
THE HISTORICAL
BAPTIST POSITION
ON BAPTISM

BY BERLIN HISEL

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Baptism not for Infants, by T. E. Watson. Henry E. Walter Ltd., 1962.

John's Baptism, by J. R. Graves. Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928.

The Act of Christian Baptism, by J. R. Graves. Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928.

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Baptism: Its Mode and Its Subjects, by Alexander Carson. Sovereign Grace Book Club, no date.

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[Editor's Note: We also offer an excellent reprinted book free of charge entitled *Alien Baptism*, by A. C. Dayton, with a foreward by J. R. Graves. Historic Baptist Church, 2000. www.HistoricBaptist.org]

BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Berlin Hisel was raised in southern Kentucky and attended Lexington Baptist College, in Lexington, Kentucky, during the late 1950's. He was an able student of the word of God and became a well-known preacher in the area.

For about 15 years, Brother Hisel was pastor of South Irvine Baptist Church in Irvine, Kentucky. He then took the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Harrison, Ohio, from 1967 to 1982. Brother Hisel left First Baptist to become the administrator of Lexington Baptist College. He then became pastor at South Irvine Baptist Church for the second time.

Brother Hisel taught at Cincinnati Baptist College in Cincinnati, Ohio, while he was pastor at First Baptist Church of Harrison, Ohio. Later, he taught at Lexington Baptist College, traveling twice a week to Lexington from Harrison, Ohio, which is about an hour and a half drive. He eventually became President of Lexington Baptist College.

Berlin Hisel has written several books. Most of these books are from notes he used in his classes. They have been circulated worldwide.

Brother Hisel passed away in 1990 from a massive heart attack. His wife still lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

No date was ever stamped on the original booklet *The Historical Baptist Position on Baptism*, so any date would be a very general guess. The booklet probably was first printed in the late 1960's or the early 1970's.

May God bless and benefit those who read this booklet. May he show his grace in extending to the reader the understanding and wisdom of believing the truths about Baptist baptism.

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first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (verses 1-4). Paul says it is the gospel by which ye are saved. The gospel he says is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. If then, we are saved this way, it follows that baptism does not save nor have any part in our salvation, for it is not part of the gospel.

POSITIVE PROOFS

When considering the thought of baptism saving us, we should look at the verses in the Bible that speak of salvation. In doing this we will never find mention of baptism in order to be saved. In the Acts, chapter 16, verse 30, we have a man desiring salvation and seeking to know how to be saved, asking the direct question to the apostles. “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” If God is honest, we should find the answer following. Remember that it is God answering the question through inspiration. We should not accept the answer of Alexander Campbell. Many would rather believe him than God. Alexander Campbell answers the question thus, “In and by the act of immersion, as soon as our bodies are put under water — at that very instant — all our former or old sins are all washed away.” See his book on *Christian Baptism*, page 100. God’s answer comes forth thus, “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Not one mention of baptism here. Whom are you going to believe? I am going to believe God. “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar...” (Romans 3:4).

The End.



ACTS 22:16

Another passage brought forth by learned members of the Christian, Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ churches to strengthen their hope of salvation in baptism is in Acts 22:16. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Many suppose that this text says that the waters of baptism wash away, literally, the sins that we have. In the Bible nothing is much clearer than where our sins are. If sins were on the outer surface of our bodies, maybe water could wash them away as it does dirt. But sin is much different than dirt. Water and soap gets dirt, but it takes the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse away our sins. I John 1:7: "...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Man's sins lie deep within us. Jeremiah realized this when he said, "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Moses tells us in Genesis 6:5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually." The waters of baptism cannot reach these parts of man wherein sins lie. Even if they could the water has no power to cleanse them. If water could, why did Christ have to die?

PAUL'S BAPTISM

Paul, just prior to his being baptized by Ananias was called brother (Acts 9:17). This can only mean that he was saved before his baptism and therefore a brother to Ananias. Paul was to be baptized and therefore in a figure wash away his sin. To be baptized pictures the resurrection of Christ, and pictures that we too are to walk in newness of life, putting away our sins (Romans 6:4-7).

A QUESTION

Let me ask the question: If baptism washes away sin, what happened to the sins of the people in the Old Testament times when the ordinance of baptism did not exist? Were they all lost?

