



# Religious Liberty

SUNDAY

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# Why Baptists Should Hold to Religious Liberty for All

BY NATHAN A. FINN

Defending religious freedom is part of the “DNA” of what it means to be a Baptist.

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS A HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE

The oldest Baptist confessions affirm religious freedom, though they often focus more on freedom for Christians who did not belong to state churches. Later confessions written in contexts without a state church, including the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), applied the principle more broadly. Even from our earliest days, Baptist thinkers applied the principle of religious liberty to members of other religions and no religion.

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS A THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Baptists have always tied religious liberty to a closely related idea: liberty of conscience. Echoing the language of the Second London Confession, the BFM (2000) states, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it.” Because God is

lord of the conscience, the conscience should be free except where God has directly bound it by his Word.

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS A MISSIONAL PRINCIPLE

For Baptists, religious liberty is a missional principle rooted in God’s character and his command to make disciples from among all peoples. When we defend the soul freedom of unbelievers to hold incorrect or irreligious views, we are not affirming their false beliefs. Rather, we are defending their right to be wrong *and* their freedom to be corrected through the preaching of the gospel.

## CONCLUSION

Now is not the time for Baptists to abandon our commitment to religious liberty for all. Rather, it is a time to patiently correct misunderstandings, answer honest questions, and make a renewed case for soul freedom. May we continue to stand with those who have gone before us in defending religious liberty for the glory of God, the advance of the gospel, and the sake of human flourishing.

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