

Baptist Principles
As described by Walter Shurden in “The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms”

The Freedom	Definition	Details	Related Responsibilities
Bible Freedom	The Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church. Christians are both free and obligated to study and obey the Scriptures	Freedom of access to the Bible and freedom in interpretation are means of arriving at the mind of Christ. It’s the authority in moral responsibility, theological beliefs and human relationships. It’s an open approach to an ongoing study under the guidance of Christ. Baptists avoid creeds or other prescriptive statements.	Bring the best scholarship to bear on our study. [What did words and statements originally mean, when and under what circumstances were they written, what thought patterns were dominant at the time?] Avoid letting others decide or falling back on lazy subjectivism or insisting on personal preferences.
Soul Freedom	We affirm the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without the imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government.	Jesus (Matt 16:13) insisted on a personal response to the question of his identity. Each human is created in God’s image and competent under God to make moral, religious and spiritual decisions. Faith is relational, not ritualistic. And grace is appropriated (accepted/incorporated) personally and individually. Christian conversions are born of conviction and are unique in style and type for each person.	To make moral, spiritual and religious decisions with the best understanding of Christ as one can wield, intending to obey. Commit to growth and maturation in the faith. Refrain from formalistic ways of practice, focusing instead on “what” and the “who.”

The Freedom	Definition	Details	Related Responsibilities
Church Freedom	Local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ.	The church practices a free double promise: to follow Jesus and to help each other (covenant) to do so. The church seeks a membership composed only of those who want to be a part of it. Baptists use the mechanism of full participation of the congregation, acknowledging the authority in the hands of all. Baptists do not equate the voice of the majority nor of the pastor with the voice of God. Baptists churches may and do worship in different forms.	Engage freely in witness and mission with other congregations and denominations: Associate. Participate in the official decision-making of the church, including those about worship style and practice and those about how the church will witness: evangelism, mission, social justice.
Religious Freedom	Freedom OF religion, FOR religion, and FROM religion, insisting that Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar.	The passion for this freedom is anchored to the nature of God, of humanity and of faith. God is the ultimate source of liberty. It would debase God's creation to deny any person the freedom of conscience.	Maintain for civic leadership the distinction between and separation of church and state. Pray for the state and declare the judgments of God related to government, citizenship and rights. Provide moral and spiritual reinforcement for the truths which undergird justice and peace.