BAPTISM AND GOSPEL SEPARATED

That baptism does not save, but is a design to show what has already taken place (namely salvation) is very well proven by the apostle in I Corinthians 1:17. Paul absolutely says that baptism and the gospel are two separate things. Paul was sent by Christ, not to baptize; but to preach the gospel. We are told what the gospel is in this same book in chapter 15. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you

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The same Greek word translated “unto” in Matthew 3:11 is translated “for” in Acts 2:38. Over Matthew 3:11 we may well write, “Here lies baptismal regeneration,” for none can believe one is baptized in order to get repentance. He is baptized because of repentance.

ACTS 19:1-7

It would be quite proper at this time to look at the candidates for Paul’s baptism in Acts 19:1-7. Many bring them forth as proof that baptism saves. Since most paedobaptists and exponents of baptismal regeneration deny that John’s baptism was Christian or belonging to this dispensation, they say that these men at Ephesus needed the baptism of one under the new dispensation in order to be saved. Thus, they believe Paul’s baptism resulted in their salvation.

Let’s first examine this Scripture and see just what it does teach. First, it would seem from the context that these men were baptized by Apollos and not John. In the chapter before this one we are told Apollos knew nothing but the baptism of John (18:25). In Acts 19:1, Apollos is mentioned again as now being in Corinth. In Acts 18:24, we are told that he was preaching at one time in Ephesus. In strict context Apollos must have been the administrator.

Next, we are told in verse two that they had not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. We are told in Romans 8:9 that, “...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” The logical conclusion, then, is that these men when found by Paul were still in their sins. When Paul preached to them that they should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 4), they heard with their hearts and were saved (verse 5). Following their faith in Christ — which saved them — they were baptized. Only after their having been saved were they proper candidates for baptism.

TRUE CAMPBELLITES

Let us briefly summarize this passage. Paul, coming to Ephesus, found certain men who were trusting that the baptism that they received from Apollos had saved them. Of them it might be said, they were true Campbellites. Paul preached that baptism didn’t save, and that it takes the Holy Ghost. Realizing then that they were lost, they believed Paul’s report about Christ, were saved, then baptized.

My friend, one must repent and believe, then seek to fulfill all righteousness by following the Lord in baptism. Those who have their hope of salvation in baptism shall spend eternity in hell, because the only salvation in the Bible is by faith in Jesus Christ, plus nothing whatsoever.

baptism is necessary for one to be saved is gross error. Mark has made a simple statement of truth. He could have said and been just as true, "He that believeth and partaketh of the Lord's Supper shall be saved." Mark makes this clear in the last half of this Scripture when he says, "he that believeth not shall be damned." This Scripture deals with believing and nothing else. If baptism were necessary for a person to be saved, Mark would have said, "He that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned." If baptism does save one's soul, it follows that the absence of baptism is what condemns along with not believing. Jesus said in John 3:18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already...." So this passage in Mark is in agreement with all Scripture that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ apart from baptism. Was the thief on the cross baptized? He was not yet saved! Did Jesus make an exception with this thief? If we believe in making exceptions to what God has said we are no better than the Catholics who change the Scripture to meet their needs.

ACTS 2:38

The next passage used by those in favor of baptism in order to be saved is found in Acts 2:38. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Their faith that baptism gives us the remission of sins is based upon the thought that the word *for* in this passage means *in order to get*. Anyone who knows the English language knows this to be wrong. If I say that Adolf Ichman was hanged by the Jews for killing millions of Jews, do I mean he was hanged in order to kill millions of Jews? If I punish my children for disobeying me, do I punish them in order that they will disobey me? This is absurd. Ichman was hanged because he had killed millions of Jews already. My children are punished because of disobeying me. This is the only logical meaning.

In this passage of Scripture the word *for* means *because of*. Let us read it again. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ [because of] the remission of sin...." Peter urges the people to repent of their sins and, because of this repentance, to be baptized. I firmly say for people to repent and be saved, and go on to say, then be baptized!

