

THE BAPTIST LANDMARK

“REMOVE NOT THE OLD LANDMARK, WHICH THY FATHERS HAVE SET.” PROVERBS 22:28

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AN EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO BAPTISM

by H. B. Little

A vital practice among the Old Time Baptist churches is the way a church receives members. New converts are received into a Baptist church after giving a satisfactory experience before the church and upon being baptized. This is commonly referred to as receiving them by “experience and baptism”. This experience has often been referred to as a “testimony” or a “time and place”. This experience is a personal knowledge that one has been saved by God’s grace. It includes a sorrow for sin, a humbling of oneself before God, a turning toward God through faith from the heart, and a knowledge of sins forgiven by finding peace of soul. The practice of requiring an experience has its origins in the scriptures and can be found within the history of the Baptists. Though it has been abandoned by many, it ought to be maintained by the Old-Time Baptists until the Lord’s return.

Requiring an experience of repentance and saving faith prior to baptism is as old as the New Testament. When John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, came preaching repentance, many of the Jewish people went out to him in the wilderness of Judea seeking baptism. As John preached and baptized with heavenly authority, some of the religious elite, men of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, went out to be baptized by him. Upon seeing these men, John called for an evidence of their repentance. Knowing their self righteous tendencies, he warned them that being of the Jewish nation or adhering to the Jewish religion would not prepare them for baptism. Only a personal experience of a penitent faith shared with the God called preacher would suffice.

The practice of requiring an experience of saving faith prior to baptism can be found among the minutes of the oldest Baptist association in America. In the 1746 meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, a question was posed to the association regarding the participation of

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TRYING TO BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT CHRIST

by M. A. Brawner

The day in which we live is truly one of coldness and complacency in spiritual matters. These are a fulfillment of the days spoken of by the Lord recorded in Matthew chapter 24. The Lord said that when “...iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”, Matt 24:12. As people become entangled with iniquity, they draw away from God and become spiritually complacent. When the genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ become complacent, everyone around them is impacted. It reminds one of the days described just prior to the great revivals of the 1700s. Jonathon Edwards, who preached the famous sermon “Sinners in the hands of an angry God”, felt confident in saying that church rolls were full of names of members who were never born again and many pulpits were occupied with preachers in the same condition. People in those days had conformed to a form of godliness that denied the power thereof. They were attempting to be Christian without Christ.

Trying to be Christian without Christ involves a denial that Christ is a real, living being. The “idea” of there being someone who is called the Lord Jesus Christ may be held in high regard but there is no real submission to His authority and leadership. Such people have no actual relationship with our Lord and Savior. They are attempting to be a Christless Christian which is self-defeating and futile. This condition can be found in all levels of the Christian experience from being born again to serving God in the way pleasing in His sight.

The Lord Jesus Christ must be directly involved with anyone who becomes a child of God. It is stunning to find out how many believe that the Lord’s only direct involvement with soul salvation took place on the cross. They are willing to acknowledge the need for the Lord’s atoning death in order for sins to be forgiven, but they see no other involvement. However, the Bible confirms

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BAPTIST?

by B. W. Carver

What does it mean to be a Baptist? When considering this question, it is important to consider what it means to be a Baptist, but also what is not meant. There are many who wear the name Baptist. Organizations can be called First Baptist, Southern Baptist, General Baptist and even Missionary Baptist, but these names do not make them a Baptist.

Matthew 3:1 reads this way, “In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea,” We find also in Matthew 11:11 Jesus spoke these words, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Let us consider what the scriptures teach about this man the Lord called a Baptist. In Luke 1:17 the angel told that John would prepare a people for the Lord. We also read that John was a man sent from God. He was not the Light, but sent to bear witness of the Light, Jesus Christ. He preached repentance and baptized only those who had a testimony and could provide evidence of repentance (Matthew 3:7). True Baptists still practice this today. We read in Luke 7:29-30 of those who were baptized of John justified God, but those who were not baptized of John rejected the counsel of God. Important to note, Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John. He did so to fulfill all righteousness. John had a distinction of a true Baptist. He was authorized to do the work of God.

After our Lord was baptized of John, He entered His personal ministry. He organized His church with the people John had prepared. This church had been prophesied of, but did not come into existence until the Lord called unto Him whom He would and placed them in the church. Mark 3:13-19 reads, “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they

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what all of those who are truly born again already realize. The Lord Jesus Christ directly interacts with people all along the way during the process of being saved from sins. They know that without the Lord Jesus Christ involved, they would still be lost and separated from God.

