

THE JUDSON DECLARATION
from
The Coalition for Baptist Principles

From the beginning of the Baptist movement in the 17th century, Baptist men and women have prized freedom both for individual believers and for church communities. While Baptist churches have willingly combined their resources to form denominations, the freedom of the local church to work out its own forms of ministry has remained a hallmark of the Baptist movement. The result of this freedom has been a wide range of theology as well as diverse ministries. We affirm our commitment to such freedom.

We further affirm that Christ is the Lord of the individual and of the church, and both are free to follow where Christ may lead without permission or approval from an ecclesiastical structure.

The Coalition for Baptist Principles calls on all true Baptists to reaffirm those principles that have been dear to us as Baptist Christians.

Article 1: the living Christ is the final judge of our belief and actions.

The call to faith by Christ is rooted in the repeated call, "Follow me." We, therefore, reject all attempts to impose a creed or creed-like structure to be used as a litmus test for orthodoxy. We declare that we follow Christ. We do not believe that because a vote has been taken, the will of Christ has been discerned.

Article 2: the Bible is a dynamic, not a static document that needs to be interpreted for every age.

No one person or group can faithfully interpret the Bible for every age or every other group. We affirm the freedom of the community of faith to read and interpret the Bible under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We declare that this freedom is central to Baptist life and thought. We reject the attempts of some to impose their interpretation of the Bible onto others. We affirm our need for dialogue and kindness in our differences, but we still stand by our own freedom to read and interpret the Bible, relying on both the historical understanding of the church and on the best methods of modern Biblical study.

Article 3: the separation of church and state is good both for the church and the state, and it promotes the common good of all citizens.

We declare our belief that the historic core of Baptist thought resides on liberty of conscience apart from any coercion by the state. Generations of Baptist forebears have lived and suffered for this conviction, and we affirm the conviction that religious liberty is best served by a separation of church and state. The church does not need the state to prop it up, and we

reject any attempts by the church to dictate policy to the state. At the same time, we affirm our responsibility as citizens to have our voice heard and our moral concerns expressed.

Article 4: non-conformity to majority opinion is part of the Baptist heritage, and to submit Baptist theology to majority vote is to betray the heritage of people called Baptists.

From Roger Williams to Martin Luther King, Jr., Baptists have been free to stand for unpopular positions. We reject the efforts of some to force all Baptists into a single position on controversial issues. Baptists have always had diverse theological, political and social positions.

Article 5: the local church is free to make its own decisions under the Lordship of Christ.

A local Baptist church need not ask permission from any judicature to venture out on faith in any ministry of love. A given ministry may not be the ministry of choice for another Baptist church, but to threaten dis-fellowship due to a church's choice of ministry is a disservice to the Baptist heritage of local church autonomy. Baptist churches cooperate in associations and regions, not because they all agree, but because there are some things they can do better through pooling their resources.

Article 6: theological diversity among Baptists is a strength.

Theological conformity among Baptists has never been a goal. The diversity of our theological positions has strengthened Baptists throughout the world. In an environment of freedom, Baptists continue to find free inquiry into biblical, social, political, and economic issues of importance a gift from our heritage. Intimidation and exclusion of dissenters are outside the boundaries of the true Baptist spirit.

We declare that these are principles for which we can and must take a strong stand. The Coalition for Baptist Principles calls on all American Baptists to affirm these principles as true to our heritage, and to live them out with respect for one another's differences.

The Coalition for Baptist Principles
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