content of their belief and not also to how they order their church life. The Bible has to be decisive in all spheres.

### The Gathered Church

#### 1 Corinthians 5

### ✓ 1 Corinthians 5 Q

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgement on the one who did such a thing, 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler-not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

🕈 ESV 🕨	\$	1
---------	----	---

Sexual immorality had taken place within the Christian community at Corinth. The response of the church, according to Paul, should not be to turn a blind eye or even to make persistent attempts to persuade sinners to change their ways. The church was to expel the immoral brother. Likewise it was to have nothing to do with any member who was flagrantly 'greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler'. The purity of the church was Paul's paramount concern. The Christian community was to include only those whose practice was no denial of their profession.

In harmony with Paul's teaching here, Baptists would insist that none but real Christians should form the church. Only those who have responded in faith to the grace of God should be admitted to membership. Only those who continue to show evidence of true conversion should remain. In the New Testament churches are nothing other than believing communities, separate from the world, 'colonies of heaven'. Christians have an obligation to join a church, for they must not omit meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). The New Testament knows nothing of isolated believers. Rather, they must regularly assemble for worship with others. Together they form a 'gathered church', gathered out of the world as a Christian community.

In consequence Baptists reject any notion that all the people in a given area should be offered the privilege of church membership. Only those who can bear witness to God changing their lives are eligible. It may be objected that human beings cannot find out for certain who possesses saving faith in Jesus. This is knowledge reserved to himself by God. But Baptists do not claim to be anticipating the last judgement. They simply look, in accordance with scriptural directions, for a credible profession. If individuals' assertation of faith is supported by fruit in their life, they are worthy of church membership.

Again, the objection is sometimes heard that, according to Jesus, weeds and wheat should be allowed to grow together. Only at harvest will they be separated (Matthew 13 : 24.30). Hence, it is argued, non-Christians, represented by the weeds, should be tolerated as members of the church. But that is to misconstrue the parable. Jesus declares explicitly that the field is 'the world' (Matthew 13 : 38), not the church. God in his forbearance allows the wicked to coexist with 'the sons of the kingdom'. But there is no permission here for the wicked to remain members of the Christian community. On the contrary, the visible church should approximate to the church invisible. Therefore church discipline should be exercised. It is important both to be kind to the sinner and to avoid complacency on the part of those exercising discipline (Galatians 6:1). But serious lapses - whether moral failures, doctrinal vagaries or simple non-attendance - do need to be taken up. If necessary, in the last resort, a member may have to be expelled. Frequently it is the most effective way of challenging people to face the error of their ways and so change them. It also ensures that the church continues to be the body (as it was put in the 17th century) of 'visible saints'.

### Believer's Baptism

#### Romans 6 : 1-11

### K Romans 6 : 1-11 Q

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free[b] from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

A	ESV		\$	1
_		1.00		-

Paul challenges his readers to realise the significance of the baptism each of them had experienced. When they were plunged under the water, he explains, they were identifying themselves with Jesus in his death. It was a burial of their old sinful ways. Hence sin must not continue in their lives. Only if Paul is referring to a person making a deliberate choice to be baptised does the argument make sense. And only if baptism entailed being submerged does the imagery of baptism carry force.

Baptists hold that baptism should be administered only to those with conscious faith. That is why their practiced is called 'believer's baptism'. In the New Testament the act of baptism always takes place after the coming of faith. It is, in fact, the mark of those who wish to respond to the gospel, itself an embodiment of faith. It is associated with God's forgiveness of our sins, union with Jesus Christ and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is also the rite of admission to the church, Christian initiation. Since church membership is to be restricted to those who have personally accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ, so too is baptism. Consequently baptism should not be administered to Infants. The baptism of infants, we can confidently declare, grew up in post-biblical times. There is no evidence that the households described in the New Testament as receiving baptism included infants: on the contrary, from accounts of their uniformly adult behaviour it would seem that they did not (e.g. Acts 11:14 with Acts 10:44). Defenders of infant baptism sometimes suggest that, since circumcision was provided for babies, baptism (as its N.T. equivalent) should be administered to them too. If the same group of people that was circumcised under the Old Testament should now be baptised, however, then the rite should be restricted to male infants. Circumcision clearly is not an analogy for baptism in all respects. Nevertheless it does not follow that baptism is for adults alone. Young people who show evidence of real faith in Jesus possess the one qualification. Baptists practise believer's baptism, not adult baptism.

The mode of baptism matters as well as its subjects. The Greek word itself means 'immerse', not 'dip' or 'sprinkle'. Only if a candidate is submerged does the rite have its full significance. Total immersion testifies to total commitment, total purification, total identification with Jesus in his death. Symbols have more power than we normally suppose, and this one has particular visual impact. Furthermore, in obedience to the instructions in Matthew's gospel (28:19), the act is performed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through baptism the believers enlist in the service of God in his fullness. They join the army of God the Holy Trinity.

