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Religious liberty  
is a gift from God.

## ■ Baptist Joint Committee: 7 decades of advocacy, education

**T**oday, as for more than seven decades, the Baptist Joint Committee is a leading voice in Washington, D.C., fighting to uphold the historic Baptist principle of religious freedom.

The BJC stands at the intersection of church and state, defending the first freedom of the First Amendment. Church-state separation ensures our vibrant religious landscape, including a public square open for discussion about religion and matters of faith.

The BJC is primarily an education and advocacy organization. In addition to working with churches, it conducts issue briefings for congressional staffs and coalition partners. BJC staff members also testify before Congress and submit friend-of-the-court briefs to advocate religious liberty in the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts.

While primarily supported by Baptists — denominations, churches, and individuals — the BJC works for religious liberty for all, including Jewish, Muslim and a host of Christian and minority religious groups, who count on the BJC for leadership.



**Julie Pennington-Russell, senior pastor at First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga., participates in the BJC's June 29, 2007, Rally for Religious Liberty at the U.S. Capitol.**

The BJC works with a wide range of religious and civil liberties groups, including several coalitions that work on Capitol Hill, but it is the only religious agency devoted solely to religious liberty and church-state separation. It is uniquely poised within the religious community to deliver the message that the preservation of church-state separation is the best way to achieve religious liberty.

### ■ Baptist Joint Committee supporting bodies

Alliance of Baptists

American Baptist Churches USA

Baptist General Association of Virginia

Baptist General Conference

Baptist General Convention of Missouri

Baptist General Convention of Texas

Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

National Baptist Convention of America

National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.

National Missionary Baptist Convention

North American Baptist Conference

Progressive National Baptist Convention

Religious Liberty Council

Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

## Biblical basis for church-state separation

Religious liberty is a gift from God, not the result of any act of toleration or concession on the part of the state. It has to do with what we Baptists call “soul freedom” — the liberty of conscience that we all receive simply by virtue of how God created us and chose to relate to us.

God has made all of us free — free to say yes, free to say no, and free to make up our own minds about our spiritual destiny.

Religious freedom has theological import. It goes to the heart of who God is and who we are. So, the fight for religious liberty for all is to ensure against government doing what even God will not do: to violate consciences or to coerce faith.

Baptists became champions of religious liberty and church-state separation in large measure because we are a people of the Book. For many Baptists, religious liberty is well grounded in Scripture. Its taproot runs deep into the creation accounts in Genesis. The creation of human beings in God’s own

image necessarily implies a freedom on our part to choose for or against a relationship with God, voluntarily and without coercion.

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks forcefully about freedom. Many would assert it was at the very foundation of his ministry. Reading from Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus announces that he had been anointed “to proclaim release to the captives and ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” (Luke 4:18) Jesus liberated all who would choose to follow him from the slavery of their sins: “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). The apostle Paul preached freedom, as well. To the Galatians he railed against the slavery of legalism. He boldly declared that, “[f]or freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery?” (Galatians 5:1)

The Bible does not articulate a full-blown doctrine of the separation of church and

state. Yet, its seeds are clearly present. Jesus at least foreshadowed the concept when he said “[g]ive therefore to the emperor things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21) Jesus’ behavior was consistent with his words. He never took a coin from Caesar or sought the help of Herod in his ministry and mission.

In many places, the New Testament outlines the contours of the separate realms of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. The church is given the tasks of spreading the gospel (Acts 1:8), teaching doctrine (Matthew 28:20), and discipling believers (Ephesians 4:11-13). The state is divinely ordained to resist evil (Romans 13:3) and keep order (I Peter 2:13-15). Although these realms sometimes overlap and do not necessarily clash, the New Testament bears witness to a two-kingdom world — each with separate duties and each engendering different loyalties.



J. Brent Walker  
BJC Executive Director

## Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT IS THE BJC?

Serving 15 Baptist bodies, the Baptist Joint Committee is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) education and advocacy organization that has worked for more than 70 years promoting religious liberty for all and upholding the principle of church-state separation. Baptists have always understood that the two must go together.

### WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE BJC?

The BJC began in 1936 as the Southern Baptist Committee on Public Relations. After joining forces with American and National Baptists in 1946, the committee established offices in Washington, D.C., and became the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The BJC is now sponsored by all major Baptist groups in the United States except for the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2005, the BJC name changed to the Baptist Joint Committee for

Religious Liberty to more accurately reflect its singular focus on religious liberty issues.

### WHAT DOES THE BJC DO?

The BJC promotes religious freedom through three major activities — legislation, litigation and education. Its legislative work includes monitoring legislation relating to church-state matters primarily at the federal level, where often its efforts are coordinated with coalitions of other groups. On any particular bill, the BJC may analyze the legislation, join coalition efforts for or against the bill, lead congressional staff briefings on the need for or implications of the bill or contact legislator offices directly on behalf of the BJC. The organization also monitors church-state litigation, providing analysis of cases and participating in some of the more pressing matters affecting religious freedom. The BJC typically files briefs in any Supreme Court case dealing with religious liberty. Finally, and perhaps its most important work, the BJC is involved in ongoing education efforts through developing resources for use on college campuses, in churches and civic gatherings. These include printed material such as issue background sheets, a monthly newsletter and Internet resources such as a

Web site and continually updated web log.

### HOW DOES THE BJC HELP CHURCHES?

In addition to serving churches as a religious liberty watchdog agency in the nation's capital, the BJC staff often leads educational programs in churches, including preaching sermons and teaching Sunday school, and publishes resources on religious liberty issues for congregational use. The organization also can be counted on if church leaders have particular church-state questions about which they would like to consult.

### WHY DOES THE BJC SUPPORT CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION?

The separation of church and state, or the “wall of separation” talked about by Roger Williams, Thomas Jefferson and the U.S. Supreme Court, is simply a shorthand metaphor for expressing a deeper truth. Religious liberty is best protected when church and state are institutionally separated and neither tries to perform or interfere with the essential mission and work of the other. Some claim that church-state separation does not appear in the Constitution. True, those words are not there, but the principle surely is. Who would deny that federalism, the separation of powers and



**K. Hollyn Hollman**  
BJC General Counsel

the right to a fair trial are constitutional principles? But those phrases do not appear in the Constitution either.

### IS THE BJC NON-PARTISAN?

Yes. The mission of the Baptist Joint Committee is focused solely on advocating religious liberty and its constitutional corollary, the separation of church and state. The BJC always has pursued a balanced, sensibly centrist position on church-state issues, affirming both religion clauses in the First Amendment — no establishment and free exercise — as essential to guaranteeing our God-given religious freedom.

### DOES THE BJC SPEAK FOR BAPTISTS?

No. You do not speak *for* Baptists. You only speak *to* Baptists. Indeed, the BJC exists *to serve* Baptists.