

## **THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (6)**

### **Baptism – A Sign and Seal of the Gospel**

#### **A. Introduction**

1. The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, instructs each local church to appoint a plurality of qualified men to be elders.
2. The elders are to feed, know, lead, protect, care for, and love the flock under their care so that as a local church we display God's glory to the world around us.
3. The primary way the elders are to do this is by ensuring that the gospel is preached and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered correctly.
4. Preaching the Gospel both CREATES the church and TRANSFORMS the church.
5. Jesus commands all believers to be baptised.

When Peter commanded the new converts on the Day of Pentecost to be baptised he was carrying out the Great Commission given to him by Jesus Himself.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? Peter replied, Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37-38)

6. The apostle Paul assumes that all Christians have been baptised.

"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no-one can say that you were baptised into my name. (Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else.)" (1 Corinthians 1:13-16)

#### **B. The Beauty of Baptism**

1. Baptism is not just "when the preacher holds you under the water and you think about Jesus."
2. Baptism is a 'visible' word – it is both a sign and a seal.

A sign that points to something else.

It reminds us of our Lord's own baptism on our behalf – the baptism of the cross.

"But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50)

"You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" (Mark 10:38)

A seal that confirms the reality of the thing it points to.

It confirms that the truths of the gospel are as real for us as the water we feel.

#### **C. Baptism is a sign and a seal of the gospel**

1. Baptism is a sign and a seal of forgiveness.

Baptism points to the reality of being forgiven when we repent and call on the name of Jesus and it seals this truth in our hearts.

“Peter replied, Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

(You can be forgiven without being baptised – see the example of the thief on the cross!)

2. Baptism is a sign and a seal of being washed clean.

Baptism reminds us that we are dirty before God because of our sin and that through Jesus’ death all our sins have been washed away like water washes away the physical dirt from our bodies.

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

3. Baptism is a sign and a seal of new life.

Baptism is a picture of dying to our old way of life and being raised to live a new life as one of God’s children.

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:3-4)

The fruit of this new life is that you obey what Jesus has commanded, including His command to be baptised.

4. Baptism is a sign and a seal of a new identity.

Baptism is a ‘badge of discipleship’ – a mark that someone has decided to follow Jesus.

Baptism identifies us as a follower of Jesus – we associate ourselves with Jesus who was baptised, and with others like us who have been baptised.

“For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:26-27)

5. Baptism is a sign and a seal of entry into the local church

Baptism is the front door into membership of a local church.

“Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:41)

This is one of the reasons why the elders must administer this ordinance correctly.

#### **D. Rightly Administering Baptism**

1. WHO should be baptised?

The New Testament pattern is of the gospel being preached, followed by the response of faith, then baptism and instruction (Acts 2:22-42).

Bible-believing Christians generally agree that believers should be baptised but not every Bible-believing Christian agrees that only believers should be baptised (their children should be as well)<sup>1</sup>.

#### The Case for Infant Baptism (Paedobaptism)

Paedobaptists do not believe that baptism saves the child.

Paedobaptists believe that the Bible teaches that the infants of believing parents should also be baptised, although they admit that there are no clear examples of infants being baptised in the Bible.

The argument for infant baptism goes something like this:

In the New Testament all of God's people are blessed in accordance with the covenant that God made with Abraham (Galatians 3:6-7).

God gave a sign of circumcision to mark those who were the recipients of the promise and to signify his pledge to provide for those who had faith in Him.

All the males who were part of Abraham's household (regardless of whether they had faith or not) were given this sign which marked God's people as being separated from the nations around them.

Circumcision was a sign pointing to Christ and a pledge that God would do what He had promised for those who have faith in Him – it was therefore not necessary for the parents to wait until a child expressed faith.

After the coming of Christ the sign of circumcision changed to baptism (Colossians 2:11-12) so that it no longer pointed to what Christ would do but to what Christ has done.

But because the covenant still remains, the new sign should be applied the same way that circumcision was. There are no commands in the Bible saying "Don't do it!" Paedobaptists would also see the examples of household baptisms in the book of Acts as proof of this taking place.

