

QUEENSLAND BAPTISTS GUIDELINES FOR BELIEF AND PRACTICE

The following statements of the Beliefs and Values, Relationship, Autonomy and Accountability, and Mission and Evangelism are approved by Assembly as guidelines for the use of all Queensland Baptists.

Appendix A

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

Queensland Baptists recognise that every local church has liberty to interpret and implement Christianity within the constraints of the Word of God. The following Statement of Belief is an outline of what, according to general agreement, Queensland Baptists do believe that the Bible teaches.

1. About God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He is absolutely holy, infinitely good, great, all powerful, all present, all knowing. God is eternal. He eternally exists in three persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. This "Holy Trinity" is a union of these three co-equal Persons in one god-head. The one triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that exists in them. He continues to care for and govern His creation, working out His sovereign purposes for all that He has made.

2. About God the Father

The Fatherhood of the First Person of the Trinity is eternal. He has always had a Son and the relationship of Father to Son is from eternity and not only due to the Second Person of the Trinity becoming incarnate. Their Fatherhood and Sonship are the source from which we derive our approximations to fatherhood and sonship in our human relationships. Our being made in the image of God enables humanity to partially reflect God's eternal Fatherhood. God the Father is spirit and has never been incarnate but nonetheless has always been immanent in the actions of both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

3. About Jesus Christ

The eternal Son, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the member of the Trinity who became incarnate. He took on humanity without losing any of His deity in the integrated personality of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is thus still fully God and now forever also fully man. This incarnation was achieved through the virgin birth. Jesus lived a sinless human life in perfect obedience to the Father in a role of humility taken on with His incarnation. He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin and a substitution in our place at His death on the cross. By the Holy Spirit's power, God the Father raised Him bodily from the dead, completing the conquest of Satan, sin and death. The Father raised this Jesus to His right hand of power and there made Him Lord of all. Christ there intercedes on our behalf and the Father and He sent the Holy Spirit to be Christ's formal representative on earth. This crucified, risen and glorified Christ is the Saviour of the world who, at the climax of the ages, will return to earth to judge the living and the dead. At that time Christ will continue the process of our salvation with the deliverance of our bodies from the presence of sin and the transformation of all of the created order with the eventual introduction of the new heavens and new earth wherein "all things will be made new."

4. About the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and with the Son. He is introduced in the Old Testament as the "Spirit of God", but in the New Testament is designated "The Holy Spirit of God." He was the communication between the Father and His incarnated Son such that the God-man was called "the Christ" which means "anointed one." By the leadership and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Christ did the works of His Father from above. After Christ returned to Heaven He and the Father sent the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost to the believing disciples so that they might do the works of their heavenly Lord and be the body of Christ. The church was born by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. At his or her conversion to Christ every true believer is baptised into this body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in the world to make humankind aware of their sin and need for Jesus Christ, and to bring them to salvation. The Holy Spirit is received at conversion to Christ and permanently lives in these believers providing them with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives believers spiritual gifts at their conversion, to be used in service for God. Christians should seek to live daily under Christ's control through the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

5. About the Bible

The 66 books of the Protestant Bible are the written Word of God to humankind. The Bible is inspired in the sense that God breathed it out as His Word, thus making it truth from the being of God and alive with His life. The Bible is our supreme and absolute authority on all matters of faith and practice and everything that the Bible affirms. It was written by human authors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is both the Word of God and the Word of Man. Whilst Jesus Christ alone is the authority in all matters of Christian belief and lifestyle, His will in such matters is always revealed in, or will be consistent with His written Word, the Bible.

6. About People

People are made in the image of God and are the supreme focus of His creative work. The value of human life is guaranteed from this divine likeness and parentage and this is true for all humanity, not just Christians. Although every human being still displays evidence of their divine creation, they also display marked fallenness from their originally created potential, due to what the Bible calls sin. Sin is the deep-seated rebellion of the human heart against God. Sin taints even the good that we are and do. Sin cuts us off eternally from God and works as a dynamic festering of evil within our relationships, our attitudes and even our physical bodies. From the moment the human race fell, every individual has been hopelessly lost and destined for an eternity in hell.

