

Baptists and Education



“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 1:7



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.

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 these skills.

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 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 many have been 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.

“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)

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 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 confront the challenge of getting people to take part in educational opportunities. Scores of activities clamor for the time of persons, young and old. Church 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 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.

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.

Conclusion

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. **Future generations need to continue the example set by Baptists of the past who believed strongly in Christian education.**

For further information on Baptists and education see www.baptistdistinctives.org.