# Independence of the Local Church

#### Ephesians 5 : 21-33

#### K Ephesians 5 : 21-33 Q

21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In writing about the relationship of husband and wife, Paul found it natural to use the bond between Jesus Christ and his church as an illustration. He wanted to provide a picture of a close, loving relationship in which one side was prepared to sacrifice himself and the other side responded with devoted loyalty. So the attitude of the church to its Lord sprang to mind. His primary reference is to the church of all places and ages, the whole company of the redeemed. Yet his assumptions apply equally to the local gathered community, the way in which the cosmic church becomes actual on earth. Jesus Christ, he points out, is the exclusive head of the church.

Baptists take this as their standing point in their understanding of the role of the gathered community of the baptised. Each local church can enjoy the full presence of Christ (Matthew 18:20) and so is complete in itself. For any external ecclesiastical body to claim authority over it is to infringe the crown rights of the Redeemer. Baptists agree with Episcopalians that oversight of the church is vested in no individual such as the pope. They agree with Presbyterians that the very idea of the superior authority of one minister over another is alien to the spirit of the gospel. And they agree with Congregationalists that no bureaucracy external to the gathered community has directive power. Only Jesus Christ possesses that.

In modern times, as a matter of practical convenience Baptists have created unions to provide services for them. Officers of a Baptist Union can provide inspiration, commission literature and speak on behalf of the fellowship of Baptist churches. But they cannot usurp any control over the churches of the union. Neither General Secretary nor Superintendent possesses the right of oversight. A Baptist church entering a union remains entirely free to order its own affairs in the light of its understanding of the will of Christ. The assembly of the Baptist Union is a consultative body for decisions on matters of joint concern, not a church court. Its decisions can never override those of a church meeting. There is therefore no such thing as 'the Baptist Church'. There are independent Baptist churches.

Yet there is another side to the coin. If New Testament churches did not submit to external authority, they did voluntarily combine for mutual support. They clubbed together to support other Christians in financial need (Acts 11:29, 1 Corinthians 16:1), consulted each other (Acts 15:3) and had other links (Col 4:13, 15f). Although independent, they were interdependent. Any proud selfsufficiency would have been a denial of the gospel they proclaimed. Consequently Baptist churches have normally seen it as an obligation to combine in associations and unions for each other's good. More recently they have commonly extended the principle to supporting bodies like councils of churches that permit cooperation between churches of different denominations. Isolation is no part of the Christian faith.

nine

ESV

## Congregational Church Government

Ephesians 4 : 1-16

#### K Ephesians 4 : 1-16 Q

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended", what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

🕈 ESV 🕨	•	1
---------	---	---

Both the diversity and unity of the church are brought out in this passage from Ephesians. In writing to a local Christian community, Paul dwells on the variety of gifts entrusted by the ascended Jesus to its members for the benefit of the whole. Each member has received the ability to contribute to the welfare of the whole (Ephesians 4:7). There is elsewhere in the New Testament an emphasis on the competence of members in general to instruct each other (Romans 15:14), their capacity to act together in important decisions (Acts 15:22) and, as we have seen, their duty to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21). The resulting picture of the local church is one of a united body marked by spiritual equality among its members.

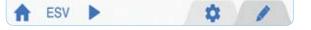
Baptists therefore uphold the privilege and duty of each member to contribute to church government. Some would deny that all should take part, pointing out that administration is a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:28). This is of course true: not all Christians are fitted to manage affairs on a day-to-day basis. Yet all Christians do participate in the mind of Christ, and, together with other members, can help discern his will for the church. Alongside the priesthood of all believers in the New Testament there is the kingship of all believers (Rev 1:6). Each Christian possesses a share in the royal authority of Christ the King. Each is therefore fitted to join in church government. Members assemble for decision-making in the church meeting. There they share responsibility for choosing officers of the church (Acts 6:3-6), admitting and disciplining members (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) and commissioning missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). It is such weighty matters as these that should concern them rather than the nuts and bolts of administration. Church meeting can encourage the gifts of its members, offer guidance to those seeking it and give scope for learning from one another about proper Christian attitudes. It is, as the words of Jesus suggest (Mt 18:17), the supreme authority of the church under Jesus Christ its head. Church meeting is not a democracy but a theocracy. It is not there to take majority decisions but to discover the will of God. Accordingly it is not (as too often it is called) a 'business meeting', but rather a prayer meeting where business happens to be done. Voting is not essential, for decisions may be taken by consensus. After discussion, a leader can formulate an agreement; any member is free to express dissent, in which case further discussion leads to a fresh formulation; and eventually a position in which all are prepared to acquiesce is reached. It is a method that preserves 'the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3). Whatever the method, however, believers share together in church government. As much as worship it is a sphere for the expression of the wholeness of the body of Christ.