7. About Salvation

Salvation is a free gift springing out of God's love, mercy and grace. It is ours only in the provision of the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect life, His atoning death, His powerful resurrection, His glorious ascension, His ongoing Priesthood, and His certain return. Salvation is at the one time something to be possessed, by coming to Christian conversion, and also something to be furthered through the Christian life. Salvation is to be prosecuted and worked out in our Christian lives and finally completed at the return of Christ. Salvation is totally provided for by the work of Christ without any contribution from us. It is effected by the work of the Holy Spirit; and it is contingent on personal faith which is not to be viewed as a work. Salvation has its antecedents in the sovereign election of God but begins in our experience with our repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It continues in sanctification through the ongoing practice of spiritual disciplines, and culminates in the redemption of our bodies and the glorification of our entire persons. Salvation is both something that we receive and something we seek to work out in our lives. It is the beginning now of the eternal life with God which will be ours throughout eternity.

8. About Eternity

People, once created are heading for an eternity in either heaven or hell. Hell is a place of permanent separation from God. The place of eternal security with God is "heaven". Eternal life begins the moment a person comes to saving faith in Christ but continues forever in Heaven. Heaven and hell are real places of eternal existence. All people, both believers and unbelievers, will be raised bodily at a resurrection of the dead, finally judged by the Lord Jesus Christ and thereafter dwell in heaven or hell. Following this judgment, the whole creation will be so transformed that righteousness and completeness will characterize believers and the new heavens and new earth forever.

9. About Baptism and the Lord's Supper and the Church

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two ceremonies given by Jesus Christ through Scripture to be observed by the church for all ages. We call them "ordinances" as they have been ordained by Christ. We do not call them "sacraments" because they do not convey Christ's salvation which is conveyed directly by the Holy Spirit in response to the individual's faith. Baptism is the immersion of believers upon their repentance and profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism pictures the connecting of the believer with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of thanksgiving for the sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is to be regularly practised until He comes. It portrays our continued reliance on Christ's work. It dramatises the basis, in Christ's atonement, of our continued membership in the body of Christ as cleansed Christians. It keeps us aware of our fellowship with the saints of all ages and with the other members of the body of Christ and keeps us looking forward to our future glorification in Jesus Christ.

The universal church consists of all persons, in heaven now or still on earth, who confess Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The local gathering of believers is the local expression of the same universal church. This local gathering is charged to meet regularly for worship, fellowship, teaching of the Scriptures and seeking to save the lost. Christ alone is the head of His church, both universal and local. The church is known as the Body of Christ. No other person, group, or religious organization can profess to be the head of His church.

10. About Service and Sacrifice

The Bible teaches that Christians should surrender every aspect of their lives to be a "spiritual service" or "offered ministry" to God. In this sense, every Christian is to minister as a servant of Christ. Serving Jesus Christ in the natural sphere of every day life is as important to Christ and His witness as is service undertaken with the church. Each Christian is given one or more spiritual gifts. These gifts give balance to the Body of Christ and enable Christ's work to continue. The empowerment for true service comes from intimacy with Jesus Christ through prayer, obedience to His Word, dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, and appropriate placement in ministry. There are some Christians who are called by God to full time pastoral and other leadership roles. These particular Christians receive this challenge from the Holy Spirit, and this call to a full time service for Christ is confirmed by the church. However it is the responsibility of every Christian to share the Good News concerning Jesus Christ with those God leads across their path, by both life and word.

CORE VALUES

There is no single formulation of belief and practice which all Baptists have affirmed. Indeed, for it to be so would violate the principles of freedom which are fundamental to being Baptist. Of the following core values, none are exclusive to Queensland Baptists, but collectively they form a set of principles which is distinctively Baptist.

1. The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Christians everywhere confess that Jesus is Lord. The life and practices of Queensland Baptist churches affirms the sole and exclusive Lordship of Christ. No other authority should be permitted to usurp Christ's position as Lord of all.

2. The authority of Scriptures

The Bible, as the true record of God's revelation, is the supreme written authority for our faith and practice.

3. Regenerate church membership

Baptist churches consist only of believers, those born anew by the Holy Spirit, who have freely responded to serve God together.

