

“Community of Freedom: Baptist Identity in Action”

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Baptists' historical understanding of community is anchored in freedom principles. What does it mean in a fear-filled 21st century for Baptists to be a people committed to freedom?

Early Baptists denied an ancient, empire-centric Christian model of community based on fear ...

- Dogma
- Coerced faith
- Authoritarianism
- Primacy of Old Testament

... and created a radical, heretical new model of Christian community based on freedom.

- Freedom of individual conscience
- Voluntary faith
- Equality
- Primacy of the New Testament

Upon attaining majority status in the 19th and 20th centuries, some backtracked on their faith heritage and identity, from fear crafting a theology of white supremacy:

- Restricted human conscience
- Embraced government-coerced faith
- Denied human equality
- Embraced a self-serving, inerrant scriptural text

In the 21st century:

- Many Americans are fearful of the “other”
- Racial and ethnic injustice remains
- Economic inequality fuels mass unrest
- Privileged white evangelicals demand government and judicial favoritism
- Institutional religion is declining
- Few younger Americans have an interest in organized religion, or religion at all

How are our freedom-centric CBF Baptist communities responding? Or how might we respond? And where in our past might we look for guidance as we shape a future Baptist identity?