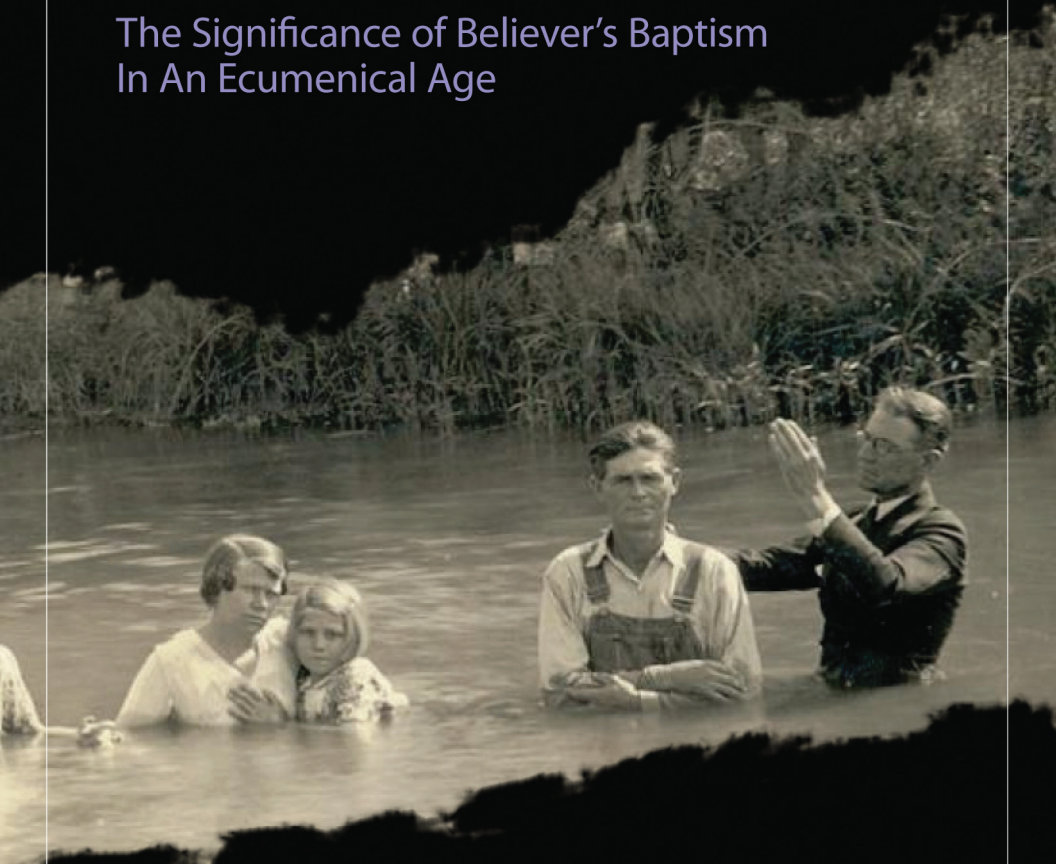


BAPTISM

The Significance of Believer's Baptism
In An Ecumenical Age



JAMES A. ALTER

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First published in March of 2008 by ANCIENT BAPTIST PRESS,
a ministry of Grace Baptist Church, Sidney, OH 45365 &
Liberty Baptist Church, Callahan, FL 32011.

ANCIENT BAPTIST PRESS is committed to promoting
Baptist principles and biblical preaching.
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ANCIENT BAPTIST PRESS
137 W. Edgewood St.
Sidney, OH 45365
937.492.9061

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Cover design by Jim Alter and Nathan Breinich
Layout by Nathan Breinich

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
available upon request.

ISBN 978-0-615-19700-5
Printed in the United States of America

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ANCIENT
BAPTIST
PRESS

Sidney, Ohio
Callahan, Florida

Christian Baptism is not the celebration of a religious rite by modes indifferent, but a specific act to be administered by a specific body, to persons professing specific qualifications, for the profession of specific truths. When one of these properties is wanting, the transaction is “null and void,” since, unless the ordinances are observed as Christ commanded, they are not kept, but perverted, and bring upon the parties not the commendation, but condemnation of the Master.

- J.R. Graves

What is the biblical doctrine of Baptism? Ask the typical Christian, be they a pastor, worker, church member or nominal attendee, to explain the significance of baptism, and they will answer something like this: “Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” If they are more informed, they may add, “It is the first step of obedience after one believes.” These are true statements and attest to the care that good pastors and teachers have exercised in grounding their students in the basics of Christianity.

On an elementary level these answers are fine, but doctrinally there remains so much more to be said. Jeremiah Jeter¹ wrote,

No man can intelligently and candidly read the New Testament without perceiving that baptism is of solemn import, and designed to exert a momentous influence in the kingdom of Christ.²

Baptism is vitally important in the life of a believer and in the life of a New Testament Baptist church. Baptism may be explained using three words: Obedience, Identification, and Submission. Before we explore these, we must first lay a foundation.

¹ Jeremiah Jeter (1802-1880) was a powerful preacher and pastor in Virginia. He was editor of the Religious Herald, an influential Baptist paper of his day.

² Jeremiah B. Jeter D.D., *Baptist Principles Reset*, (Richmond, Virg.: The Religious Herald, 1901), 27.

BAPTISM BASICS

1. BAPTISM REQUIRES THE PROPER CANDIDATE

- Biblically speaking, baptism is always of believers.³ By this we mean those who have placed their faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation, recognizing their sinful condition before a holy and just God, and through repentance and faith have received Christ Jesus as their one and only Saviour.⁴

Biblically speaking, baptism is always of believers.
- The clearest example of an individual's baptism in the Bible is the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-39. In verse 36, the eunuch asked, "... *what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" Phillip answered with the condition of baptism in verse 37, "... *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*" The eunuch's response demonstrated his understanding of salvation as prerequisite to baptism, "... *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*"
- *Never in the pages of the Word of God is anyone baptized prior to salvation, never is an infant baptized, never is anyone coerced into being baptized, nor is anyone born-*

³ Acts 2:41

⁴ See Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9-13, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5

Never in the pages of the Word of God is anyone baptized prior to salvation, never is an infant baptized, never is anyone coerced into being baptized, nor is anyone born-again by their baptism.

again by their baptism.

2. BAPTISM REQUIRES THE PROPER MODE

- When we speak of the mode of baptism, we refer to the method of baptism. Do we immerse, sprinkle, or pour? The student of the Bible will read and study the Scriptures his whole life and never find any mode of baptism other than immersion.
- In the New Testament we have two examples of people going down into the water to be baptized. First, in Acts 8:38-39, both Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water. Second, in Matthew 3:16, Jesus Christ Himself was baptized in the same manner.
- Baptism is a *demonstration* of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When a person dies, their burial is the complete immersion of their body in the ground. Dirt is not sprinkled on the body and called burial. The biblical mode or method of baptism is complete immersion in water. No one in the Bible was ever sprinkled. Sprinkling has nothing to do with and cannot in any way represent or