4. Believer's baptism by immersion

Being a believer's church, Queensland Baptists affirm that baptism is for believers only and that full immersion is the appropriate mode for baptism.

5. The ministry of the Holy Spirit

The presence of the one Holy Spirit in the life of every believer draws believers together into a community of faith. The Spirit is the source of spiritual gifts which bring vitality to worship and mission.

6. The priesthood of all believers

There is no intermediary between God and humanity except Jesus Christ. Baptists believe that every believer is called upon to fulfil the ministry of the church, to worship God and bear witness to His good news.

7. Congregational church government

Each local church has the freedom and responsibility to conduct its own ministry. Whilst affirming the place of leaders to guide, the local Baptist congregation has the final authority, under Christ, for the life and mission of the church.

8. Servant leadership

Queensland Baptists will exhibit a strong commitment to developing, identifying, installing and releasing, visionary, gifted, anointed, godly, servant leadership; who whilst leading, still are accountable to God through the Church Meeting.

9. Liberty of conscience

Baptists accept that no one can coerce a person to believe; no one can force a church to accept a creed. Central to the Baptist identity is a strong commitment for total religious freedom.

10. Diversity of practice

Queensland Baptists exhibit a strong commitment to diversity of practice and methodology in ministry between churches believing that this allows for congregational creativity, expression of unique personality, matching of local needs and resources, and the possibility of mutual enrichment.

11. Evangelical Christian doctrine

Queensland Baptists exhibit a strong commitment to evangelical Christian doctrine, and to evangelisation of all people in obedience to the Word of God.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG QUEENSLAND BAPTISTS

The early New Testament church, Luke tells us, ***devoted themselves to the apostle's word and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer*** (Acts 2: 42). Fellowship involved people in sharing with each other – building relationships – significantly fellowship had priority with prayer and hearing the Word taught. John too, placed a high value on Christian fellowship, ***We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us*** (1 John 1: 3). The participation of Christians in building shared relationships is clearly part of God's plan for us.

The foundation key to building Christian relationships has to do with God's concept of love. The new command of Jesus ...***Love one another***, simple though it may appear, is the basis of our relationships. ***As I have loved you***, Jesus said, ***so you must love one another***. He firstly commanded us to build our relationships on love, and secondly He set the standard of love. And then He gave us our 'corporate mission' for Christian relationships, ***By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*** (John 13: 34,35).

All of our relationships in Queensland Baptist churches are founded in God's love - whether within churches, among churches, between churches and support services, or across to other denominations.

Queensland Baptists build and maintain the relationships which God intended for them based on the following general principles.

- **Building relationships within the Body of Christ is essential for Queensland Baptists.** ...*there should be no division in the body, but that all its parts should have equal concern for each other.* (1 Cor 12: 25)
- **The Body of Christ is to be united but diverse.** Paul reminds us to *make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit***, and points out that the purpose of preparing God's people for service is *so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach **unity in the faith*** ... (Eph 4: 3, 13) However, within the united Body of Christ there are many, quite diverse parts and we are encouraged to celebrate that diversity (1 Cor 12).
- **Unity among Queensland Baptists does not mean 'uniformity'; and diversity does not mean 'division'.**
- **The Kingdom of God advances best through the cooperative effort of the Body of Christ – ie sharing together.** *From [Christ], the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work* (Eph 4: 16).
- **Queensland Baptists should help each other to develop their maximum potential – ie sharing with others.** *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* (Eph 4: 2).
- **Queensland Baptists need a denominational structure which will facilitate the building of relationships.**

AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG QUEENSLAND BAPTISTS

The concept of Churches being accountable is a strong New Testament emphasis. The basis of Jesus' prayer prior to His ascension was a striving for unity within the Church. "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21). Such unity can only be attained and maintained through careful lines of accountability.

As the Church developed out of the events of Pentecost the question was asked by the enquirers, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Guidelines were given in the answer which could be used as a form of accountability in that they needed to "Repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38). Following compliance to this instruction accountability is seen in that, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Despite there being thousands of converts meeting like this in individual small groups, it is noted that they came together daily for the purposes of gathering for prayer and teaching. As the Gospel produced Gentile converts who met as autonomous groups, accountability rules were laid down in order to maintain a Christian standard among the Churches (eg following the conversion of Cornelius and the establishment of the Church at Antioch, Cyprus, Cyrene etc).

