



# Truly Believing

a guide to baptism



*The baptistry at Ephesus*

**Stapleford Baptist Church**

## 1 Introduction

You're probably reading this booklet because you've been coming to Stapleford Baptist Church for a while and either you've asked, or someone's asked you, "What about baptism?". So this booklet is meant to be a simple guide for people who are thinking about being baptised as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll find lots of references to Bible passages. You'll find it helpful to look them up!

In his book "The purpose driven life", Rick Warren says:

Healthy families have family pride; members are not ashamed to be recognised as part of their family. Sadly, I have met many believers who have never publicly identified themselves with their spiritual family as Jesus commanded - by being baptised.

Baptism is not an optional ritual to be delayed or postponed. It signifies your inclusion in God's family. It publicly announces to the world, "I am not ashamed to be part of God's family". Have you been baptised? Jesus commanded this beautiful act for all His family. He told us to "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20).

For years I wondered why Jesus' Great Commission gives the same prominence to baptism as it does to the great tasks of evangelism and edification. Then I realised that it is because it symbolises God's second purpose for your life: participating in the fellowship of God's eternal family.

Baptism is pregnant with meaning. Your baptism declares your faith, shares Christ's burial and resurrection, symbolises your death to your old life, and announces your new life in Christ. It is also a celebration of your inclusion into God's family.

Your baptism is a physical picture of a spiritual truth. It represents what happened the moment God brought you into his family: *"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).

Baptism doesn't make you a member of God's family; only faith in Christ does that. Baptism shows you are part of God's family. Like a wedding ring, it is a visible reminder of an inward commitment made in your heart. It is an act of initiation, not something you put off until you are spiritually mature. The only biblical condition is that you believe.

In the New Testament, people were baptised as soon as they believed. At Pentecost, 3000 people were baptised the same day they accepted Christ. Elsewhere, an Ethiopian leader was baptised on the spot when he was converted, and Paul and Silas baptised a Philippian jailer and his family at midnight. There are no delayed baptisms in the New Testament. If you haven't been baptised as an expression of your faith in Christ, do so as soon as possible, as Jesus commanded".

I hope that's given you a desire to know more about baptism. If so, read on ....

## **2      The requirements for baptism**

As Rick Warren said, *"the only biblical condition (or requirement) is that you believe"*, or to put it another way, you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation. But before moving on we ought to think for a moment what that really means.

Everybody is a sinner (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23), we've rebelled against God and His plans for us and now we are under His wrath. We are guilty and condemned. We have to confess our sinfulness and our sins, repenting of them to God, and trusting only in the Lord Jesus Christ for our personal salvation (Acts 20:21). Because he has died as the only pure

and holy sacrifice who is acceptable to God, Christ's death buys the salvation of everyone who trusts in Him (1 Peter 2:24). We are redeemed (bought back), born again of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-5) and are reconciled to our holy and righteous God (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Everybody who has truly trusted Christ for their salvation in this way must be trying hard to live a holy life as children of God (1 John 2:6; Romans 6:4). If they weren't then it's difficult to see how they truly repented and trusted in Christ in the first place. It would be a little like saying "God, I'm very sorry for rebelling against you .... but not sorry enough to try and stop. Please save me anyway". Whereas God says "I will come to those who repent of their sins" (Isaiah 59:20).

What about you? Have you truly repented and are you trying to treat Him as your Master - who everyday should be willingly and enjoyably obeyed? If so, then baptism's definitely for you. But if you want to have the benefit of salvation without daily repentance and a desire to please Him and to grow to be more like Him, then take great care. You need to get your direction sorted out before you consider baptism. You can't expect God to rescue you from Hell and destruction, where your old way of living was taking you, if you still are happy living life in the same selfish way. 1 John 1:6-9 spells out the contrast. You can't expect to be accepted in God's family, which baptism portrays, if you don't want to live as a family member. For you baptism isn't appropriate. We urge you to truly repent, to change your life's direction, and then to be baptised.

### 3 What, exactly, is baptism?

The English word for Baptism comes from a Greek word, "*bapto*", which means "to cover wholly with a fluid". The Greek word was used when a ship sank, when a person drowned or when a garment was dyed. It's used in this way in John 13:26 when Christ says "*I will give a piece of bread after I have **dipped** it in the dish*". In Revelation 19:13 Christ "*is dressed in a robe **dipped** in blood*". As you can see from the first sentence of this paragraph, the English and Greek words sound almost exactly the same! The word's not really been translated in our Bibles, if it had been this booklet would be about "dipping" not "baptising". So, you see, baptism is a dunking!

