

# WHO ARE THE BAPTISTS?



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*Special Thanks:*

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## Who Are the Baptists?

I had the privilege and responsibility of growing up in a Christian home. Our family attended, participated in, and were faithful members of a thriving Baptist church in southern Ohio.

Many of my extended family are members of a small Methodist church in the hollows of the rolling hills of Southern Ohio. As a boy, I remember attending baptisms of cousins being immersed in the cool waters of a creek. In that day, back in the hills, many of the smaller churches had not yet been influenced by progressive interpretations of Scripture and were very similar in practice to what we read in the Bible. Things have since changed.

As a teenager, the first time I entered inside an Episcopal church building was for a wedding. I could tell some things were different there from what I was taught and read from the Bible.

A few years ago, Wilton Baptist took a mission trip to Montreal, Canada to help a

missionary church planter. We visited and toured what we were told was the largest Catholic church building in North America. In it, people were praying to the actual heart of the man who bore the name of the building. His heart was removed from his body upon his death and kept in a clear bottle of formaldehyde.

There on display in Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, people really bow down and pray to this human heart. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to pray to anyone or anything other than God the Father. We are to pray through the authority and in the name of Jesus Christ Himself.

Today, we do recognize there are many "branches" within Christianity. Like Jesus said: "I Am the vine- ye are the branches." Some "branches" are more biblically accurate than others. If a church or religious group adds anyone to the Trinity, or prays to other "deities" or even saints, we would not count them as following the Scriptures. Bible Christianity holds on to Jesus alone for salvation, trusting Him for eternal life,

intercession to God the Father, and the full payment for our sin He paid on the Cross. Since there are so many religious groups in this world, please take time to read this short book about who the Baptists really are.

What is it that makes a Baptist a Baptist? Baptists are Christians who trace their heritage to the early church of the New Testament. Most scholars who study this heritage see Baptists as neither being in the Catholic Church or in the Protestant Churches that broke away from the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation. Think of it this way – Baptists are not truly Protestant because they were not in the Catholic Church to protest anything in the first place.

We are glad to identify as “Baptists.” Being a Baptist does not cause salvation. For a person to be saved, he must become a Christian by placing his faith in Christ for the forgiveness of his personal sins. Baptist doctrine is important for the person who says “I am a Baptist.” Why? What do Baptist churches really believe?

Someone has developed an acrostic using the term “Baptist” to develop and define the Baptist distinctive and what separates Baptist doctrines from other Christian groups:

## **B** **Biblical Authority.**

The Bible is the blueprint and defining handbook for our code of conduct. We hold the Scriptures as being infallible, inerrant, and the perfect letter from God to man. We see the Bible as our authority for all we do. Therefore, it is God’s Word that we must live by. It supersedes any word, message, or idea any man may have.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

The Bible is powerful and capable to change the person who is yielding himself to the

Word. Other verses about Biblical Authority include but are not limited to: John 17:17; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4, Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20–21.

## **A** **Autonomy of the Local Church.**

The organization of the church is self-governance. We believe in independent churches functioning autonomously of other churches, conventions, and religious groups. “Autonomously” is an adverb that Oxford defines as “with the freedom to act independently.” As Americans, we tend to value independence and liberty. As Christians, we value independence and liberty even more. Baptist independence means for instance, that we decide which missionaries to partner with, what actions to take as a body, which colleges to recommend, what holy days to observe, and what times to have our services, including communion. We have no outside party or “hierarchy of leadership” from a religious group or organization that

dictates what to believe or how to behave as a local body of believers. We believe in congregational rule, following the leadership of the pastor.

While we are independent, we are not isolationist. We enjoy encouraging other Christians. What other churches do, or do not, do is of little consequence to us.

Some “Baptist” Churches would be “Southern Baptist,” “American Baptist,” or even “Hard Shell Baptist,” like I heard in the mountains years ago. Independent Baptists, however, are not part of any denomination, so in purely academic terms, Baptists are not a denomination. A denomination, according to Meriam-Webster’s refers to “a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices.” There are so many variations within “Baptist” churches that you cannot fully tell everything you need to know about a church until you visit it by spending some time hearing the Sunday School lessons, listening to the pastor preach, singing the songs, and even

seeing the disposition of the people. The point to take is this: Don't merely judge a church by its name.

