

***Christian Theology***  
Distinctions among Christians  
August 9, 2009

***Baptists***

- By the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, about five hundred congregations in Western Europe used the name "Baptist."
- Generally, the earliest Baptists were dissatisfied with the Church of England. Like the Puritans, they then had to leave the country.
- One of the early Baptist leaders was a man named John Smyth. During his lifetime, he broke away from many church groups in an effort to find the group that most closely resembled the New Testament. (At the end of his life, he was a Mennonite. It seems that he didn't intend to start a new group!)
- Some of these reforms were fixed in place by another man, Thomas Helwys. Specifically, he disagreed with the structure and government of the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans, and even the Puritans and Separatists. These were seen as false Christian groups whose baptisms were meaningless.
- Early Baptists divided into two groups: General Baptists (Arminian theology) and Particular Baptists (Calvinist theology).
- Baptists are incredibly diverse, theologically speaking. Here are a few generally common beliefs:
  - Biblical authority
  - Autonomy of the local church
  - Priesthood of all believers
  - Two ordinances
  - Individual soul liberty
  - Separation of church and state
  - Two offices of the church