

“What is a Baptist?”

By Pastor Les Hill

Most Baptists would be the first to admit that “Baptist” is merely the name of their denomination, and that being a Christian is of foremost importance. However, many choose to be Baptists for good reason. Here are some Scriptural reasons why we are Baptist:

A Baptist is someone who has been baptised *after* being saved.

Baptism after salvation follows the example of the *original* Christians. It is clear that John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, and the early church disciples baptised their converts by full immersion in water (often in the River Jordan). The early Baptists received their name as a slur or derogatory term because they baptised their converts *after* they had professed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was argued by their opponents that their converts had been baptised already as infants. Thus, their opponents gave them the slur of “re-baptisers” or “Ana-baptists.” The name was later shortened to “Baptists.”

Why did the Baptists “rebaptise” converts? (And why do they continue to do so to this day?) The answer: It is Scriptural. The Bible describes baptism as full immersion in water. Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Matt. 3:15-17; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:41-2). The word “baptism” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning “to immerse, dip or plunge.” Thus, Baptists do not consider the christening of babies as baptism at all, because babies are not submerged in water. Even more importantly, babies are not able to make a conscious decision to profess personal faith in Christ.

This leads to the next question: What does it mean to be “saved,” or to “profess faith in Christ?” The Bible makes it clear that every person born into this world is a sinner (Romans 3:10-12). Since Adam and Eve took the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, we, as their descendents, were all born with sin natures (Romans 5:12). We like to say that we are “only human”: but God states that we are “sinners.” Our sin nature makes us enemies of God (Romans 8:7). Because of our sin, we are alienated from God (Ephesians 2:12); we are under the wrath of God, Who is angry at our sin (John 3:18, 36); and we are utterly unable to please God (Romans 3:19-20; 8:8). If God were to execute the full weight of the Law upon us, He would have to send each one of us to an eternal hell, where we would pay the just punishment for our rebellion against His authority (Revelation 20:10-15).

However, we thank God that He is not only a God of perfect justice, but also a God of gracious mercy and love. The greatest love story ever told is that of the God-Man called Jesus Who came into this world 2000 years ago. The Lord Jesus lived the perfect life and fulfilled the Law of God perfectly (I John 3:5; II Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 27:19). However, wicked men took Him, prosecuted Him falsely, and nailed Him to a cruel cross. It was on this cross that the Father poured out His wrath and judgment upon Jesus. The wrath that we deserved was mercilessly poured out upon the Son of God, Who was willing to suffer on our behalf (Isaiah 53:3-10).

The last words of Jesus before He died were “It is finished!” (John 19:30). That means that there is no more sacrifice necessary to pay for the sins of men. The Lord Jesus paid it all (Hebrews 10:10-14). In fact, God refuses to accept any sacrifice other than the blood of Jesus that was spilt on the cross 2000 years ago (Hebrews 9:22).

True, saved believers, then, are those who have put their faith in the risen Saviour. The Gospel message is this: that Jesus, died, was buried, and rose again so that He could pay man’s debt, remove the righteous wrath of God from off him, and free him to serve God with a clean conscience and a clean heart (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4; Romans 8:1; 1 Timothy 1:5). All God requires is repentance

(turning away from sin) and faith in the blood of His risen Son (Romans 10: 9, 10). Upon repentance and faith, He will fully pardon from *all* sin. (“And by him all that *believe* are justified from *all things*, by which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Acts 13:39)

Before anyone can become a Baptist, he or she must testify of believing this Gospel or good news.

A Baptist is someone whose rule of faith and practice is the Bible.

A Baptist places no dependence upon tradition or church teaching. A leader from a prominent religion was once asked, “Upon what do you base your faith?” His answer: The Bible plus tradition. The question was then asked, “What if the Bible contradicts tradition — because it does at times?” His answer was that he would first place his faith upon tradition.

The big problem with that thinking is that tradition and the teachings of a church can change. Isaiah 40:8 says, “*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.*” A Baptist is one who places his faith in the unchanging Word of God.

A Baptist is a priest.

A priest can approach God himself without a human mediator. In I Peter 2:5, and 9, the Apostle Peter teaches us that every genuine, Bible-believing Christian is a priest. John restates this in Revelation 1:6. What exactly does this mean? The Chambers dictionary defines a priest as a mediator between God and worshippers. If the Bible states that all believers (Christians) are priests, then true Christians can go to God themselves without anyone else coming in between that relationship. In fact, Hebrews 4:14-16 urges Christians to do just that.

In I Timothy 2:5, we are told that the only valid Mediator (priest) between God and man is the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, those that are “in Christ” (saved) can go directly to God the Father through their High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Some religions have taken the priesthood away from individual believers and have placed it into the hands of a select few. This teaching is contrary to the Bible. It is the exercise of unfair control over men and women.

A Baptist can think for himself.

Thinking for yourself means that no one may *force* you to believe a certain way. (Baptists adamantly stood for the “separation of church and state”—and went to the stake for that belief—many centuries before the idea even began to gain any general acceptance in Western societies.) Some religions hold people in fear, so that they cannot and will not think for themselves. According to I Corinthians 10:23, Christians have the God-given right to decide their convictions. No one has the right to force what he believes upon others, for each individual has the right to exercise his own conscience freely before God (Romans 14:5). To be able to make a right judgment about any issue, a person must hear and heed what God has to say in His Word. However, each individual can choose whether he wants to hear or not. We have the freedom to believe what we want to believe. But remember — with this freedom to choose comes responsibility and accountability before God (Romans 14:10).

A Baptist is someone who has completely changed.

When the God of heaven lives inside a person, that person will change. The God of heaven is a Holy God, and He expects those who belong to Him to be holy also (I Peter 1:15-17). That is why those who belong to Baptist churches have been noted for distancing themselves from sinful habits and doctrinal error. God stated that Christians are to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-14). We cannot be salt and light in the world while continuing to act like everyone else in the world. A Baptist cannot just fit into his culture unnoticed. The Lord Jesus expects His people to be different—to let their light shine. Many people do not understand why God requires His people to be separate. Nevertheless,

most people expect that those who *say* that they are children of the Living God should avoid certain habits and behaviour. They are right – because that is exactly what God says.