

The Bible and the Baptist Church

Jack H. Williams

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” Acts 17:11

Preface

In writing this study, my purpose is not to ridicule nor mock. The intent is to simply look to the teachings of the Baptist church and compare them with the teachings of God’s Holy Word. Surely all would agree with the principle which Paul set forth when he said, “let God be true and every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). When those of the first century were confronted with things about which they had questions, they did what God said was the “noble” thing — “they searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). It is my belief that if you are looking through this study booklet that you are of like mind and are sincerely seeking God’s will. I urge you to examine the things in this book, not with the thoughts of whether they are pleasing or popular, rather with the question, “Are they Biblical?”

If there are questions or comments you would like to offer, please feel free to contact me at your convenience. I too am seeking the truth of God’s Word.

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In a study of the Baptist Church, there are many sources one can look to. This paper will rely on the testimony of the Baptist denomination itself. Sources used will be mainly from two books currently used by the Baptist Church in the “Church Study Course” in the area of Baptist Doctrine.

Southern Baptist Distinctives, by Earl Kelly. Copyright 1989 by Convention Press.

The Baptist Faith and Message, by Hershel H. Hobbs. Copyright 1971 by Convention Press [1989 edition]

Also used will be:

The Baptist Heritage, by H. Leon McBeth, copyright 1987 by Broadman Press.

Mr. McBeth is an instructor at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, having taught Baptist history for a quarter century.

The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual, copyright 1965.

This book is a condensed version of The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches written by Hiscox in the mid 1800's. Though very old, some of the statements found within it shed light on the teachings of the Baptist church.

In this study, we will examine quotes from these sources on the following subjects:

- (1) Church Origin
- (2) The Church
- (3) The Kingdom
- (4) Church Organization
- (5) Salvation
- (6) Baptism
- (7) The Lord's Supper
- (8) Once Saved Always Saved
- (9) The Role of Women

The problems faced in studying the Baptist church, as well as any other denomination, are set forth in a statement by Earl Kelly, a Baptist writer, when he says the Baptist church is “a paradox ever changing while never changing. We are in such a constant movement that we refuse to pose long enough for a timeless portrait” (Kelly, 5). This not only sets forth the problems faced, but also points to one of the many fallacious points of any denomination - it is changing - yet the church Jesus purchased with His own blood has not changed. It can still be found described in the pages of the New Testament record and can be found on this earth when men will follow that unchanging will of God.

Think about it....

God describes His church within the pages of the New Testament. But He says that His Word will abide forever (1 Peter 1:22-25). How then can a church be the church of the Bible if it is constantly changing? The only proper change God describes it that of repentance (ie Jeremiah 6:16; Luke 13:3,5).

Section One . . . Church Origin

“Rediscovering certain basic Biblical truths in the seventeenth century brought about the formation of the Baptist denomination.” (Kelly, 5)

“Baptists have a long, long history. Even though we did not develop into a specific denomination until many centuries after Christ, we still suspect there were influential relatives all the way back to early Christian days ...” (Kelly, 57)

“The Baptist heritage is linked in part to all four reforms started by these men [Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Henry VIII - JHW], although we were not a part of either group who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. Baptists are a second generation of the reformation.” (Kelly, 59)

“Most Baptists agree that we can definitely trace our lineage back as far as English General Baptists. A group of English people who were in disagreement with the State Church of England went to the Netherlands to escape persecution in AD 1608. Their leader, John Smyth, became convinced from his study of the Bible that infant baptism had no scriptural basis. The other members of the group agreed with his conclusions . . . Smyth then baptized himself and forty others by pouring water on their heads.” (Kelly, 33)

“The modern Baptist denomination originated in England and Holland in the early seventeenth century. Baptists emerged out of intense reform movements. . . . Influenced by the Reformation theology . . . these Separatists adopted baptism for believers only. They later applied that baptism by total immersion and were nicknamed “Baptists” for that practice.

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Two major groups of Baptist emerged in England in the 1600’s. . . The earliest of this persuasion was formed about 1609.” (McBeth, 21-22)

“We have seen that John Smyth formed the earliest Baptist Church of modern history, early in 1609.” (McBeth, 101)

“No major historian today holds to the organic succession of Baptist churches... ” (McBeth, 61)

“The most reliable historical evidence confirms that the Baptist denomination, as it is known today, originated in the early seventeenth century.” (McBeth, 61).

“Extant records do not tell who was the first Baptist in America, but they do show that the first organized church was formed at Providence in early 1639 by Roger Williams.” (McBeth, 124)

Think about it . . .