So baptism for infants is a sign pointing to what Christ has done and a pledge of God to do what He said He would do for those who have faith in Him, thus fulfilling Acts 2:39: *"this promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

#### The Case for Believer's Baptism (Credobaptism)

Baptism is not a replacement for circumcision but a new sign marking out those who have repented and believed. Whereas circumcision points forward to Christ and conversion, baptism points back to Christ and conversion.

There are no examples in the Bible of infants being baptised – there are verses about infants, verses about baptism, but no verses that put infants and baptism together.

Every person in Acts who is baptised, is baptised after they have repented and believed (including the instances of household baptisms). It is worth noting that John's baptism was given after repentance.

Baptism ultimately is picture of what has already taken place in a person's life, not what might take place in the future.

As there is a link between baptism and membership of the church (Acts 2:41), baptising infants creates confusion as to whether the infants are in fact members of the church because they have not yet repented and believed the gospel.

#### Summary

If those who hold to believer baptism are wrong, the only harm they have done is unnecessarily delayed baptism, but positively the person being baptised may now remember their baptism. If the Infant Baptist is wrong, they have caused people to sin and prevented people from obeying a clear and direct command from Jesus.

Only those who have repented of their sins and believe in Jesus should be baptised.

## 2. HOW should they be baptised?

The Bible does not prescribe a method for baptism.

"As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." (Mark 1:10)

"Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptised." (John 3:23)

"Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:38-39)

Three modes of baptism have been used which each have their roots in the Old Testament.

Sprinkling emphasises the promise of Ezekiel 36:25: "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.*" (see also Hebrews 10:22)

Pouring emphasises the pouring of God's Spirit upon believers (see Titus 3:5-7).

*"God, in baptising the disciples with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, did so by pouring out His Spirit upon them. Pouring is therefore very clearly described as a biblical mode of baptism."*  
(Doug Wilson)

Immersion emphasises the union with Christ of a believer in His death, burial and resurrection (see Romans 6:3-4)

The Greek word 'baptizo' generally means to immerse or to dip but not exclusively.

*Didache: "But if thou hast neither [running water or a static pool], then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

*Calvin: "Whether the person baptised is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence: churches should be at liberty to adopt either according to the diversity of climates although it is evident that the term baptise means to immerse and that this was the form used by the primitive Church."*

The only firm conclusion we can have is that baptism involves water, although Luther said: "*If, in an emergency there's no water at hand, it doesn't matter whether water or beer is used.*"

Our tradition and preference as a local church is to baptise by immersion, as it presents a clearer picture of the gospel. However in exceptional cases an alternative method (either sprinkling or pouring) may be used.

The HOW is not as important as the WHO.

Other factors to consider is what is said when a baptism takes place.

Jesus has told us to baptise people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

Two helpful but not essential items are to ask the person being baptism to answer some questions and to share their testimony.

Answering questions about what they believe can be helpful in confirming that the person is in fact a believer.

Asking the person to share their testimony provides an opportunity to give glory to God for saving them, to build up and encourage other believers, and to witness to any unbelievers present.

## 3. WHEN should they be baptised?

The examples in Acts are of people getting baptised very soon after becoming Christians (Day of Pentecost, Ethiopian eunuch, Philippian jailer etc).

“immediately he and all his family were baptised.” (Acts 16:33)

There are however, some good reasons to delay baptism for a period of time.

If we believe that only believers should be baptised, it is important to make sure that to the best of our knowledge the person wanting to be baptised is a believer, by allowing time for fruit to show.

In the case of children and young people it might be helpful to wait for evidence of their conversion to show, for understanding about what baptism means, and for maturity and independent thinking.

Historically most Baptists were not baptised until late teens or early twenties and most already held jobs.

*“Spurgeon is a good example of someone who both preached and practiced the importance of leading children to conversion and yet who waited to baptise his own sons – evidently Christians for years – until they were eighteen.”* (Mark Dever)

### **E. Be Baptised!**

1. If you have repented and put your faith in Jesus, but have not yet been baptised, Jesus commands you to be. What is stopping you?

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

2. If you have been baptised, think back to the day of your baptism, and be encouraged by all that it represented.

3. If you have not repented and put your faith in Jesus, reflect on the truths that baptism points to.

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<sup>i</sup> The best argument I’ve read for infant baptism is in Bryan Chapell’s essay ‘A Pastoral Overview of Infant Baptism’ in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* edited by Gregg Strawbrige