

Session 1 – Introduction to the B-P Distinctives

Outline:

1. Doctrines; Traditions; Practices; Distinctives
2. Overview of the Distinctives
3. Changes over time

DISTINCTIVES are not DOCTRINE

DISTINCTIVES are a product of our HISTORY; CULTURE; CIRCUMSTANCE

DISTINCTIVES are not so much ‘what we BELIEVE’, as they are ‘why we DO things the way we do’

DISTINCTIVES may or may not CHANGE with time & circumstance

DOCTRINES		Beliefs based on truths discerned from the BIBLE; common to most denominations	
POSITIONS & PERSUASIONS	TRADITIONS	Beliefs based on our interpretation of Scripture; may differ from denomination to denomination	WCF
PRACTICES		How we practice our faith Depends on culture; times; etc.	Separatist
PREFERENCES		Our particular way of doing things Mostly because of our history	Baptism by sprinkling
			Burial of the Dead
			Infant Baptism
			KJV, ESV

IMPERATIVES and INDICATIVES:

Just because it is in the BIBLE, does not mean we are supposed to DO IT

- Rebekah taught Jacob to deceive Isaac to gain Esau’s birthright
- Rahab lied to the soldiers to save the Israelite spies

Telling what happened (indicative); is not the same as teaching us to do something (imperative)

Information is not instruction; a description is not a prescription to do the same

OVERVIEW OF THE B-P DISTINCTIVES:

The last time we conducted this module was in 2009 – 12 years ago:

<p>BP Distinctives 2009:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reformed Calvinist Tradition 2. Biblical Separation 3. The Bible & the KJV 4. The Charismatic Movement 5. The WCF 6. Presbyterian Church Government 7. Burial of the Dead 	<p>BP Distinctives 2021:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to the Distinctives 2. Reformed Calvinist Tradition 3. Biblical Separation 4. The Bible 5. The WCF 6. Presbyterian Church Government
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1. REFORMED CALVINIST

- This has to do with: how we understand **God’s work in our salvation**
- There are 2 main views – CALVINIST & ARMINIAN
- The Calvinist position has been conveniently reduced to the 5 Points of Calvinism (which in fact, did not originate from Calvin or his followers, but was a counter to arguments presented by the Arminians called the Remonstrance summarized in 5 points in 1610).
- The Canons of Dordt (1618) in response, became known as the 5 points of Calvinism

<u>Remonstrance of Arminianism (1610)</u>	<u>Canons of Dordt (Calvinism) (1618)</u>
1. Conditional Election based on foreseen faith	1. Unconditional Election
2. Universal Atonement based on Christ's merit	2. Limited Atonement to the Elect
3. Sin's depravity insufficient to affect free will	3. Total Depravity, Total Inability
4. Sufficient but Resistible Grace	4. Irresistible Grace
5. Uncertain destiny; possible lapse from grace	5. Perseverance of the saints

2. BIBLICAL SEPARATION

- This has to do with: how we treat those who **do not share the same regard for God's Word as we do**. When the B-P church started in the 1950s, the church in Singapore was rocked by the liberal modernist movement that began in the US in the 1920s. Singapore churches responded in 2 ways – the liberals embraced this new movement wholeheartedly; the fundamentalists utterly rejected it, remaining true to the BIBLE
- Among the fundamentalists, were 2 groups – one which chose to engage the mainstream churches & work from within to reform & enlighten the churches – they were known as the accommodationists; and the other group who left the mainstream denominations & formed separate churches – the separatists. The B-P church is part of the Separatist group.
- Today, liberalism / modernism has lost much of its appeal among churches in Singapore. Most of the mainline denominations have returned to the evangelical & fundamental understanding of the Bible.
- Biblical Separation has become less critical & urgent – not because we have moved closer to the left but because the mainline denominations have moved over to the right!