- (1) In the quotes above reference is made repeatedly to the Baptist “denomination.” How does this agree with the Bible plea of unity? (Cf. John 17:17ff; 1 Corinthians 1:10)?
- (2) To what authority did those who formed the Baptist denomination appeal? What does God say is the authority to which we must appeal? (Colossians 3:17)

Section Two . . . The Church

“Whereas one is born again into the church general, he becomes a part of a local church through believer’s baptism.” (Hobbs, 80)

“While salvation is synonymous with membership in the church general, it is not so with regard to the local church, nor is membership in the local church synonymous with salvation.” (Hobbs, 129)

Think about it . . .

- (1) From the above statements we see the basis for the oft made statement that, “It is harder to get into the Baptist Church than it is to get into heaven.”
- (2) What scriptural support is ever given for this distinction between the “church general” and the “local church” or denomination.

Section Three . . . The Kingdom

“The New Testament teaches a personal, bodily, visible, triumphant return of Jesus Christ to earth During that time Christ will bring history to its conclusion and the kingdom of God to its fulfillment.” (Kelly, 21)

“The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.” (Hobbs, 97)

Think about it . . .

- (1) What does the Bible say about the Kingdom and its existence upon this earth in the following passages: Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13
- (2) What does the Bible say will happen when Jesus Christ returns? (1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

Section Four . . . Church Organization

“The officers in a local New Testament church are pastors and deacons (Phil. 1:1).” (Hobbs, 80)

“Every member has one vote in a purely democratic organization. Neither age nor status provides leverage among Baptists. Even the pastor has but one vote.” (Kelly, 48)

“Baptist authority resides in the membership of its churches.” (Kelly, 110)

“Originally there were only churches. Later, cooperating bodies developed to provide fellowship and accomplish work that a single church could not do alone. Southern Baptists cooperate voluntarily at three different levels: associations, state conventions, and the Southern Baptist Convention.” (Kelly, 114)

“Despite this exaggerated independence, early Baptist churches did form the rudiments of denominational structure. By mid-century the Baptist ‘association,’ a group of cooperating churches in a given region, had made its appearance...” (McBeth, 95)

“Because churches are the only Christian organizations provided for in the New testament, it may be said that they are the only ones really essential to the accomplishment of the purposes of Christ. *Experience, however, has demonstrated that churches in fellowship with one another are able to fulfill the work of the gospel more effectively than churches alone*” [emphasis mine - JHW] (Hiscox, 120)

Think about it . . .

- (1) How many elders did each New Testament church have in the Bible record? (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1).
- (2) Who possessed the authority within the congregation in the Bible record? (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:5)
- (3) What authority is given for the organization above the church in the quotes above?

Section Five . . . Salvation

“Regeneration is the experience of being born again or from above (John 3:3; Titus 3:5). It is an instantaneous work of God’s grace wrought by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

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Regeneration is the result of conviction of sin, repentance from sin, faith in Jesus Christ, and the confession of that faith.” (Hobbs, 59,60)

“When one accepts Christ as Saviour, he lets God’s life in because Christ is 100% God. At that point, redemption from sin is instantaneous.” (Kelly, 16)

“Belief, and only belief, is the door to salvation.” (Kelly, 16)

“Saving belief demands positive obedience” (Kelly, 16)

Think about it . . .

- (1) In John 3:3 and Titus 3:5, what is the meaning of “water and Spirit” and “washing of regeneration?”
- (2) What does the Bible say about when “one accepts Christ as Saviour?”
- (3) If “Belief and only belief, is the door to salvation” why would one speak of “conviction of sin, repentance from sin, . . . and the confession of that faith”?
- (4) How can it be said that “saving faith demands positive obedience” if “belief, and only belief is the door to salvation”?

Section Six . . . Baptism

“There is no indication in the New Testament that baptism either saves or adds to salvation. A person should be baptized because he is already a Christian . . . When a person is baptized he is being obedient to Christ’s command . . . Baptism is not an option to be exercised; it is a command to be obeyed - an ordinance . . . There are numerous references to baptism in the book of Acts . . . in each instance, baptism followed belief by a person who had made an independent, personal decision to believe.” (Kelly, 30,31)

“Baptism is not necessary for being in the kingdom of God or the church general. But it is necessary for fellowship in the local church. Being a church ordinance, it is a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.” (Hobbs, 88)

“Since both baptism and the Lord’s Supper are given as church ordinances or commands of Jesus, both should be observed by every believer. Failure to do so is to be disobedient to the Lord’s will.” (Hobbs, 91)

“The spiritual change of the new birth begets Christian fellowship; but to secure church fellowship, that change must be confessed in baptism” (Hiscox, 35)

“All men are under obligation to repent of sin, and to accept Christ as their only means of salvation. And all believers in Christ are bound by the most sacred considerations to obey their Lord’s command, and confess him before men in baptism. No one who trusts him for salvation can willingly disregard his command, nor neglect the public profession of faith which this ordinance affords.

