Course Syllabus

Course Title: Baptist History and Polity

Semester: J-Term 2025

Instructor: Pastor Randy Powell
Instructor contact: 616-552-2103 (cell), rpowell@actsministryschool.com

---

Course Description

This course explores the origins, development and basic beliefs of Baptists, emphasizing an appreciation for the importance of knowing our rich Baptist heritage. There will be an examination of the association, regional and national structures of ABC-USA and of the typical organization styles and policies of the local church. As opportunity presents itself, concepts of congregational transformation and spiritual formation will be incorporated in the course.

Course Objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the primary forces and movements within Church History that influenced the formation of the Baptist Movement.
2. Have an understanding of the nature of the growth of the Baptist Movement from individual congregations to associations, to societies, and finally denominations.
3. Know and appreciate the Baptist distinctives.
4. Understand how Baptist polity affects church governance.

Online Classroom Format

All class sessions will be held online using Google Meet. All course materials, including the submission & grading of assignments, will take place on Google Classroom. Please watch the tutorial on navigating Google Classroom, if you are unfamiliar with the platform.

Required Texts

A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice: Second Revised Edition
By Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson

Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents
By Joseph Early Jr.

Other Required Materials

A (Very) Brief History of the Baptist Church – By Clayton Kraby
https://reasonabletheology.org/a-very-brief-history-of-the-baptist-church/

The Origins and Development of Baptist Thought and Practice
https://www.abc-usa.org/what-we-believe/our-history/

Park Street Divided: Congregation Asked to End Conflict with a Vote
Christianity Today article - Microsoft Word version of the CT article

The London Baptist Confession
https://www.chapellibrary.org/pdf/books/lbcw.pdf

Pre-recorded class lectures on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL00gfcvjAglqQKi0M9u8xCawX0iO6BeXr

Course Requirements

1. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/11/25**: Watch all 11 of the pre-recorded sessions (NOT the recordings of class #1 and class #2 from 2023) https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL00gfcvjAglqQKi0M9u8xCawX0iO6BeXr.

   It would be beneficial to take notes while doing so and to write down any follow-up questions and requests for clarification that the materials suggest.

2. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/11/25:** Obtain a copy (digital or paper, it doesn't matter) of the bylaws (hint: some churches call it a constitution instead) of your local church. It would be wise to begin this search early as in some churches it may be difficult to find an up-to-date version of the document. (Call Pastor Powell ASAP if you are unable to obtain a copy of your church's governing document)
   - **a.** Answer in a Word document (2-3 pages, double spaced) the following questions about the organization of your church:
     - **i.** How many boards/committees are authorized/required by the bylaws?
       - **1.** Are the responsibilities and authority of each of these groups spelled out adequately in the bylaws?
     - **ii.** How many elected positions are authorized/required by the bylaws?

1. Are there sufficient members in the church to support this number of elected leaders?

iii. Is the role of the pastor(s) clearly defined in the bylaws?
   1. What areas of responsibility is he/she given by the bylaws?

iv. Who has authority, according to the bylaws, to authorize the spending of funds?
   1. Is this authority shared? If so, which boards/committees are responsible for what areas of spending?
   2. What is the process required by the bylaws to authorize expenditures not contained in the current year's budget?

v. Do the bylaws clearly explain how to amend this document?
   1. What is that procedure?

vi. Are there any areas of the church's ministry/mission or leadership structure that are missing from the bylaws?

3. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/11/25**: Read the forwards, preface, and chapters 1-2 and 8-12 of *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, *Second Revised Edition*.

4. **PRIOR to the start of the first class 1/11/25**: Read Chapters 1-4, 6, 12, 14, 16, 22-23, 25, 29-30, 35, and 40 of *Readings in Baptist History*

5. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/11/25**: Read the online materials listed above under "Other Required Materials"

6. **PRIOR to the start of the second class on 1/25/25**: Read chapters 3-7 of *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, *Second Revised Edition*.

7. **Between the first and second class (1/12-1/24)**: Respond in Google Classroom to all 5 Message Board prompts below with: (1) An original opinion of no less than five sentences, (2) and at least two responses, of 1-2 sentences each, to the postings of others in the class. In all message board posts an effort to take the issues seriously and to treat the postings of your fellow classmates with kindness and grace when you respond to them is required; if either are lacking, credit will not be given toward the required post total {5 original, 10 responses to the posts of others}.

   a. Re-baptize? The question of how to treat infant baptism. Respect what was done before, or 'get it right'? (See ABC statement, p. 107 in *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*) In brief, what is the theological rationale for your view?
   b. Open Communion? Can I take communion at that kind of church? Are they welcome to take communion with us? In brief, what is the theological rationale for your view?
   c. Scenario: The UMC moves its pastors every few years within a district (goal is 6-7 years spent at each church), what are the pros and what are the cons of itinerant pastors? How does this compare to our Baptist at-will view of pastoral leadership?

d. Scenario: Your local Baptist Church has been asked to participate in a Thanksgiving worship service with area churches including a Seventh-Day Adventist Church, what is the theologically sound response? Why? How would your answer change, if it does, if a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon congregation wanted to participate?
e. Scenario: Your local Baptist Church has been asked to join a food/clothing/or housing initiative in your community, those supporting it (donations and volunteering) will include Muslims, Hindus, and the non-religious, what is the theologically sound response? Why?