Using the term "Baptist" and the definitions in this acrostic are a great place to start, but not every "Baptist" church would even hold these definitions!

As Christians with Baptist doctrine and convictions, we are serving the Lord faithfully as best as we know how.

Ultimately, we would say we are being led by Jesus Himself. Colossians 1:18 describes this by saying: "*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*" Other verses teaching the autonomy of the local church are: Acts 13–14, 20:19–30; Ephesians 1:22–23, Ephesians 4:15.

# **P**riesthood of Believers.

One of the most incredible truths in all of Scripture is that each person who has received Jesus for salvation is ordained a priest by the Lord. While the Jewish Old Testament priesthood required a priest (another man) to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the repentant and confessing sinner, we see the New Testament truth that the Christian is his own priest. We pray directly to God the Father in the name of and through His Son, Jesus Christ. We need no other mediator to receive salvation but Jesus. Jesus is the mediator – and the sacrifice. Since His sacrifice of Himself paid for our sin, once we are saved, we go directly to God the Father through Jesus. We need no other man for this.

Hebrews 4:14–16 relates this amazing truth, *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;*

*but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*

This truth has helped many people turn from a man-created, works-based religion to trust in Jesus alone and receive His gift for salvation. Reformers such as Martin Luther saw the Scriptures teach that a man did not need to confess his sins to another man (unless he sinned directly towards that man), but that he could take his plea for forgiveness directly to God. Luther lived in the Dark Ages. At that time, people began to read the Bible for themselves, and the world was thrust into the more modern era of Renaissance and then Enlightenment.

The priesthood of the believer changes our lives, because we can pray directly to God. While we are commanded to pray for other people – we cannot make other people right with God. We can only confess our own sin and seek the Lord for ourselves directly with God in matters of forgiveness and grace.

Other passages to read include: 1 Timothy 2:5–6 and 1 Peter 2:5–10.

# **T** Two Offices

## **Within the Church.**

There are two positions of servant-leadership described in the Bible for the New Testament church: pastor and deacon. The pastors of the church are men who have been called to publicly preach and teach the Bible. They study the Word and pray, ministering the Bible to the needs of the congregation. While the terms “bishop, elder, and pastor” are synonymous we use the term “pastor.”

The deacons are also servants who assist the pastor in the care of the church. The original deacons were men who “served tables” and helped the physical necessities of the widows, while the pastors gave their time to prayer, study, and ministering the Word. At Wilton Baptist Church, our deacons have helped people learn to manage finances, give money

to pay bills, and construct needed items or repairs in the houses of those who are unable.

In his letter to the Philippian church, who supported Paul's mission work financially, the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1:1; *“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”* Here we find him addressing the church and the servant-leaders of the church – the pastors and the deacons.

Our church is blessed with kind-hearted pastors and faithful deacons who are committed to the cause of Christ. Each of these men do not merely fill an office, but fulfill their role of godly service to the Lord in serving the church. The high qualifications and expectations for pastors and deacons are found in Acts 6:1–7; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9; 1 Peter 5:1–4.

# I Individual Soul Liberty.

It would seem wonderful if we could “pray other people into Heaven” or make some sacrifice on behalf of the sins of another yet the Bible makes it clear that for a person to be saved, he must accept Jesus for himself. Each individual is responsible for this basic question: “What will I do with Jesus?” We can accept Him, reject Him, or put Him off until later, but we may never have the opportunity of today. Belief in Jesus is an individual choice that God allows us to make for ourselves.

Romans 14:5 teaches, “*One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*” God created us to make up our own mind with the options and opportunities the Lord gives to us. God did not create us to be robots. His desire is that each human freely choose to come to Christ. Love is not something that is bought or forced. While He is not willing that any

person perish, the Lord gives us freedom to choose or reject Jesus.