The Bible describes the condition of a person who is unsaved as well as the person who becomes saved all based upon their relationship to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. The Bible explains that a person who is unsaved is someone who "...hath not the Son of God," 1 Jn 5:12. The Lord deals directly with the unsaved to help them see their unsaved condition, John 8:7-9. A person who is under conviction must come by way of Christ to be saved, John 10:9. As such people pray for forgiveness, they call on the Lord to deliver their soul, Ps 116:4. Once a person has received soul salvation, he or she understands that God forgave them "for Christ's sake," Eph. 4:32. When the Lord saves a soul, He personally enters and abides within the person He saves, Gal 4:6. Many additional references could be provided, but these make it clear that people who pass from being lost, separated from God, to being born again will have the Lord Jesus Christ interacting with them all along the way. With this in mind, it is obviously beyond unreasonable to think a person could ever be a child of God without Christ. Sadly, a great number of professing Christians are in this very state. This is a true manifestation of someone trying to "profess" what they actually do NOT "possess".

Anyone who is born again should feel deeply indebted to God. A heart that has been made right with God feels a vast sense of gratitude toward the One Who has been so merciful and gracious towards it. Such will want to serve God in the way that is pleasing and right in His eyes. A truly born again person will have the attitude that Saul of Tarsus expressed out on the road to Damascus. He called out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. Saul's question reveals both a heart made right and a heart full of gratitude towards God. God the Father has set all things under the authority of His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ, Matt 28:18. So then, it is essential for the born

again to acknowledge that truly pleasing God means yielding to the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ. This means the Lord Jesus Christ must be directly involved with those who would serve God.

As stated earlier, God the Father has set all things under the authority of His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ, Matt 28:18. This will remain true until all things in the world are brought to their full conclusion with the defeat of death itself, 1 Cor 15:24-26. This order of things directly impacts every person. If people will live to please God, they are required to yield to the rulership and leadership of Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the Lord Jesus Christ established His own Church Kingdom during His personal ministry on the earth, Matt 16:18. The Lord personally directed His Church in the work of preaching the gospel, making disciples, and baptizing those disciples, John 4:1-2. He sat His table in this Church Kingdom and instituted the Lord's Supper to be observed by those who have joined Him in it, Luke 22:29-30. Before ascending back to the right hand of the Father, the Lord sent this Church out to continue preaching the gospel, making disciples, baptizing those disciples, and observing the Lord's commands, Matt 28:19-20. The Lord committed Himself to go with the Church until all things are concluded as described earlier in 1 Cor 15:24-26, Matt 28:20. Knowing this to be true, a truly born again person should see that submitting to the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ must involve seeking out and joining the Church that Jesus Christ alone leads. Attempting to serve God in any other way is to do so without the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is apparent that since the fall of man, the world has hated the ways of God. It resists seeing itself in the light of the truth of the Word of God. The world denies its need to have sins forgiven. To defend its stance against God, the world works to influence as many as possible to reject God and all of His ways. However, when some people insist on seeking God, the world offers an alternative to a true relationship that honors God. The world offers a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. This form of godliness leaves the Lord Jesus Christ out of it. This type of Christianity that is without Christ well pleases the world so it doesn't resist any who would adopt it. However, the true followers of Jesus Christ know differently.

In times such as these, all of these true followers need to be prepared to call attention to the true nature of a relationship with God. As the Lord directs and leads, such may be just the very instrument the Lord uses to open the eyes of the blinded. Let's all pray for each other that we may be prepared to be just such instruments for our living Savior.

CREATIONISM OR NATURALISM?

by H. B. Little

Mankind has a basic desire to explain his origin. Two different philosophies prevail in answering the question, "Where do we come from?" These philosophies are creationism and naturalism, and they are polar opposites. Creationism is the belief that the universe and all living things, including mankind, originate from an act of divine creation. An example of this belief can be found in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. Naturalism is the belief that the all things originate from natural causes to the exclusion of a supernatural creator. Examples of naturalism include the big bang theory and the theory of evolution.

Historically, Christians have held a literal interpretation of the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, believing that God made the world and all that is therein in six days. Recently, many Christians have drifted toward a creationism-naturalism mixed view of man's origin. An example of this type of view is as follows: *God created the laws of physic, then allowed the world and all living things to naturally occur by the processes of the big bang and evolution.* This type of view arises from an acceptance of a naturalistic interpretation of scientific evidence and a nonliteral interpretation of the Genesis account of creation. While this article will not focus on the interpretation of scientific evidence, more information can be found online at websites such as *Answers in Genesis* and *The Institute for Creation Research*.