Before leaving this passage let me ask one favor of those who believe they must be baptized in order to be saved. Turn to Matthew 3:8. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Who will say we are to bring forth fruits in order to get repentance? No one! John the Baptist is here dealing with the Sadducees and Pharisees (verse 7), who wanted to be baptized. John would not baptize them until first they brought forth fruit to prove that they had repented. Then he would baptize them.

INTRODUCTION

The reason for offering this little booklet in print is to meet a very present and ever growing need in Baptist churches. Baptism is being labeled by many as a non-essential. Alien baptism (a baptism not meeting Scriptural requirements, and thus foreign to the scriptures) is having a hey-day in churches that once taught and stood for the truth.

Many churches masquerading under the Baptist name have falsely reasoned that the authority for baptism rests in the Christian ministry. This makes baptism to be a Christian ordinance rather than a church ordinance. This false reasoning has led to recognizing any immersion of a saved person to be valid regardless of the authority of that immersion. Historical Baptists have maintained and are maintaining that proper authority for baptism rests within a New Testament Church. This would mean that only immersion performed by a New Testament Historical Baptist Church would be valid. This we believe, and this we practice.

This great doctrine of baptism has distinguished Baptists from all others down through the years. Baptists are not Paedobaptist (baby baptizers), thus distinguishing them from much of organized Christianity. One cannot help but feel that if this doctrine was good enough to distinguish Baptists from others in the past, it is mandatory to distinguish us today in an age of ecumenicalism.

This booklet is not offered to replace the great works on baptism by our distinguished ancestors. A bibliography of some of their valuable works will appear at the end of this booklet. It is offered primarily that the membership of the church this author pastors might have available in written form that which will help them to understand, love, and contend for this great doctrine. Pastors come and go while members usually spend a lifetime in the same church. If they are grounded, the church will be protected from the alien immersion error and many of the other errors to which it leads. We also pray that this booklet might be used effectually by other churches in defense of truth for the glory of God.

CHAPTER 1 WATER BAPTISM: PROPER MODE

There are many today who would have us to believe that sprinkling and/or pouring are proper modes. Neither of these two is mentioned in the Scripture in reference to baptism. The Greek word for baptize means to immerse or dip. We refer the reader to any Greek lexicon

since we do not have the space to give references. We will say that no true scholar will deny the real meaning of this word.

POUR OR SPRINKLE?

Let us see if these other meanings (pour, sprinkle) could be true of the New Testament word *baptize*. To do this, we will find where the word is used and substitute the three words, *sprinkle*, *pour* and *immerse*. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verse 9 we read, “And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.” Was Jesus *poured* of John in Jordan? Certainly not, for Jesus was not liquid or material to be poured out of a container into Jordan. Was Jesus *sprinkled* of John in Jordan? We sprinkle salt on our potatoes. Certainly John did not do this with Jesus in Jordan. Was Jesus *immersed* of John in Jordan? This alone can be true, as we understand the English language. See also Mark 1:5; Matthew 3:6 and Luke 3:7. Only the word *immersed* can be used successfully in each place the word *baptize* or its cognates appear.

BAPTISM OF JESUS

Let us examine the baptism of Jesus in Matthew chapter 3. We are told in verse 16 that Jesus came up *out of the water*. This could not be true if He were sprinkled or poured. The same thing is said in Mark 1:10.

BAPTISM OF THE EUNUCH

Another place in the Scripture where the water is spoken of is in the baptism of the eunuch that Philip baptized. “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38-39). Can this language possibly mean sprinkling or pouring? They both (the word *both* is used twice in verse 38) went down into the water; both came up out of the water. This did not take place inside a christening vessel or a sanctified container. No one would say we are *sprinkled* or *poured* into a river or a body of water.

ROMANS 6:1-5

All agree that Romans 6 teaches that baptism pictures the burial, resurrection, and the death of Christ. The picture of death is presupposed, for how can one have a burial or resurrection without a death? *Burial* means to cover over. We bury our dead under the ground. How can this be pictured by either sprinkling or pouring? We must conclude with the Scripture that immersion is the proper mode of baptism.

Peter 2:21). We should do no less than our Master.

OTHER KINDS OF CHURCHES

We, then, do not hate other denominations when we refuse to accept their members into our churches upon their baptism. We love them and their souls. We simply are convinced of God that their baptism does not meet the requirements of the word of God. Consider this with an honest mind.