In 2 Cor. 8:1-5 Paul defends the Christian commitment of the Macedonian Church as being a credible group in terms of fulfilling their responsibilities toward the other Churches of Asia and Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that many of Paul's prison letters emphasised the need for Churches to keep in touch with each other and to correct one another where wrongdoing was evident. His letters were in this sense a call for autonomous groups to be accountable cf Eph. 4:1ff "...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism...etc. "

The following definitions give meaning in the Queensland Baptist context to the words 'autonomy' and 'accountability' -

Autonomy: Freedom to function within mutually accepted position statements and policies.

Accountability: Mutual cooperation to ensure that we individually and corporately remain within the accepted position statements and policies.

Queensland Baptists establish the Autonomy and Accountability practises which God intended for them based on the following principles:

- Among Queensland Baptists there ought to be a balance of autonomy and accountability that promotes and protects unity and diversity.
- A set of accepted guidelines should be developed to which all individual churches are committed. Within this framework churches are then free to deliver their own style of ministry. An example is the multi-lane Highway - each driver has the freedom to drive in whichever lane he or she chooses as long as the predetermined road rules are obeyed.
- To uphold this philosophy there needs to be a process of accountability which includes disciplinary and conflict control measures mutually accepted by all parties.
- A covenant statement needs to be developed and agreed to by all parties. This document would be an addendum to each church's constitution.

MISSION AND WITNESS AMONG QUEENSLAND BAPTISTS

Queensland Baptists believe that every affiliated church and every Christian in those churches have the serious obligation to obey the Great Commission of Jesus, to *make disciples of all people, to baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to teach these new disciples to obey the commands of Jesus* (Matt 28: 19-20). Each Christian, we believe, is in a personal relationship with the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. Each Christian, then, has a responsibility to participate in the ministry of Christ's church. To share in mission and witness is a necessary function of being a Christian (1 Peter 2: 9)

The importance of this is that the confession of the gospel is at the heart of what it is to be a Christian and also what makes a local assembly of people into a Christian church. The confession that ***Jesus is the Christ*** is the foundation on which Queensland Baptists understand the church to be based. The gospel calls people to this confession.

Queensland Baptists use the term **evangelism**, in its broadest sense, to be the activity of fulfilling the Great Commission. Far from evangelism being some peripheral activity for outside the church and only for the 'outreach department', evangelism is at the heart of the very existence of the church. Evangelism should be one of the great passions of each church and each church member.

One of the essential, on-going needs of Queensland Baptists is to teach the gospel at depth so that we have evangelism in our hearts, so that each Christian can find their own expression of this vital message. It is through this that the church will naturally grow.

When the church has the gospel at its heart, the best way to send that gospel is to transplant the church into the new area. Church planting is a form of evangelism and is not an unrelated activity. Queensland Baptists need to make church planting a very high priority as this is the best way to spread the gospel in a holistic fashion.

The Bible also depicts evangelism as the exercise of a specialist evangelistic gift - a gift which can flow through numerous modes but often involves preaching. This specialist-gift form of evangelism involves the whole church in the way that the whole body needs the individual parts to be doing their roles. Sometimes the giftedness of the evangelist involves a 'reaping' function and at other times it can be a special ability to make the message clear in a particular medium. *One sows and another reaps but both rejoice together* applies to these specialist ministries. Queensland Baptists believe that there should be an intentional balance of broad-definition evangelism and specialist-gift evangelism. Evangelism by the church corporately, using a specialist, is often only successful if the church individuals carry the gospel with them in the sense of the broad definition of evangelism. Similarly, the ministry of the specialist is a good catalyst for the individual gospelising of church members.

Queensland Baptists should use every available resource to encourage the churches to rediscover the gospel; make available all varied helps to Christians taking the gospel to their local contexts; sponsor specialist, charismatically-gifted ministries; and major on church planting.

The End