

# Great Hope is An Independent Baptist Church

## “Independent” means . . .

1. We have no national headquarters
2. We have the responsibility of following the leader of our church: Jesus Christ – Ephesians 1:22

## We are Baptist Church – we hold to the “Baptist Distinctives”

1. **Biblical Authority**
  - a. 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20-21
  - b. The Bible is the final authority in all matters of belief and practice because it bears the absolute authority of God Himself
  - c. Whatever the Bible affirms, Baptists accept as true.
  - d. No human opinion or decree from any church group can override the Bible
  - e. No so-called “word of knowledge” or any human experience usurps the Written Word of God
2. **Autonomy of the Local Church**
  - a. Colossians 1:18; 2 Cor. 8:1-5, 19, 23; Acts 15
  - b. The local church is an independent body accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church
  - c. All human authority for governing the local church resides within the local church
  - d. No religious hierarchy outside the local church may dictate a church’s beliefs or practices
  - e. Autonomy does not mean isolation – we do cooperate with other churches of like faith
3. **Priesthood of the Believer**
  - a. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:9-10
  - b. Every believer today is a priest of God and may enter into His presence in prayer directly through our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ
  - c. No other mediator is needed between God and people
  - d. As priests, we can study God’s Word, pray for others, and offer spiritual worship to God
  - e. We all have equal access to God, regardless of how long we’ve been saved, how well we know the Bible, or our position in our church
4. **Two Ordinances**
  - a. Believer’s baptism by immersion in water after salvation, picturing our union with Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead – Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 8
  - b. The Lord’s Supper, commemorating His death for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and His promised return – Matthew 26; 1 Cor. 11:23-32

**5. Individual Soul Liberty**

- a. Romans 14:5, 12; 2 Cor. 4:2, 5:10; Titus 1:9
- b. Every individual, whether saved or lost, has the liberty to choose what he believes
- c. No one should be forced to assent to any belief against his will
- d. We Baptists have always been opposed to religious persecution
- e. Remember, however, that this liberty does not exempt anyone from the responsibility to the Word of God or from accountability to God Himself

**6. Saved, Baptized Church Membership**

- a. Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 12:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; Ephesians 4:3
- b. Local church membership is restricted to individuals who give a testimony and evidence of person faith in Christ and have publically identified themselves with Him in believer's baptism
- c. When members of a local church are believers, a oneness in Christ exists, and the members can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

**7. Two Offices**

- a. Pastor
  - i. 1 Timothy 3:1-13
  - ii. Acts 20:17-38
  - iii. Titus 1
  - iv. Other titles –
    - (1) Elder
    - (2) Bishop
    - (3) Overseer
  - v. All refer to the same office
- b. Deacon
  - i. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Acts 6; Acts 8
  - ii. Assist the pastors and serve the church

**8. Separation of Church and State**

- a. Romans 13:1-7; Matt. 22:15-22; Acts 15:17-29
- b. God established both the church and the state government, and He gave each its own distinct sphere of operation
- c. The government's purpose is outline in Romans 13:1-7
- d. The church's purpose is outlined in Matthew 28:18-20
- e. Neither should control the other, nor should there be an alliance between the two
- f. Baptists in a free society can properly influence government toward righteousness, which is not the same as a denomination or group of churches controlling the government