# The Ministry

1 Timothy 3 : 1-13

#### 1 Timothy 3 : 1-13 Q

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well, 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.



In the pastoral letters of the New Testament there is a great deal of teaching about the proper conduct of church life. This passage of 1 Timothy concentrates on the qualifications of church officers, overseers and deacons (NIV) or leaders and helpers (GNB). Both groups are to be above reproach.

It is not clear from this passage how the responsibilities of the two groups differed, but if, as is likely, the seven appointed to ensure fair shares of food for all widows are be identified as deacons (Acts 6:1-6), then their work fell in the area of administration and relief. Elders were overseers: the two words are equivalent (Acts 20:28 with Acts 20:17). They were to be shepherds of the flock, and some were to preach (1 Tim 5:17). So local churches were to have two types of officers, overseers and deacons. Baptists have the same two types of officer in their churches. There is sometimes confusion caused by names. Ministers or pastors can be thought of as a separate category. In fact, however, with their shepherding and preaching responsibilities ministers are nothing other than elders/overseers. Up to the eighteenth century their normal title was 'elder'. They do not differ in status from those actually designated elders. It makes no difference that ministers work full-time. They need not do so, and at all stages of Baptist history, including the present, many have not done so. What matters is that those charged with oversight, whether called ministers or elders, should receive the respect and support of the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12f).

Leaders should nevertheless avoid the risk of usurping authority that is not properly theirs. Appointed by the local church, they remain responsible to it. Domineering figures do exist (3 John 9), and it is within the duties of the church to admonish a leader (Colossians 4:17). Those charged with leadership must remember the example of Jesus, who came to serve by giving his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45). The very words 'minister' and 'deacon' both mean 'servant'. Deacons in particular need to recall that they are subordinate to the collective voice of the church. As deacons, whether individually or collectively, they have no independent powers. The common term 'deacons court' is therefore a misnomer. The 'deacons' have no jurisdiction. Any authority they possess is by delegation from the church meeting. Their joy should be to serve.

Ministry, though concentrated in elders and deacons, remains the task of the whole church. Elders and deacons are fundamentally facilitators, enabling their fellow-members to use their gifts to the full. Service for one another should be an expression of the love of God implanted in our hearts (1 John 3:17)

# Church Membership

#### 1 Thespalonians 5: 11-24

### 1 Thessalonians 5 : 11-24 Q

11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

🔶 ESV 🕨 🌼 🥒

The church at Thessalonica as a whole received instructions 'to encourage each other and build each other up' (1 Thessalonians 5:11). They had leaders who were over them in the Lord, but that did not detract from the responsibility of ordinary members of the church to warn, encourage, help and exercise patience. Faithful Christian practice included a concern for corporate welfare as well as prayer and other features of a devout life. Churchmanship was part and parcel of church life.

The corporate dimension of Christianity has received increasing stress in recent years. Partly as a result of realising the importance of community solidarity in Third World countries, Evangelicals have perceived with new eyes the centrality of togetherness in the New Testament. Baptists should never have forgotten this truth. Believer's baptism, among many other things, is an oath of loyalty - which is the meaning of the word 'sacrament'. Loyalty is pledged to Jesus Christ and to the particular church that is being entered, the body of Christ in the locality. The baptised believer is dedicated to live (as the Christian Endeavour motto puts it) 'for Christ and the church'.

Part of the church member's obligations rests upon the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9). Each member shares in the priestly task of the whole church. Priests represent their people in the presence of God. Accordingly, each church member has a responsibility (and delight) of regular corporate worship. The members join in offering a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Another responsibility, partly fulfilled through public worship, is intercession. Prayer for others is a primary duty of the church (1Tim 2:1).

A member will also wish to attend the service which, above all others, expresses the togetherness of the church – the communion. Division at the table or unconcern for one another is a denial of the meaning of the feast (1 Corinthians 11:18- 21). The Lord's Supper is a regular opportunity to reaffirm loyalty to Jesus Christ and his church. Membership means much else in less formal contexts. It entails stirring each other up to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10.24). It entails lending what fellow church-members need. It entails simple friendship. Members will consider what time and money should be given to their church. They will also expect fellowmembers to suggest tasks for which their aptitudes may fit them. But they will not confine their thoughts about serving the church to the narrowly ecclesiastical sphere. Jesus may equip people for a career or for public service, and in either role they may be expressing loyalty to their church. A church draws people in, but it also sends people out. Membership should be a guarantee of prayerful interest in any Christian calling by the whole church.