CHAPTER 4 WATER BAPTISM: PROPER DESIGN

By proper design we mean for the proper reason. Many say the reason for baptism is to wash away sins or to secure salvation to the candidate. These are reasons or designs given by men and therefore fall short and miss entirely the design or reason given by the Almighty in the Bible.

BAPTISM IN A FIGURE

In the baptism of Jesus, our Saviour said His baptism was to fulfill all righteousness. If we understand the life of Christ as represented in the Bible, we know Christ was already righteous. Therefore, baptism could only fulfill all righteousness in a figurative sense. The Apostle Peter assures us that baptism is a like figure of something (I Peter 3:21). Turning to Romans, chapter 6, verses 4-5; we find the answer to what baptism is a figure of. We are here told that baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This is the Gospel. It is the thing that saves us (I Corinthians 15:1-4). By following our Lord in baptism we picture the death, burial and resurrection; and thus in a figure fulfill all righteousness.

MISINTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Those of our opponents who believe that baptism is designed to save a person, do so because they misinterpret the Scriptures. We shall honestly consider the passages of Scripture that they bring forth to try to prove that baptism saves us.

MARK 16:16

The first we shall consider is found in Mark, chapter 16, verse 16. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” To suppose that this Scripture teaches that

We could go on and on with every other denomination but we do not have the space.

Alexander Campbell, founder of the Christian Church, says the following of Baptists: “The Baptists can trace their origin to Apostolic times and can produce unequivocal testimony of their existence in every century down to the present time.” So is the testimony of all honest historians of all denominations. The Baptist churches have no founder this side of Jesus Christ; therefore, it is the church to whom is given the ordinance of baptism. [Editor’s note: Even today, a true New Testament Baptist church will confess Jesus Christ founded their Baptist church — they indeed have no *earthly* founder. We are set in the local New Testament Baptist church through scriptural baptism (I Corinthians 12).]

WHO WAS COMMISSIONED?

Many argue that Jesus was, in these verses we have just considered (Matthew 18:19-20), speaking to His apostles and thus giving them as individuals the authority for the Great Commission. It needs to be observed that Christ promised, “...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Each of the individuals Christ spoke to died within a generation. If the commission was given only to them as individuals, it must have died with them, which would prove the Saviour’s words, “unto the end of the world” to be false.

What is the answer to this seeming difficulty? Jesus was speaking to His church as an institution. When the apostles died, the church as an institution kept right on with the commission. With the Lord’s churches today, His promise is being fulfilled.

EXAMPLE OF JESUS

We will prove further now the necessity of proper authority. Jesus is our supreme example. Let us see His baptism and who performed it. In Mark’s Gospel, chapter 1, and verse 9, we are told, “And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.” If anyone could baptize, why did Jesus walk sixty-odd miles from Nazareth of Galilee to where John was baptizing? The reason is simple. Jesus, Himself, sought out the proper authority. Think of all the bodies of water our Saviour passed on His way to where John was baptizing! Think of all the people He could have gotten to immerse Him in the water! But He did not. He proceeded to John. Why John? The Bible does not leave us in the dark upon this question. In the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 6, we read these words, “There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John.” John, then, was sent from God to administer baptism. Jesus sought him out. Jesus is our example and we are to follow in His steps (I

It is interesting to note, before we leave the mode, that very few who use either sprinkling or pouring ever try to prove their authority for doing so from the Bible. They merely say it is more convenient to use these modes, and say that Christ would not object to their changing the Scripture around for convenience sake.

ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN

Moses was not to build the tabernacle at his convenience or in any manner he chose. “According to all that I shew thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make *it*.” See Exodus 25:9. This tabernacle pictures something also (Hebrews 9:23-24), as does baptism (Romans 6:4-5); so let us use God’s blueprint in the manner of baptism as Moses did in building the tabernacle.