Considering the different views on man's origin, how should Bible believing Christians interpret the Genesis account of creation? They need only look to the views expressed by Jesus and the inspired writers of the Holy Bible. If they held a literal interpretation of the creation account found in Genesis, all Christianity should hold the same view.

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should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house." John 4:1-2 reads, "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.)" The Lord worked through His church to do His work. He personally baptized no one, but made and baptized disciples through the Church He organized. To be a Baptist means to be one who labors with the Lord as He carries on the work through His church.

The Lord continued to make and baptize disciples the same way even after His resurrection. Mark 16:19-20 reads, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following: Amen." The church labors together with God, and Jesus is the head of this work. He promised to be so even until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). Ephesians 2:18-22 reads, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The true Baptist church follows the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

As true Baptists, we must find our place among those whom God has called out to labor with Him. In Acts 13, we read of the Lord leading members from the church at Antioch to carry the gospel as

missionaries. The church at Antioch ordained these brethren and they went forth preaching. God called them, the church ordained them for the work and the Holy Spirit led them. We read of those who were saved and were baptized through their efforts. Churches of the same were organized and brethren were ordained in these churches. These churches were also commended to continue the work. As true Baptists, we must find ourselves joined to a church organized in the same manner. There is an unbroken lineage of churches organized in the same manner down through the ages. This lineage began with the church the Lord organized with the material prepared by John the Baptist. We must note that John did not organize the church, but he did prepare the material for the Lord to organize His church.

We find points that have led to disagreements among our churches. There are fundamental doctrines that all true Baptists must adhere to. We find these in the word of God. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but it includes: salvation by grace through faith that is not of works, one true church, a distinct difference in the family of God and the church, the ordinances (Baptism and The Lord's Supper) that can only be administered by the church, ministers that are called of God, and church authority that includes ordaining brethren to the offices of bishops and deacons. These are some of the principles from which we cannot waiver.

A true Baptist will seek the help of God in all things. We must realize we can do nothing without His help. John 15:5 proves such as Christ said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." This also brings to attention the warfare between the inward man and the outward man. This is a daily struggle. Paul in Galatians 5:17 writes, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." He also writes in verse 25 of the same chapter, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." To be a true Baptist means that we strive daily to follow the Holy Spirit.

One will only be a true Baptist and will die as a true Baptist by the grace of God. God

saves the soul by grace through faith and calls His children to be a part of the church He set up. One day, the Lord will come and receive His church to present it as a chaste virgin before His Father in the great marriage of the Lamb. Let us strive to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:14).

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The Lord Jesus was an eye witness to the creation, being the creator Himself. John writes, "All things are made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:3) Jesus made several statements regarding the creation during His earthly ministry. In one such statement He said, "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female." (Mark 10:6) In this statement, the Son of God clearly states that mankind was made at "the beginning of creation." Those holding a naturalistic view of man's origin believe the earth to be four billion years old. They believe man to be between two and seven million years old, being a product of the process of evolution. Thus, they believe man to be made closer to the end of earth's timeline than "the beginning of creation". So, when one believes the naturalistic view that the earth is ancient while man is much younger, he believes something contrary to this plain teaching of the Lord Jesus.

While many other passages in the New Testament support a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation, these passages can be summed up in this: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God..." (Heb. 11:3) While many have compromised on the creation account of the Bible, it ought not be compromised for "science falsely so called", for a true interpretation of scientific evidence will harmonize with the Bible.

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women in church business. In particular, their right to vote in business meetings was called into question. Some members of the association were trying to misapply 1 Corinthians 14:34 to exclude sisters from having any rights in church business. The association set the matter aright by providing an explanation of the scripture. Among this explanation is found a point of interest as it pertains to the practice of receiving testimonies of saving faith prior to baptism.

If then, the silence enjoined on women be taken so absolute, as that they must keep entire silence in all respects whatever... how shall a woman make a confession of her faith to the satisfaction of the whole church? or how shall the church judge whether a woman be in the faith or no? (Minutes of the Philadelphia Association, A. D. Gillette, pg. 53)

Here the Philadelphia Association expresses three underlying sentiments regarding admission into their churches. First, every member (male or female) was received by baptism upon a personal confession of faith. Second, this confession was expressed before the "whole church" for its consideration. Third, this confession was only received if it met the "satisfaction of the whole church." In other words, a mere confession of "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God" would not suffice. If it should, would not every petitioner be judged in the faith? A personal experience of saving faith is implied. The very mention of judging such confessions implies a universal practice among their churches.