8. **By the end of Tuesday (1/28/25) following the 2nd class**: Write about your experience in moving toward ministry, how was it helped and/or hindered by the Baptist laissez-faire method of leadership recruitment, training, and retention? Did you have adequate guidance and mentorship? How did you make decisions when responding to your perceived calling to serve?

    a. This is a personal journey and will be read only by Pastor Powell, not shared for in-class comment
    b. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.

9. **By the end of Tuesday (1/28/25) following the 2nd class:** Utilizing the opening paragraph of page 57 from *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* as a writing prompt: Make the case for how well the Baptist tradition, in general, has achieved the balance between: (1) avoiding constricting control and (2) chaotic disorder. Draw upon your own experience in a local Baptist church, and with Baptist associations and denominations (ABCUSA or otherwise) to inform this opinion.
    a. This is primarily calling for reflection upon your own experience and understanding, not a research paper about other people, other churches, etc.
    b. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.

10. **By the end of Tuesday (1/28/25) following the 2nd class:** Write about an **ecumenical effort**, whether of worship or service, that would fit the situation in which your Baptist Church is situated. What gap in fellowship, outreach, or witness could be filled, how difficult would acceptance be within your church and within the community at large?
    a. This is primarily a visioning effort of dreaming about what could be created or enhanced in the context in which you serve. Share enough of the details of your church and community to place your potential ecumenical effort in context (a paragraph or two should suffice).
    b. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.

Grading

A final grade will be calculated based on the following:

Class participation – 10%

Reading assignments (self-reported) – 20%
Watching Pre-recorded videos – 10%
Church bylaws analysis – 10%
Message Boards, 10% your posts, 10% responses to those of others – 20%
Three papers, 10% each – 30%

Grades to be assigned at the end of class shall be:

A+ = 97-100	A = 93-96
B+ = 89-92	B = 85-88
C+ = 81-84	C = 77-80
D+ = 73-76	D = 69-72

Not Passing = 68 and below

Academic Policies

Plagiarism policy:

A.C.T.S. defines Plagiarism as "using someone's ideas, words, or data, without proper acknowledgement, as one's own original work." To avoid plagiarism, you must 1) cite the original author every time you use his or her exact written or spoken word (by enclosing them with quotation marks if fewer than four lines or indenting as a block quote if four or more lines) or 2) paraphrase someone's written or spoken words and recognize the author/source in the body of the text or as a footnote. Plagiarism is an act of dishonesty and violation of academic integrity.

If an Instructor determines that an act of plagiarism has occurred, after talking with the student, the Academic Dean will be notified. Possible consequences will be considered, including: a failing grade for the work, a failing grade for the entire course, asking the student to redo the assignment, etc.

Late Assignment policy:

- Because the reading assignments and pre-recorded videos enable students to productively participate in the class sessions, completing them after-the-fact will not be accepted for credit.
- Likewise, the discussion board posts will enhance the second class on 1/21, therefore no late completion will be accepted.
- The three writing assignments will be accepted through the end of the Tuesday (1/24/23) following the 2nd session. They will not be accepted later than this given that grades for the class need to be turned in at the end of the week.
- Summation: No late work for this class will be accepted.

Course schedule

1/11	Class #1a	9-12 AM
1/11	Class #1b	1-3 PM
1/25	Class #2a	9-12 AM
1/25	Class #2b	1-3 PM

Baptist History and Polity: In-person hour by hour outline

1st Class

9:00 – 9:30	Introduction
	Q&A about assignments
9:30- 10:30	Review pre-recorded materials
10:30- 12:00	Review "other required materials", *London Baptist Confession* in particular with detail (preview of polity issues contained within)
LUNCH	
1:00- 2:30	Review and discuss, *Readings in Baptist History*
2:30-2:45	Message Board topics discussion, review of what a desired post is and is not.
2:45- 3:00	Q&A

2nd Class

9:00-10:00	Q&A about assignments
	Message Board post follow-up: tie-ins to issues of polity, aspects students overlooked and/or unexpected foci of discussion.
	Follow-up from 1st Class material, additional questions
10:00-12:00	Polity lecture and discussion
LUNCH	
1:00-2:00	Polity lecture and discussion continued
2:00-2:30	Discussion: CT article on Park Street, what lessons can we learn from this?
2:30-3:00	Three mini-paper final assignments discussed