

# Baptists and Christian Education



**Baptists believe in making Christian education available for all persons and deliver it in a multitude of ways.**

They support Christian education with their money, time, and talents. The Baptist denomination is indeed a teaching denomination.

## Reasons for Baptist Support of Christian Education

**The commitment to Christian education rests solidly on the teachings of the Bible,** as do all beliefs and emphases precious to Baptists.

**The Bible stresses the importance of enriching the mind as well as the spirit.** Jesus taught, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37).

The knowledge of God is best found in the Bible. The Bible instructs, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The Scriptures make us "wise unto salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15). A complete education, therefore, involves a study of the Bible.

**"The time has come when, as never before, our beloved denomination should worthily go out to its world task as a teaching denomination."**

George W. Truett  
Baptist pastor and denominational leader  
(from a sermon preached on steps of  
U. S. Capitol in 1920)

Christian education involves more than a study of the Bible, however. Since God is the creator of everything (Genesis 1–2; Colossians 1:16), Christian education appropriately includes study of the physical world as well as theological reflection. Such education adds a positive dimension to the pursuit of knowledge.

**Baptists also provide Christian education because they believe that it helps to make strong and effective churches and contributes to a just and stable social order.** Christian education not only prepares persons to be positive members of churches but also constructive members of society.

## The Relation of Christian Education to Other Baptist Principles

**Baptist beliefs and polity lead to the Baptist commitment to Christian education.** In turn Christian education enhances various Baptist

principles and practices. For example, the Baptist belief in the authority of the Bible calls for the ability of persons to read and understand the Bible.

Christian education sharpens the skills which enhance the study of the Bible.



The Baptist beliefs in **soul competency and the priesthood of all believers** call for Christian education. Although soul competency is a gift from God and not a human achievement, such competency to know and follow God's will is enriched by Christian education. Thus, Christian teaching and training can enhance the ministry of believer priests.

**Congregational governance and local church autonomy**, both Baptist polities, are strengthened by Christian education. A knowledge of Baptist beliefs and practices and of how and why these were developed helps church members to fulfill their governance responsibilities.

**Evangelism, missions, ministry, and the application of the gospel to daily life** are all made more effective by Christian education. Teaching and training provide skills and knowledge needed for persons to carry these out. **Religious freedom** is secured and advanced by people who are well-grounded through Christian education in the Bible and in history.

## Kinds of Christian Education

**Baptists make available resources for many kinds of Christian education, formal and informal.** They provide schools of various types for persons to receive a formal education. In addition, they make resources available for individuals to gain an informal, often self-taught, education. Many persons who lack formal education are well-educated, having utilized the many resources at their disposal.

**Baptists believe that education is for all persons.** They provide educational opportunities for children and adults, for males and females, and for persons of all races, religious preferences, and economic status. Instruction on a huge range of subjects is available through a variety of means.

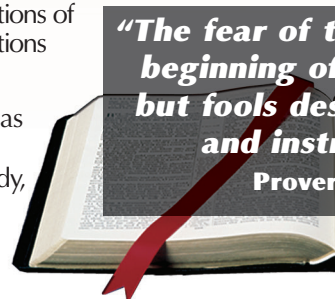
Some teaching and training is provided primarily **for vocational church leadership.** The Baptist denomination has no prescribed requirements for a level of education necessary for ordination or service as a pastor or other Christian leader. However, believing in the value of education, Baptists have established schools to provide education for such persons while also being aware that there are effective leaders apart from formal schooling.

Christian education **for laypersons** is also important to Baptists. Baptists view their universities, for example, not only as institutions to provide education for those in vocational church service but also for persons in all walks of life.

## Methods of Christian Education

**Baptists use a variety of methods and delivery systems to provide Christian education.** Churches, associations of churches, conventions, and various institutions and organizations are involved.

**Churches** deliver Christian education in many ways, such as sermons, Sunday School classes, Vacation Bible Schools, organizations for men and women, various programs of study, church libraries, retreats, and other means. In addition to the Bible and doctrine many other subjects are also studied.



Numbers of churches provide training needed for employment, such as literacy and job skills. Hundreds of churches operate kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schools.

**Associations of churches** provide teaching and training through encampments, retreat centers, seminars, and conferences. Some conduct ongoing education for pastors and other church leaders, usually in cooperation with a college or seminary.