It is not a question as to whether he can be saved without baptism, but whether he can be a true disciple, and refuse or neglect thus to obey and confess his Savior. . . . Baptism may not be essential to salvation, but it is essential to obedience.” (Hiscox, 83)

Think about it . . .

- (1) How can we reconcile the statement that “There is no indication in the New Testament that baptism either saves or adds to salvation. A person should be baptized because he is already a Christian . . .” with such passages as Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:37-38; Acts 22:16?
- (2) How can we reconcile the statement, “It is not a question as to whether he can be saved without baptism, but whether he can be a true disciple, and refuse or neglect thus to obey and confess his Savior. . . . Baptism may not be essential to salvation, but it is essential to obedience” with Hebrews 5:9, John 14:15, and Matthew 7:21?

Section Seven . . . The Lord’s Supper

“Jesus did not say when or how often believers should observe the Lord’s Supper. He instituted it on Thursday night. New Testament Christians observed it on the Lord’s Day. But Jesus did say, ‘as often ... ’” (Hobbs, 90)

“Autonomous Baptist Churches exercise their individuality in selecting the content of the cup and the kind of bread they use Each church also decides how often it will observe the Supper. The New Testament does not specify a timetable. Acts 2:42-46 seems to indicate it was observed somewhere in Jerusalem each day. After an elapse of time, Acts 20:7-11 seems to indicate weekly observance. The clear and unmistakable witness of Scripture is, ‘do this, whenever you drink, in remembrance of me’ (1 Cor. 11:25, NIV). This specifies no time or frequency, but it does require that whenever it is done, the real meaning be preserved.” (Kelly, 41,41)

“Baptists regarded the Lord’s Supper as a memorial supper to recall and reflect upon the death of Christ. Breaking bread was a major element in early Baptist services and was probably a part of each Sunday’s worship.” (McBeth, 81)

Think about it . . .

- (1) From the above statements, what do the writers believe the frequency of observance of the Lord’s supper was in the churches of the New Testament?
- (2) How often does Acts 20:7 say the first century Christians partook of it?
- (3) What did the “early Baptist services” follow?
- (4) Did Jesus select the content of the cup and kind of bread, or is it left to individuals?

Section eight . . . Once Saved, Always Saved

“‘Once saved, always saved’ means there is something in the salvation experience that guarantees its completion. It does not mean that a person can continue to live as he wants to after being saved. God changes our natures so that we desire to live above sin. It does

not mean that we will be saved if our faith holds out. God bring to bear such influences on all true believers in Christ that their faith will hold out to the end. . . . Since our salvation does not depend on what we do in the beginning, its permanency does not depend on what we do from day to day. From beginning to end, salvation depends on God.” (Kelly, 49)

“The word of God does not teach that one can become a part of the body of Christ and then be severed from it. One of the key scripture verses which teaches ‘once saved, always saved’ is John 10:28.” (Kelly, 50)

“The believer has been saved - instantaneous (redemptive). He is being saved - continual (sanctification). He will be saved - ultimate (glorification).” (Kelly, 50)

Think about it . . .

- (1) If “. . . from beginning to end, salvation depends on God” and He “changes our natures so we desire to love above sin” whose fault is it when a child of God sins?
- (2) If salvation’s “permanency does not depend on what we do from day to day” what effect would such sins as fornication, murder, idolatry and such have on one’s salvation?
- (3) Does John 10:28 in context give any requirements to those who will never perish nor be plucked from Jesus’ hand? (Cf. Verse 27).

Section Nine . . . The Role of Women in the Church

“On August 9, 1964, Addie Davis was ordained as a gospel minister at the Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. So far as the records show, she was the first woman formally ordained to ministry in a Southern Baptist Church. In two decades since then, over a hundred other Southern Baptist women have received ministerial ordination, plus countless others who have been ordained as deacons. The changing role of women represents a major trend in Southern Baptist life.” (McBeth, 690)

“By the 1980’s women deacons were more numerous, of course, than women preachers among Southern Baptists and less controversial. . . . Women emphasize that their role is that of deacons, not deaconesses, for the latter word has often designated a subordinate role.” (McBeth, 691)

“In the past, many Southern Baptist interpreted the Bible to keep women in silence and subjection. however, in recent years Southern Baptist theologians, pastors, laymen, and laywomen have read the same passages in a new light . . .” (McBeth, 692)

Think about it . . .

- (1) How can women ministers or deacons be condoned in light of such passages as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34?
- (2) What “new light” could be shed on the above passages that make them inapplicable to the church today?
- (3) Are the reasons for the woman not being in a position of authority over man cultural?