

A Baptist Worship Theology



This document is intended to be used as a general guideline for Baptist ecclesiastical worship, specifically within a church service during a time of corporate worship. This document is deliberately concise in order to be manageable and useful.

A Definition of Worship: Christian worship is “the gift of participating through the *Spirit* in *the incarnate Son’s* communion with the *Father*. It means participating in union with Christ, in what He has done for us once and for all, in His self-offering to the Father, in His life and death on the cross. It also means participating in what He is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in His mission from the Father to the world. There is only one true Priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father.”¹ Therefore, worship is a response to union with Christ and reflects the work of God in our lives; a life lived to the Father, in Christ, through the Spirit, and on behalf of all of creation.

As Baptists we believe we are gathered together in Christ, by the Spirit, before the Father, as we covenant with each other to bring glory to the Triune God in word and deed, and in song and action. Worship is a response to God’s goodness and grace to us and as such our worship seeks to name Christ in our midst.

The foundations for what constitutes Baptist worship include:

- **Baptist Worship is Trinitarian.**
As Baptists we hold firmly to the doctrine of the Trinity, three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, in one being. Focusing on the unity within the Trinity and our unity with Christ, as our mediator.
 - **In practice this means** we affirm the role of Jesus as Lord and our reliance on the work of the Spirit. However, we also want to highlight all the persons within the Trinity.
- **Baptist Worship is unashamedly Christ-focused.**
As Baptists we gather together as one, affirming loudly that ‘Jesus is Lord’! Christ forms the center of our gatherings as we joyfully submit to His Lordship, celebrating His resurrection as He is present in our midst.
 - **In practice this means** we are looking to see that the name of Jesus (or Christ) is prominently displayed in our worship. At times, many songs choose to refer to Christ as “He” or “Him”. As Baptists, we would look to see the name of Jesus (or Christ) said plainly and clearly so there is no confusion about whom we worship.
- **Baptist Worship is open to the workings of the Holy Spirit.**
Worship is both intellectual and spiritual. God seeks worship from our hearts and it is God’s prompting that inspires our worship (including our response, words, prophecy, edification) by way of the Holy Spirit.² See 1 Cor 14:26, Eph 5:18-19, Col 3:16.
 - **In practice this means** we are looking to see lyrics that affirm our reliance and obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit within us; that affirm the gift and fruit of the Spirit evident in those who follow Christ.

¹ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 20–21.

² Christopher John Ellis and Myra Blyth, *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2005), xvi.

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- **Baptist Worship is communal and covenantal.**

A key characteristic of being Baptist is an emphasis on the local congregation, (where Christ is both present and active by His Spirit), the gathered community and its life together as a community of worshippers under Christ.³ Also, as Baptists we recognize that we have lovingly entered into a covenant with Christ (this relationship is known as the 'vertical') and to one another (the 'horizontal').⁴ Our life together is not simply of our own choosing, it is a reality established by God who draws us into relationship with Himself and one another through Jesus Christ by the Spirit's power. As we are a priesthood of all believers, we join together in worship, not just being led from the front.

- **In practice this means** we are looking to see lyrics that reflect our communal gatherings. These would use "We" and "Us" in place of "I" and "Me". We are also looking for lyrics that communicate the close kinship bond between Baptist congregants with each other, as well as the commitment between us and God to oneness. We are also looking for language that expresses the high Baptist participation in worship, as well as our affirmation that the entire congregation takes part in worship, not merely the select few leading it.

- **Baptist Worship recognizes New Zealand's indigenous people.**

As Baptists we see the Māori language, culture and practices as an indispensable part of our Baptist identity. As a result, we aim to incorporate Māori language (*Te Reo*), traditions and culture into our assemblies as well as our worship, both lyrically and structurally. As the church, we are called to live-out Christ's reconciliation of one new humanity, which displays God's glory.

- **In practice this means** we are looking to see both a blend of the English and Maori languages within songs as well as full songs in Te Reo Māori. Beyond the language, we are actively looking to see worship by Māori, in partnership with Māori and specifically creating a worship environment for Māori. Therefore, please ensure that you are using Te Reo correctly, that you are pronouncing the words correctly and that the words are used respectfully as we do not want to see Te Reo used incorrectly or in a tokenistic way.

- **Baptist Worship is Kingdom Orientated.**

Worship is not only about the present, but it is also orientated towards our future hope in Christ and the Kingdom to come.

- **In practice this means** we are looking for themes within our songs that focus on the work of Christ in our gatherings now, and in the hope that is to come. We have songs that sing of either, but not often of both.

³ Ibid., xviii.

⁴ "Baptists clearly thought of the gathering of the local church in covenant terms" even if it was not clearly stated. Paul S. Fiddes, "Tracks and Traces; Baptist Identity in Church and Theology," *Stud. Baptist Hist. Thought* 13 (2003): 31.

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- **Baptist Worship affirms Scripture.**

As Baptists we affirm the inspiration of the Bible and its authority in all matters of faith and practice.⁵ As Baptists we are committed to reading scripture in community, together as one as we seek the Spirit to awaken us to Christ's will, which is revealed in our gathered life. Reading scripture communally is central to Baptists as it is in our gathered life that Christ promises to be present. Therefore, all our worship conforms to what is taught in Scripture and should be based upon its teachings.

- **In practice this means** we are looking to see Scripture incorporated into these songs wherever possible as we uphold those words as God's revelation to us.

- **Baptist worship is Free**

Baptist hold firmly to freedom of conscience, freedom to respond to the Lord without coercion, and freedom of varied expressions and embodiments of the faith in Jesus Christ. In John 4 we are encouraged to worship in Spirit and Truth, both of which are inherently freeing. As Baptists we are wholeheartedly committed to Scripture and the gathered body of Christ (His church) but we do this in response to the work of Christ in a spirit of life, truth and freedom as there is true freedom in Christ.

- **In practice this means** our songs will be rooted in Christ's Truth and Life. Baptist worship has a soul and expression of freedom and life.

⁵ NZ Baptist Statement of faith: <http://www.baptist.org.nz/general/Being-a-Baptist/>