



Baptists and Evangelism

"The great work of evangelism...should be undertaken by the church as a church, and that so far as possible every church-member should be enlisted in it."

The Watchman, December 10, 1896, p. 10

Baptists are committed to evangelism, to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ so that others might believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. **Commitment to evangelism as a priority is evident in practically every aspect of Baptist life.**

The Bases of Evangelism

Evangelism is not some sort of fringe concern but rather an integral part of who Baptists are. The Baptist emphasis on evangelism is not based on anything less than the beliefs and practices that comprise Baptist distinctives.

For example, belief in the **lordship of Christ** is a bedrock Baptist conviction. Because Jesus is Lord, those who follow him are to do as he commands. Jesus commanded, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). He further declared, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). The Great Commandment of Jesus (Matthew 22:36-40) calls for sharing the good news about him; love of neighbors certainly involves telling them about salvation in Christ.

For Baptists, **the Bible** is the authoritative source of teaching about doctrine and the Christian life. The Bible teaches that salvation from the power and penalty of sin, from hell to heaven, comes **only** through faith in God's grace gift of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:8-10). The Bible records Jesus' statement, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Salvation does not come from good works, or through sacraments, or by baptism or in church membership but only by a **faith response to God's grace gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.** Thus, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel so that people might know to believe in Jesus and be saved (Romans 10:13-17).

Salvation involves a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that salvation is experiential, that it results from an experience of personal repentance of sin and of faith in Christ. Jesus compared this to being born again (John 3:7). The experience is not necessarily emotional, but it is personal. No one can do this for another.

The Bible teaches that **the gospel is for everyone**, that **whosoever** believes in Christ as Lord and Savior can find salvation (John 3:16; Romans 10:13). Therefore, all people are to be urged to trust in Christ as Savior and to follow him as Lord.

The Means of Evangelism

Because of the importance of evangelism, Baptists utilize all legitimate means to urge people to believe in Jesus. Coercion is an illegitimate means of getting a person to follow Jesus. Jesus did not force people to follow him (Matthew 19:16-22). **To be genuine, a response to the gospel must be free and voluntary.** Therefore, Baptists insist that both the sharing of the gospel and the response to it ought to be voluntary.

Baptists believe that evangelism is every believer's opportunity and responsibility. Although some people are gifted by God as evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), all followers of Christ are to share the gospel. One aspect of the Bible's teaching about the priesthood of all believers is that each believer priest ought to minister to others by lovingly sharing the gospel with them. **Evangelism is for everyone, not just pastors, missionaries and evangelists.**

An individual's sharing the gospel with other people plays a vital role in evangelism. Baptists are urged to prayerfully share a personal testimony of their own faith commitment to Christ, in other words, to be a witness (Acts 1:6-8). Churches, associations and conventions all provide both training and encouragement for individuals to be witnesses.

Part of this sharing by individuals involves **living a positive Christian life**, one that attracts others to the gospel. However, Baptists realize that lifestyle alone cannot adequately communicate the essential truth of the gospel: Jesus' sinless life, his sacrificial death, his resurrection and the necessity of a faith response to him in order to be saved. Words are necessary (Romans 10:8-17). **Evangelism involves sharing the gospel in both deeds and words.**

Preaching the gospel (2 Timothy 4:2) is another way Baptists carry out evangelism. Preaching in worship services usually carries an evangelistic emphasis even when the sermon deals primarily with other issues. Baptists preach in special evangelistic services, outside of church buildings in the open and in encampments to urge people to believe in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Teaching (Matthew 28:20) by Baptists also carries an evangelistic emphasis. For example, Baptists consider that a Sunday school has a dual purpose—Bible study and evangelism. Teaching sessions in Vacation Bible School, retreats and conferences contain an evangelistic element. Baptist schools of all kinds exist not only to educate but also to evangelize.

Ministry to human need (Matthew 25:31-46) by Baptists also involves a dual purpose—to meet physical, mental and emotional needs and to share the gospel. Most Baptists believe that needs are not adequately met until both physical and spiritual needs are met.

Baptists provide specific organizations and meetings to encourage and develop evangelism. For example, Baptist conventions often have departments staffed with people who conduct evangelistic campaigns, help churches and other Baptist entities to improve evangelism, and provide conferences to instruct and inspire Baptists in evangelism. In a similar vein, many Baptist seminaries have professors who specialize in teaching evangelism.

Praying for Christians to boldly share the gospel (Acts 4:31) and for people to believe in

the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved plays a prominent role in Baptist evangelistic efforts. In fact, prayer ought to undergird every aspect of evangelism.

Obstacles and Challenges to Evangelism

The emphasis on and efforts by Baptists regarding evangelism are not without obstacles and challenges. Because of the vital importance of evangelism in helping people to find salvation in Christ, Satan will attempt to disrupt evangelistic efforts.

Apathy and indifference on the part of Christians certainly obstruct effective evangelism. The causes of such conditions are many, such as spiritual immaturity, lack of biblical understanding and a backslidden condition.

Fear plays a role in obstructing evangelism. People may fear failure, ridicule, rejection and even hostile responses if they endeavor to evangelize. Such obstacles may be overcome by realizing that the Holy Spirit is part of efforts to share the gospel (Acts 4:31). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would empower "witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit, not the person witnessing, brings conviction and commitment in the heart of the lost person.

Doubt in the uniqueness of Christ for salvation can sabotage evangelistic efforts. Universalism (the belief that everyone ultimately will be saved), relativism (the belief that Christ is only a way and not *the* way to salvation) and materialism (the belief that nothing exists except matter in motion and thus there is no spiritual salvation) are prevalent and undermine evangelism.

Conclusion

Baptists are an evangelistic people because of basic beliefs and utilize many means to share the Good News about Jesus Christ. Yet obstacles and challenges thwart evangelistic efforts. By prayer and spiritual growth in Christ, the difficulties can be overcome, and **evangelism can be widespread and effective.**

For further information on Baptists and evangelism, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
Romans 10:17