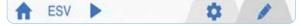
### Freedom

### Halatians 5 : 1-6, 13-18

### Galatians 5 : 1-6,13-18 Q

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.



sitteen

The way in which we are made right with God, Paul insists, is by faith. If we expect God to accept us on the grounds of observance of the law, as the Galatians would do if they were circumcised, we overturn the basis on which we have already been received. We are therefore free. Three ways of life are contrasted in this chapter. The way of the sinful nature, the flesh, is non-Christian. The way of the Spirit is the Christian way. That means that the third way, that of law, is also to be rejected (Gal 5:18). Jesus Christ has set us free.

Baptists have worked out something of what is involved in upholding freedom. The social leader of the first Baptist church, Thomas Helwys, wrote a book, The Mystery of Iniquity (1612) claiming full liberty for religious practice. It was a very early statement of the case for freedom of conscience. In the United States Roger Williams, a Baptist among the early colonists, likewise called for religious liberty. There should be no attempt by church or state to impose conformity to a particular creed. If there was an attempt to impose a false religion, persecution of true believers would follow. But equally if there was an attempt to impose Christian truth, people would conform for the wrong reasons and so be inoculated against the real faith. So freedom was recognised as implicit in the gospel.

Freedom must be maintained against unjustified authority today. The state has its claims upon us: we should, for example, pay our taxes. But the state should not step beyond its sphere by attempting to regulate belief. When it does so, the state becomes a marauding beast like one of those depicted in Revelation 13. In some countries that has been everyday experience. Many Baptists in Russia believed that their churches could be registered by the state, but those who did not suffer acute harassment or worse. In other countries a privileged church has harried Christians of other denominations. Romanian Baptists probably suffered more at the hands of the Orthodox Church than at the hands of the communist state. So in giving thanks for our own freedom, we should remember those who do not enjoy it in the modern world.

Further, we need to resist attempts to abridge Christian freedom on our own doorstep. There are risks that Evangelical Christians may be regarded by some officials in central or local government as peculiar fanatics and so treated less than fairly. And there are Christians who claim that obedience is the great virtue of the hour, not freedom. Leaders in the church, they hold, are to receive unquestionable submission. That is not the case. Leaders, as we have seen, are to be respected, but are subject to correction by their fellow believers in the local church. No leader has the right to infringe the freedom of other members by directing them, for example, in their plans for marriage. There is a sacred area of freedom in which, for all the benefit of guidance from Christian friends, believers are answerable only to their Lord.

### Mission

#### Matthew 28 : 16-20

### K Matthew 26 : 16-20 Q

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

🏫 ESV 🕨 🔅 🥒

eighteen

The Great Commission stands as the climax of Matthew's gospel. Jesus is about to ascend to the Father, his work on earth complete. His last words are a command to go. Followers of Jesus are not to stand still but are to reach out to those around them. Possessing the authority of their ascended Lord, they are to make disciples, baptise them and teach them. Christians are entrusted with the task of planting the gospel firmly in all nations. Consequently, as it has been put, the church is mission. The aim of spreading the gospel, though happily shared with many Christians of other denominations, is a matter of strong conviction amongst Baptists. The Declarations of Principle of the Baptist Union, after affirming the headship of Jesus Christ over each church and the nature of Christian baptism, has only one further clause. It declares 'that it is the duty of every disciple to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.' Baptists are constitutionally bound to the responsibility of evangelism.

The first section William Carey's *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792), argues that the Great Commission is a lasting command. From that belief sprang the Baptist Missionary Society, the earliest British foreign missionary organisation. Since that time Baptists have been among the most consistently Evangelical of Christian denominations.

The theological rooting of their practice of mission is the prophethood of all believers. Just as they share in Jesus' work as priest and king, so they participate in his prophetic ministry. They have to declare what God has done for humanity through Jesus Christ. That is not to say that all Christians are evangelists. On the contrary, the ascended Lord has equipped only some to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). We might expect about ten percent of the church to have the gift. But one hundred per cent of a church can be witnesses. Those who had been scattered by the earliest persecution of the church naturally told the message of Jesus (Acts 11:19f). Equally naturally, we can imitate them.

Mission involves more than testimony, however. It means supporting words with deeds. Christian people should look for chances of following their Lord in care for the whole person, bodies and minds as well as souls. This need not be a diversion from evangelism, but may be a powerful support for it. And Christians need above all to be present in the society around them, to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). What we are can be more eloquent than words or deeds. In whatever sphere we move, whether work or home, our primary role is to live out the new life that Jesus has brought us, to be what we are in Christ. This is his purpose in sending us into the world.