**State and national Baptist bodies** foster institutions for education, such as academies, Bible colleges, universities, and seminaries, electing trustees and providing financial support. Other Baptist schools function independently of these bodies. Baptist schools offer bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs as well as non-degree courses and other educational opportunities.

**Baptist schools are involved in evangelism, missions, and ministry.** They not only equip persons to perform these in the future but also provide avenues for students, faculty, and staff to carry them out in the present. Participation in such activities is viewed as a vital ingredient in Christian education.

**Baptists produce a huge number of resources for educational purposes,** such as books, newspapers, magazines, movies, videos, material on the Internet, audio cassettes, DVDs, and CDs. Churches, associations, institutions, and state, national, and international Baptist bodies make these available.

In addition to distinctly Christian education, **many Baptists help provide education in general,** working in state and private schools from pre-school to university graduate programs.

## Challenges Related to Christian Education

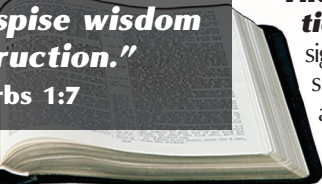
**Baptists deal with a number of challenges related to Christian education.** For example, in an increasingly diverse denomination a vast array of educational resources are required to meet the needs of a wide variety of persons.

**Churches must deal with the challenge of getting people to take part in educational opportunities.** Scores of activities clamor for the time of persons, young and old. Christian education must be relevant, appealing, and accessible in an assortment of ways.

**Colleges and seminaries** deal with issues that are often controversial, such as academic freedom, qualifications for teachers, and the content of curriculum. How best to integrate Christian faith and academic pursuits confronts Baptists with an ongoing challenge. It is vital that Baptist principles not be on the fringe but at the center of the educational process that provides a positive, high quality academic experience.

**The relation of universities to Baptist denominational entities,** such as Baptist state conventions, raises significant questions in regard to governance and financial support. The historical record of Baptist schools indicates that as schools loosen their relationship with Baptist conventions they tend to become less committed to Baptist distinctives.

**The Lord is the  
fountain of knowledge:  
He will multiply wisdom  
and increase knowledge.  
— Proverbs 1:7**



**Adequate financial support for Christian education** has been an age-old challenge. If denominational support for schools wanes, the institutions may turn more and more to other sources. This can lead to a lessening of commitment to Baptist principles.

Maintaining a school's commitment to being unapologetically Christian and distinctively Baptist is not easy. It requires strong leadership by the school's trustees, administration, faculty, and alumni to do so.

## Conclusion

Jesus gave a high priority to teaching. In fact, without reservation, he accepted the title of Teacher (John 13:13). Furthermore, he commanded his followers to be involved in teaching (Matthew 28:19-20). In following both the example and the command of Jesus, Baptists have been involved in teaching.

**At considerable sacrifice Baptists have provided a wide variety of educational opportunities for Baptists and others.** In so doing they have strengthened churches and society in general. Present and future generations need to continue the example set by Baptists of the past who believed strongly in Christian education.

*For further information, see [www.baptistdistinctives.org](http://www.baptistdistinctives.org)*

The basic material in this leaflet originally appeared in a series of articles in the *Baptist Standard* in 2005. Wanting to share information about Baptist distinctives, Noble Hurley, shortly before his death in 2004, established the Jane and Noble Hurley Baptist Identity Fund to provide for publishing the series. He asked William M. Pinson, Jr. and Doris A. Tinker to prepare the articles. The financial assistance of The Prichard Family Foundation and Vester T. Hughes, Jr. enabled this series of nineteen leaflets to be produced based on the articles. Skyler G. Tinker designed and formatted the leaflets for publication. Each leaflet is for both individual and group study.

The topics in this series: (1) Baptists: Who? Where? What? Why? (2) What Makes a Baptist a Baptist? (3) The Lordship of Christ; (4) The Bible as Authority for Faith and Practice; (5) Soul Competency; (6) Salvation Only by Grace Through Faith; (7) The Priesthood of All Believers; (8) Believer's Baptism; (9) A Regenerate Church Membership; (10) Congregational Church Governance; (11) Church Autonomy; (12) Baptist Church Life: Organization, Worship, Officers, Ordinances; (13) Voluntary Cooperation; (14) Evangelism; (15) Missions; (16) Ministry; (17) Christian Education; (18) The Application of the Gospel; (19) Religious Freedom.

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