The churches of the Philadelphia Association were not alone in requiring a personal expression of saving faith prior to admitting individuals into their membership. The Kehukee Baptist Association of North Carolina maintained the same practice. In the 1783 minutes of the association, the following question and corresponding answer are found:

Question: What are the essentials of church communion? Answer: That a person shall, before being admitted to commune, give a satisfactory account of his being savingly converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and publicly declare the same by being regularly baptized by

immersion. (History of the Kehukee Baptist Association, L. Burkitt & J. Read, pg. 75)

Here the Kehukee Association expressed in the simplest terms how their churches should receive members. They believed it to be essential (absolutely necessary) to require new members to give "a satisfactory account of being savingly converted" before baptism. This account (description of an event or experience) of a personal salvation must satisfy (meet the expectations) of the church before a person should be baptized. In 1772, a bar of communion existed between some of the Regular and Separate Baptist churches of North Carolina. This division was caused by some "not being strict enough in receiving experiences." (pg. 42)

An example of an experience that would have been found acceptable among the Baptists during the mid 1700s can be found in the *The Diary of Isaac Backus*. Bro. Backus (1724-1806) was a prominent Baptist pastor, missionary, and historian. He was highly regarded among the Baptists of New England. An appendix to his diary contains the account of his testimony in his own words. He writes:

...in May and June 1741, God by his Spirit was pleased in infinite mercy to bring eternal things near to my soul and shew me the dreadful dangers of delays...about this time it pleased the Lord to send many powerful preachers to Norwich...Nothing now distressed me more than to find that hearing the most powerful preaching and also the sreaks and cries of souls under concern did not affect me as I desired. But my heart felt hard...to see that I had such corruptions in me brought on fresh distress that I knew not which way to turn...after this on August the 24, 1741 as I was mowing in the field alone I was thinking of my case...it appeared indeed nothing but a life of sin. I felt so that I left work and went and sat down under a shadey tree...had tried to mend my self by my tears prayers and promises of doing better but all in vain...it appeared clear to me then that I had tried every way that possibly I could and if I perished forever I could do no more. And the justice of God shined so clear before my eyes in condemning such a guilty rebel that I could say no more—but fell at His feet..that He had a right to do with me just as He pleased and I lay like a dead vile creature before Him. I felt a calm in my mind—they tossings and tumults that I

felt before seemed to be gone...And now my burden (that was so dreadful heavy before) was gone: that tormenting fear that I had was taken away and I felt a sweet peace and rejoicing in my soul. But yet all this time I hadn't thought that this was that which is called conversion; it was so different from the notion that I had of it before...These mercies of the Lord are greater than tongue can express. That He should deliver my soul from going down to the pit... (pg. 1523-1526)

The eminent Baptist missionary, John Taylor (1752-1835), wrote of many being saved during the great revivals in Kentucky. On several occasions in his *A History of Ten Baptist Churches*, Bro. Taylor relates different experiences which were received by Baptist churches during these revivals. Of one man he writes, "This poor man through deep distress of soul did...like the publican in the temple cry for mercy, and the Lord sent him speedily relief." (pg. 151) Of another he relates:

...to accommodate his wife, he went [to a church service], with the design to pay no attention...but that night, the arrows of God reached his soul, that he could not extract, till he found relief in the Lord... When [he] related his experience, to the church, if weeping is a childish thing, the crowded house all became children...This conquered sinner was baptized the next day, with his wife... (pg. 206)

While there are some differences in these experiences, the things common between them were considered the essentials of a satisfactory account of being savingly converted. The things common among them are a godly sorrow which works repentance and a faith from the heart which brings peace.

The practice of receiving new converts by experience and baptism has its origins in the scriptures. John the Baptist baptized those who would bring forth evidence of a penitent faith. Baptists of the past received only new members who would relate a *satisfactory* account of saving faith. These Baptists considered a *satisfactory* experience one which included a godly sorrow, repentance, faith from the heart, and a knowledge of sins forgiven by obtaining peace within. This they considered a genuine penitent faith. This practice ought to be maintained by Old-Time Baptists today. Remove not this old landmark, which the fathers have set.