Romans 14:11-12 continues this idea by saying, *“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* We will all give an account for ourselves to God one day. Other passages to read about individual soul liberty include: Romans 10:9–17, 14:1–23.

## **S** Separation of Church and State.

Church services, doctrine, events, and ministries of the church are separate from the government. God created both the State and the Church and both are given their own distinct responsibilities in the Bible. While the State ensures protection from civil evils and terror nations, the Church functions apart from the government. Part of the Christian’s

obligation is to pray for leaders, support them, and obey them. When the leaders make laws that contradict the Bible, we choose to peacefully obey God rather than men. We seek to encourage our governmental leaders in matters of Scriptural priorities and offer our prayers to the Lord for them. It is a good thing when Christians are serving in public office.

Interestingly enough, the phrase “Separation of Church and State” is not found in the Constitution of the United States. While researching Thomas Jefferson in the Library of Congress, I found a letter he wrote. It is a good and proper statement in its original context. Here are his words in 1802.

*Gentlemen,*

*The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, & in proportion as they are persuaded of my*

*fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.*

*Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.*

*I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.*

*Th Jefferson  
Jan. 1. 1802.*

Writing to a “Baptist Association” Mr. Jefferson makes it clear that his intent is for no human government to control the interests of any church. As one reads this letter, it is evident that Mr. Jefferson also believed in individual soul liberty.

I have a 2000-year-old coin similar to the one presented to Jesus when He said in Matthew 22:21: “...*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*” The coin imprint is a bust image of Tiberius Caesar on one side and an image of his mother, Livia Drusilla, in a deified engraving on the other side. Stop by for church next Sunday and we can look at it together.

Other verses to examine are: Acts 5:29–31; Romans 13:1–4 and Romans 13:7.

## **T** Two Ordinances.

Believers Baptism and the Lord’s Table (Communion) are two special events the Lord

has ordained for the local church to observe as part of the church meetings.

When giving His Great Commission to evangelize the world, Jesus says, “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...*” (Matthew 28:19). The teaching for the new believer includes the event of believer’s baptism. Notice the specific directive to be baptized and the authority that is given to the church to baptize converts in His statement.

Baptism is only for those who have made the personal decision to believe in Jesus for salvation. They have repented of sin and asked God to forgive them in Jesus’ name. They are not infants, nor are they merely good people. Believer’s Baptism is for – believers. It is a one-time event designed to picture the “death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.”

Years ago, in West Virginia, we were blessed to lead a lady to Jesus. She trusted Jesus for her eternal salvation and forgiveness of her

sins. She lived in the local nursing home just 2 blocks from the church building. She was only about 30 years old. She sat in an electric wheel chair with a joy stick she could control with her mouth. She was frail, weak, and a quadriplegic. She could not leave the nursing home, but she begged us to baptize her. One day, following a church service, I instructed the church that the “service is not over. Please go to the nursing home for the baptismal part of our church service today.” The whole church arrived at the nursing home. We sang songs as several staff members held the der lady in towels (so as to not bruise her) and together we lowered her into a bathtub for her baptism. In the presence of the church, she followed the Lord in believer’s baptism. I am grateful for her testimony and good example to honor Christ in baptism.

Christians who love Jesus will not only follow the Lord in believer’s baptism following their repentance and prayer of faith in Jesus, but they will also participate in the Lord’s Supper. Within the framework of their local church, they will regularly

remember the sacrifice Jesus made in observing the Lord's Table.

If you were to go to the Upper Room in Jerusalem today, you will find ample room for the first disciples to be seated around a large table with Jesus. It was in this location that the words of 1 Corinthians 11:26 were given, *“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”*

Communion is designed to remind our minds and recall to our own hearts the love, devotion, and sacrifice Jesus made when His body was broken and His blood was shed for us. The elements of grape juice and unleavened crackers remain just that, and they are intended to be a picture of the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Passages to review include: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Acts 2:38–43, 8:36–38; and Romans 6:1–6.

# S Separation and

## Personal Holiness.

The Church is comprised of “called-out ones.” We are to be little “Christs” which is what the term Christian meant in its early beginning.

