

BAPTISTS: WORSHIP



The word "worship" comes from an old English word "worthship." **Worship is declaring by word and deed that God is worthy of our absolute love, total devotion and complete obedience in every aspect of life (Revelation 5:12).**

The Nature of Worship

We declare that God is worthy of our total dedication by the way we live daily (Romans 14:8). We demonstrate our love for God by our service to others through evangelism, missions, ministry and efforts to develop a more just and humane world.

Baptists emphasize these various aspects of worship. **Baptists also believe that there are times for worship in which our total focus is on God and our relationship with God.** Such times provide an opportunity to express adoration and praise for God, confess sin and seek forgiveness from God, offer thanksgiving to God and place our requests before God.

Thus Baptists have heralded the importance of private worship by individuals, of family worship in homes and of corporate worship by churches. Each of these ought to be characterized by freedom.

Worship by a Congregation

Baptists believe that congregational worship is an essential ingredient of church life (Hebrews 10:25). The New Testament does not provide specific instructions for corporate worship but does contain some examples of how the first Christians worshipped.

The Baptist denomination does not prescribe worship patterns for churches--or anything else, for that matter. Looking to the Bible for guidance, each congregation freely determines its own pattern. Worship by Baptist congregations differs among churches, but certain elements are almost always present. Freedom is a hallmark in each of these.

The day and the time for congregational worship varies among Baptists. However, most Baptists conduct worship services on Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). The number of services and the time of day for them differ among churches.

The persons leading in worship also vary. In a rather typical service the pastor presides and preaches, a song leader directs the singing, and designated members of the congregation and/or church staff lead in public prayer, give testimonies and/or take up the offering. Persons leading in worship are free to dress in whatever way a congregation feels is appropriate.

The Bible is central in Baptist worship (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Baptist denomination has no authority to direct how the Bible is to be used. Churches are free to choose the translations of the Bible to use, what texts to read and what place in the service the Bible is read. Reading the Bible by individuals and by the congregation responsively are both practiced.

Prayer is basic to all Baptist worship

services, both private and public prayer (Mark 11:17; Philippians 4:6). There are no denominationally prescribed prayers. Any member of the congregation may lead in prayer. Often the pastor leads in a "pastoral prayer" that may be written in advance but is usually spoken spontaneously.

A sermon is a major part of a Baptist worship service (Acts 20:7-9; 2 Timothy 4:2). Concerning the sermon, the preacher is free to choose the topic, theme, type and text. The denomination dictates none of these. The style of preaching is also up to the preacher; some read a manuscript while most preach from notes or extemporaneously.

Music plays a significant role in Baptist worship services (Psalms 100:2; Ephesians 5:19). Again, freedom is evident. Although in practically all churches the congregation participates in singing, the type of music that is sung varies greatly. In addition to the congregation, singing by choirs, praise teams, soloists and vocal groups can be heard in Baptist worship. The musical instruments used in worship services also vary, including pianos and organs as well as various other instruments.

"That Baptists are a 'free church people' finds expression in the wide variety of worship practices in their churches..."

William R. Estep
Why Baptists? A Study of Baptist Faith and Heritage

Testimonies are a common feature of Baptist worship services. The subject of the testimony depends on the person giving it and on the emphasis that the church is making at the time.

An offering is usually received in the services (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Baptist churches are supported by tithes and gifts that are freely given.

An appeal for decisions is part of most Baptist worship services, such as for the lost to trust in Jesus as personal Lord and Savior, for persons to become church members by "letter" or by "statement," for the "backslidden" to rededicate his or her life to Christ and for persons to commit to "full-time vocational service." Normally, people are encouraged to make their decision public, usually by coming forward and sharing the decision during an "invitation hymn" following the sermon.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper may be part of a worship service. Again, each congregation is free to choose when and how to observe these two ordinances.



A worship service can take place in almost any setting. However, weekly worship services usually take place in a building designed especially for this purpose.

The design of buildings for worship varies depending on the desires and resources of the church. A common arrangement is for the congregation to be seated in view of the Lord's Supper table located in front of the pulpit, sometimes with a Bible on it, with a baptistery located behind the pulpit. This arrangement highlights the centrality of the proclamation of the Word of God in worship and the importance of the two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Worship and Other Baptist Emphases

Baptist worship is closely related to Baptist doctrines and polity. For example, the belief in the **lordship of Christ** guides the Baptist conviction that in worship churches are to focus on Jesus and seek to find and follow his will.

The Baptist conviction regarding the **Bible as the authority for faith and practice** is manifest in worship by the centrality of the Bible. Because the Bible is a book from God and about God it deserves a central place in the worship of God. The Bible is the basis for prayers, sermons and music.

The biblical teachings about the **priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), soul competency, congregational governance and local church autonomy (Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8)** undergird the Baptist convictions that any believer is eligible to lead in worship and that each church under the lordship of Christ ought to be free to determine the place, elements and leaders for worship.

The Baptist conviction that Jesus gave **two ordinances for churches to observe, baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29),** guides both the physical layout of a worship center and the presence of these in worship.

The Bible's teaching that **salvation is only by grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10)** guides Baptist worship in that nothing is part of the service which could be construed as a means of salvation other than such faith.

Religious freedom (Galatians 5:1) shines brightly in the Baptist concept of worship. In order to be genuine, worship must be free, never coerced. Churches ought to be free to determine the day, time, place and order of worship. Because of Baptists' deep commitment to the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:18), such freedom ought not result in confusion, but rather things should be done "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Conclusion

Baptist worship of God differs greatly among churches but certain elements are almost always present because of basic Baptist convictions.

Whatever form it takes, Baptist worship ought always seek to glorify God and no one else.

For further information on worship, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.