3. THE BIBLE

- This has to do with: how we, ourselves, as a church, **regard the Bible as the Word of God**. Especially the English versions of the Bible.
- Until 2015, our church had one official English version & preference – the King James Version. This was both historical & practical because the KJV was the most popular English version for most of our history.
- But in 2014-2015, the leaders of the church undertook a serious study & produced a landmark paper that resulted in the addition of a second modern English version – the English Standard Version – which is as faithful & accurate as the KJV, but far more readable and efficient for modern readers.
- Today, we have 2 official English versions in the church today – the KJV and the ESV.

4. THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

- This has to do with: how we crystallize **our system of beliefs and doctrines** as revealed from the Bible. Among evangelical churches today are also 2 groups – confessional (which follow a system of beliefs that are codified in a document called a “confession”); and the non-confessional (which do not have a system of beliefs but usually draw their doctrine directly from Scripture). We are confessional & follow the Westminster Confession of Faith.
- Among the widely used confessions are the Belgic (probably the oldest); the Helvetic (use by the Swiss Reformed churches); the Augsburg (Lutherans); the 39 Articles (Anglican); the Savoy (English Congregationalists); the London (Baptists); the Westminster (Scottish Presbyterian).

- *The Westminster Confession is considered by many to be the best English confession of faith to date. Until we can find something better, we continue to subscribe to the WCF.*

5. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT

- *This has to do with: how we as a church, **rule & govern ourselves** & our denomination.*
- *There are 3 general forms of church government: hierarchical – where church power & authority is vested in a hierarchy of higher offices & persons, ultimately culminating in one person or office (Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans [hybrid: with synod & Bishop]); congregational – where church power & authority is vested in the local church alone, and there is no higher authority that the local church answers to, except God through His Word (Brethren, EFC); and presbyterian – where church authority is vested primarily in a group of Elders in the local church, but higher courts comprising an association of Elders of local churches exist to assist the local church by referred authority.*
- *We are presbyterian in our government & feel that this model best reflects the practice of the early church as recorded for us in Scripture.*
- *We do not believe that Scripture prescribes one model of church government; neither do we believe that the presbyterian form is superior to other forms.*

CHANGING OVER TIME:

- *Our Distinctives have changed over the last dozen years. This is not a bad thing.*
- *Whereas our distinctives have changed; our doctrines & convictions have not.*
- *Issues that are no longer central or critical are:*

1. Our Stand Against the Charismatic Movement

- *While this used to be important to us in the past, it no longer features in the day-to-day life of our church.*
- *Again, this is not because we have become tolerant of charismatics – we have not. We continue to believe that charismatics have misinterpreted Scripture, taking descriptive texts (Acts), telling of what happened in the early church; for prescriptive texts, teaching believers to do likewise.*
- *Rather, it is because charismatics ceased from being a movement that threatened to overwhelm other churches & denominations in their erroneous teachings, as they did in the past; and have settled down from their youthful exuberance and become a ‘denomination’ of their own, just like every other with their own peculiar practices, which we do not subscribe to.*
- *In fact, several charismatic churches are caught in another fallacy – the Health & Wealth, Prosperity Gospel.*

2. Burial of Our Dead

- *The B-P church used to insist that burial of our dead was the only proper means of interring remains the remains of believers; and B-P pastors were not permitted to carry out cremation services. This has led to much anguish when members of our churches have expressed their desire for cremation & our pastors were unable to care for our dying to the very end.*

- *The solution then, was to engage the help of a pastoral acquaintance from outside the denomination to carry out the final rite of consummation of the remains. But this has always been an unsatisfactory arrangement.*
- *The BPCIS has reviewed the existing situation. Biblical texts supporting burial over cremation mostly fall into the category of descriptive rather than prescriptive. There are no clear & direct imperative texts that teach burial of our dead. Also, within land scarce Singapore, the availability of sites is also fast diminishing.*
- *Our current position leaves the decision whether to conduct burial or cremation services to the individual church & pastor. We still recommend burial as our traditional practice; but should members insist on cremation, pastors are free to offer complete care to our dying.*