The difference that Christ makes in us should be evident more and more each day. While we will never be perfect while navigating life on earth, we can become more like Jesus.

Speaking to a church that struggled from time to time with holiness and right living, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

We have two choices: to be more like the world, our human flesh (sinful nature), and the devil – or to be more like Jesus. God has

given us a directive to be more like Him.

The members of Wilton Baptist are no different from the members of the Corinthian church. We are all sinners who, because of our love for Jesus will seek Him and allow Him to change us each day to be a greater reflection of His image and likeness. Other scriptures include: 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:11; 1 Peter 1:16.

Because we are willing to admit that we are an imperfect people following our perfect God, we seek help and find hope for each day in the Bible. Like one preacher said: “We are sinners willing to admit it and are banding together to do something about it.” We find emotional encouragement, spiritual admonition, and personal accountability when we gather together with other people who comprise the Wilton Baptist Church. We study the Bible together. We sing and pray together to the Lord.

Church services at Wilton Baptist Church are not intended to be like a new car showroom. Go to a dealer and see the impressive brand-

new cars; smell the premium leather seats, hear the engine run smoothly. The church services are more like the repair shop. Our hands may have grit and grease on them. The engine is not running as smoothly as it should be running. We know we need help. We do not come to church to “show off.” We come to church to get a “tune up.”

May the current members of Wilton Baptist Church and the future members remain faithful to Jesus, giving glory and honor to Him.

**Who are the Baptists?** Baptists are Christians who hold the Bible in highest esteem. We seek to hold to the earliest teachings of the first Christians as described in the Bible. With no denominational ties, we answer directly to the Lord Jesus. We seek to evangelize the world, edify the saints (other believers) and to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in the church and in daily life.

If these truths are resonating with you, or if you would like more information, please set

up a time to meet with me. Wilton Baptist Church would be honored to count you as a member here to help us carry out these responsibilities the Lord has given to us.

For more information, please go to:  
[www.wiltonbaptistchurch.com](http://www.wiltonbaptistchurch.com)

Or visit this Sunday at 11:00 AM or 6:00 PM  
Wilton Baptist Church  
755 Saratoga Road, Wilton NY

Find free devotional resources at:  
[www.pastorharness.com](http://www.pastorharness.com)

# How Can I Be Born Again?

## ► **Recognize your need for the Savior.**

I am a sinner; I cannot save myself with good works or religion. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)*

## ► **Realize Jesus paid for your salvation.**

*“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)*

## ► **Receive His gift of salvation.**

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Pray to receive Jesus as your Savior by faith:  
“Lord, I know I am a sinner. I know Jesus

came, bled, and died on the cross, taking the penalty for my sin. I believe Jesus rose again, and I am asking You to forgive me of my sins. Please save me and give me a home in Heaven. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.”

*Please let us know if you have  
trusted Christ for salvation.*

*We want to help you grow  
in your new faith in the Lord.*

## About the Writer

**Pastor Steve Harness** was saved at the age of seven. His father led him to the Lord in their home after a Sunday night church service. The Lord has blessed Pastor Harness with many educational and experiential opportunities. Educational opportunities include a Bachelor of Bible, a Master of Ministry, a Doctor of Biblical Studies, and a Ph.D. in Christian Counseling. Experiential opportunities include pastor, youth pastor, Christian school educator, school board president, teen evangelist, camp and conference speaker, radio broadcaster/podcaster, and many others. He is thankful for each opportunity the Lord has given, and he desires to “serve the Lord with gladness” while seeing people saved and growing in their relationship with the Jesus.

Connect with him on Twitter: [@SNHarness](#)

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Counseling Devotionals at [www.pastorharness.com](http://www.pastorharness.com)

iTunes/PLAY podcast at [“Claiming New Territory”](#)



**BAPTISTS** are Christians who  
strive to adhere to the earliest  
teachings as found in the  
**NEW TESTAMENT.**



## WHO ARE THE **BAPTISTS** ?

is designed to be an introduction  
to the Wilton Baptist Church and  
the primary understanding of  
what it is to be a baptist.

\$3.00