CHAPTER 2 WATER BAPTISM: PROPER SUBJECT

To have a Scriptural baptism, a proper candidate is required. By this we mean one who meets all requirements as set down in the word of God prior to or preceding the ordinance of baptism. Many in our land today feel that the only thing necessary for baptism is merely the desire to have the ordinance performed. Others believe that birth in the physical world is all that is necessary. These perform the ordinance of baptism upon their infant children within eight days after their birth. This idea comes from the mistaken thought that baptism replaces the acts of circumcision. The Jews had the act of circumcision performed upon their male children eight days after birth. Circumcision was for Israel as a nation, believers and unbelievers. It was performed only upon the males. If baptism merely replaces circumcision it should only be administered upon the males and that at eight days. Thus we see circumcision and baptism as separate things.

FINAL AUTHORITY

In this matter as all others, let us not see what man thinks or feels to be right, but let us turn to the pages of the sacred history (the Bible), and see what the Almighty Authority has to say — “...let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). The Bible declares without any doubt that a proper candidate for baptism is one who has already been saved.

EXAMPLE OF PENTECOST

Let us consider the account of those baptized into the first church on

the day of Pentecost. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls." See Acts 2:41. Preceding this verse Peter had preached a sermon with such power that the people, under conviction for sin, asked the question, "...what shall we do?" Peter told them they must repent, and because of this repentance, be baptized. This is seen in verse 41. They that gladly received his word were baptized. Here, as everywhere else in the Scripture, these folks were already saved when they were baptized into the church. The receiving of his word is what saves one from sin (John 1:12).

THE EUNUCH

Now we turn to the account of Philip again and his experience with the eunuch. "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). This verse was given in answer to the question, "See, *here is water*; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Before the servant of God would perform this ordinance, he made sure that the candidate was already saved. After Philip was convinced of the eunuch's salvation, he baptized him (verse 38).

LYDIA

The case of Lydia's baptism affords evidence that salvation precedes baptism. In the book of Acts, chapter 16, verse 14, we are told that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia and she attended unto the word of God spoken by the Apostle Paul. Could we have better assurance of her salvation than to know that God Himself opened her heart so that she received and understood what Paul had said? Countless multitudes would be saved today if the lost would attend unto the words of God's called preachers! We see after this took place in verse 14, that she was baptized in verse 15.

We are forced once again to conclude with the word of God, that one must be saved before he or she can be a candidate for baptism.

CHAPTER 3 WATER BAPTISM: PROPER ADMINISTRATOR

It is here where many would depart from us upon the truth of baptism. Some would accuse us of hatred for all other denominations. This, however, is not true. We feel that the word of God gives authority only to a Baptist church for the administration of baptism. Please bear with us as we examine the Scriptures.

AUTHORITY

For anyone to perform an action of the government, he must be given authority to do so by that government. Not just anyone can perform the action of the Secretary of Defense. This authority is given to someone by the President of the United States. Not just anyone has the right to arrest someone. This belongs to the law enforcement department. So it is with baptism. God appoints whom He would to administer baptism. If you do not believe this you are forced to say that just anyone can baptize! The drunk on the street, the woman in the house of ill repute, the Masonic Order, the Catholic Church, or just anyone who wishes to do so. Certainly you do not believe this!

CHURCH AUTHORITY

To find whom Christ gave this authority, turn with me in your Bible to Matthew 28:19-20; where we read these words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen." Here, then, is the commandment given to baptize. To whom was it given? When we find this answer we have the authority of baptism. In verse 16 of Matthew 28 we see to whom Jesus was investing the authority of baptism. "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them."

HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

These eleven composed the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, organized in His ministry (Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17). Let us for a minute lay aside prejudice and see which church this was that Jesus built. He did not build all the denominations existing today. They all teach different things, and God is not the author of confusion. A mere look at history will give us the answer to this question. History gives a founder for every denomination existing today except a Baptist church. Let us look:

- (1) the Catholic Church founded in 313 by Constantine;
- (2) the Lutheran in 1520 by Martin Luther;
- (3) the Episcopal in 1534 by King Henry VIII;
- (4) the Presbyterian in 1536 by John Calvin;
- (5) the Methodist in 1740 by John Wesley;
- (6) the Christian (Church of Christ, Disciples) in 1827 by Alexander Campbell;
- (7) the Church of God in 1825 by John Winebrenner;
- (8) the First Church of God in 1880 within the churches of God existing and founded by John Winebrenner in 1825.