

## ***Discover South Main***

### SESSION 2 – “What does it mean to be a Baptist?”

One of the most requested items of information during Discover South Main sessions is, “What does it mean to be a Baptist? At South Main it is much more important to be a Christian than a Baptist. We are Christians by conversion and Baptists by choice. Once we follow Jesus, He will lead us to a church where we can learn and grow, as well as to use our talents and abilities in His service.

#### OUR BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

Here are a few distinctives of the Baptist denomination. They are organized as an acrostic, using the word BAPTIST, to help you to remember them. If you find a church with these distinctives, it is most surely a Baptist church!

**“B” stands for “Believer Baptism.”** Christian baptism in the New Testament was for believers. Members of other denominations that practice infant baptism sometimes want to experience being baptized as believers. They sense that the Lord wants them to take a public stand for their faith. We extend the invitation to be baptized as believers to all Christ-followers!

**“A” stands for “Autonomy of the Local Church.”** Baptist churches are locally autonomous, without a local, district, or national church authority over them. We call our own pastors, build our own buildings, and run our own affairs. We join together with other churches to send missionaries, build and run colleges, and do charitable work, but this is a cooperative endeavor and totally voluntary.

**“P” stands for “Priesthood of the Believer.”** Believers are competent under Christ’s authority. We can read and understand the Bible by ourselves. We can pray to God without having to go through clergy or saints. We can be forgiven by Christ directly without having “absolution” prescribed by a priest. Because of Christ, we need no “go-betweens” between us and God.

**“T” stands for “The Truth of God’s Word.”** Baptists (at least the theologically conservative ones) believe the Bible is infallible (unfailing) and inerrant (without error). The Bible is God’s Word and is the basis for all of the instruction we need in knowing and serving Christ.

**“I” stands for “Immersion.”** Baptists baptize by immersion instead of sprinkling or pouring. Indeed, the biblical word translated “baptism” is the Greek word, “baptize” which means, “To immerse”. When a follower of Christ is baptized, he or she is saying non-verbally, “I believe in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of my sins.”

**“S” stands for “Security of the Believer.”** Those who are saved are secure in Christ. They will never lose their salvation. God said in His word, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Those who say they are saved and later reject the faith may not have ever truly

been saved at all. God promises eternal life to all who receive him, and “eternal” life by definition cannot be undone.

**“T” stands for “Time, Talent, and Tithe.”** Christianity is an “ethical faith”. The superstitious Greek and Roman religions used sacrifices, conjured-up potions, and spells to try to move God to make their lives better, without any conversion of their thoughts or actions. But when Christianity burst on the scene it rightfully recognized that faith in God should lead to changes in how believers use their time, invest their talents, and spend their money.

#### OUR BAPTIST ALLIANCES

**The Lakeland’s Baptist Association.** *42 churches that cooperate together for fellowship, ministry, and outreach for the spiritual transformation of Greenwood and Abbeville Counties.*

**The South Carolina Baptist Convention.** *1,877 churches that fellowship together with the goal of ministry, evangelism, higher education, and church planting in our state.*

**The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).** *45,000 independent churches cooperating together in a world-wide effort of missions, church strengthening, education, outreach, and church planting.*

#### WHAT IS THE SBC?

***It is the largest association of Christian churches in South Carolina and in America.*** One out of every 10 churches in America is affiliated with the SBC (41,000 churches and 16 million members — more than most other denominations combined).

***It is the most diverse association of churches.*** SBC churches include every race, nationality, and ethnic group. Each Sunday in the United States alone, Southern Baptists worship in over 80 languages!

***Why not just be an independent church?*** We *ARE* an independent church! Every SBC church is completely independent. There is no denominational control or hierarchy, as there are in most other denominations. Each local church is self-governed and determines its own affairs, choosing their own pastors, purchasing and owning their own buildings and assets, and determining its own programs, with a congregation-led form of church government.

#### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF AFFILIATING WITH THE SBC?

***It allows us to identify with other Christians around the world*** who are known for their commitment to the Bible. Unlike other groups, the SBC has no man-made “creed”. The Bible is our only authority.

***It allows our church to participate in the largest missionary organization in the world.*** Through the SBC “Cooperative Program” we help support over 5,000 missionaries in North America and 5,000 missionaries in 146 countries around the world.