Best Church Practices

The local church is the primary instrument through which God is working in this age. In Scripture, God has furnished His church with a sacred deposit of both *orthodoxy* (right belief) and *orthopraxy* (right practice). Together, these two components constitute the lifeblood of the church and its reason for existing.

Church history amply demonstrates that whenever the church has neglected one or both of these components—or has disproportionately emphasized one component to the neglect of the other—disaster has surely followed. Recognizing this, Baptist churches have traditionally sought to maintain and regulate both orthodoxy and orthopraxy by means of a statement of faith (emphasizing right *belief*) and a church covenant (emphasizing right *practice*).

Regarding the foregoing to be true, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches urges all Christian congregations to develop and maintain healthy church practices that are informed by Scriptural teaching and sound doctrine. To that end, be it resolved that

1. We acknowledge the principal God-ordained functions of the church (Acts 2:42–47) to be
   1. preaching and teaching God’s Word (2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9) ,
   2. evangelism and discipleship (Matt. 28:18–20),
   3. ministry and service to the Lord and to one another (Rom. 15:26, 27; 2 Cor. 9:12),
   4. administration of the ordinances (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23–25),
   5. prayer (Col. 4:2)
   6. fellowship (1 John 1:7), and
   7. worship (John 4:23, 24; Phil. 3:3).
2. We commit to strive for excellence and intentionality in all the ways we fulfill these functions.
3. We exhort all pastors and ministry leaders to carry out their ministries with an abundance of grace, gentleness, and charitableness toward all (2 Tim. 2:24–26), recognizing that Christian ministry should not be characterized by pugnaciousness or heavy-handed authoritarianism, but rather by humility and service (Phil. 2:5–8).
4. We acknowledge church discipline (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:6) as a practice vital to maintaining the spiritual health and God-honoring fellowship of the church, and recognize church membership and church covenants as helpful tools for facilitating church discipline.
5. We call on all churches to be regularly involved in community outreach and church planting efforts (2 Tim. 4:5) in order to foster the spread of the gospel and to demonstrate Christ’s love to the world around us (Acts 1:8; Matt. 22:39).
6. We understand that there are certain areas pertaining to church practices[[1]](#footnote-1) in which well-meaning, godly people can disagree on the particulars without violating Scripture. In these areas, we urge a spirit of tolerance and generosity, recognizing that in essential matters unity is required, but in nonessential or uncertain matters liberty is permitted and charity is prescribed (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8).
7. We rely on God’s providence and the leading of His Holy Spirit to enable our performance of these best church practices, trusting in the assurance of Scripture that “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

*Resolved by the messengers of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, meeting together in regular conference June 27—30, 2017, at Sandy Cove Ministries Center in North East, Maryland.*

1. E.g., selecting the music style to be used in corporate worship, choosing a Bible translation, deciding how best to contextualize the gospel message in a given culture, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)