In the book of Acts (which tells the story of the early church) Peter says "*Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ*" (Acts 2:38) and the early church did this, dunking people (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12; Acts 8:36-8; Acts 10:48; Acts 16:33). Thus they followed Jesus' instruction (Matthew 28:19 = "*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*"). So we believe it's important for the church to baptise people who truly believe and for all true believers to be baptised as Jesus Christ commanded. That's why, at Stapleford Baptist Church, we dip people under water.

But there aren't any magical powers in the water we use.

- ◆ it comes out of a Severn-Trent tap,
- ◆ there aren't any incantations to make the water special,
- ◆ the people doing the baptising are ordinary people,
- ◆ being dunked in it won't make you or anyone else a Christian .... it will only make you wet! As we saw

above in Section 2, people should only be baptised if they are Christians already.

If you are baptised, you'll also be asked just before you are baptised to profess your faith. It's great if you can say a few words about how you became a Christian and how you are trying to please Him every day. Some people can't do this, but the person in charge of the baptism will ask you something like the following 3 questions:

- a) Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save completely everyone who comes to God through Him?
- b) And do you repent of your sins and trust Him alone to forgive them all and to save you?
- c) And is it your aim to follow Him every day, asking Him for strength to do so?

As you can see, by answering 'Yes', you'll be verbally agreeing to the conditions for baptism described in Section 2, above.

## **4 Why is baptism necessary?**

Believer's baptism is necessary because:-

### **4.1 Jesus commanded it**

- a) Believer's baptism is a command of Christ to His Church (Matthew 28:19 quoted above in Section 3).
- b) Believer's baptism is a command for every new convert (Mark 16:15-16).
- c) Though it's commanded as something that accompanies salvation, believer's baptism is not essential to salvation (Luke 23:39-43). But if it is not essential to salvation, you might ask "why is it commanded?" By following the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ we show that we

know Him and that we love Him and God gives us certainty about our faith in Him (1 John 2:3-6).

#### **4.2 Jesus was baptised**

- a) We have just seen in Section 2 that whoever claims to live in Him must live like Jesus did. Jesus was baptised and we must take Him as our example (Mark 1:9-11).
- b) Jesus was baptised by John and the Bible tells us that the baptism of John was a baptism to illustrate cleaning from sin. But what did Jesus' baptism mean, after all, He had no sins? By being baptised in the River Jordan, Jesus identified Himself as closely as He could with sinful men (Hebrews 2:10-15). His baptism was a sign that he humbled Himself and it was part of His obedience to the Father (Matthew 3:13-17). As Jesus publicly identified Himself with sinners like us when He was baptised, so we identify ourselves with Him when we are baptised.

#### **4.3 The Apostles practised Believer's baptism**

As we've seen in Section 2 (above), we constantly read in the book of Acts, which records the life of the early church, that new Christians were baptised. Rick Warren pointed out several of these (see Section 1 above). And in every reported case of baptism in the New Testament, faith was the only, but constant, requirement. So baptism becomes the means of open confession and initiation into the visible Church (Acts 2:41-47). We'll consider this more in Section 7.

## **5 What does baptism show?**

Baptism is an outward sign and visible act and includes the following symbols.

### **5.1 It symbolises a cleaning from sin**

The most obvious symbolism intended by baptism is that of washing. Baptism is a simple and powerful outward sign of an inward reality. The washing of the body with water is an outward sign that the heart has been cleaned of sin. The person being baptised is saying "God's washed me of the dirt of sin" - disobedience & rebellion. Baptism is a beautiful picture of the forgiveness of sin (Matthew 3:6; Acts 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 2:13-14 and 3:4-6; 1 John 1:7).

### **5.2 It symbolises union with Christ**

Baptism involves being dipped under the water and emerging again. This symbolises that the believer is united by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ in His death for sin ('buried' under the water) and in His resurrection (rising out of the water).

Read Romans 6:3-4. These verses do not speak directly about water baptism. They refer to the spiritual baptism of becoming one with Christ in His atoning death and resurrection, through faith. The believer's union with Christ is one of those glorious mysteries of the Gospel. Baptism by being dipped in water beautifully illustrates this.

### **5.3 It symbolises entrance into the visible church**

The Bible uses the image of the body to describe the collection of all believers everywhere (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). This "body of Christ" is the true Church. Its composition is known only to God (2 Timothy 2:19).



- a) That body becomes visible in local churches. Through baptism the believer associates openly with the visible people of God, just as, by faith, he was invisibly (but no less certainly) incorporated into the Body of Christ.
- b) The ongoing expression of this membership of the body is the communion of the Lord's Table.
- c) The early church shows this. Acts 2:40-42 tells us that the new converts were baptised and started engaging in all the aspects of Church life.

We'll briefly cover how this membership works in practice in Section 7, or you can read the second booklet "Truly Belonging" which goes into much more detail.

## **6 The Significance of baptism**

Believer's baptism is both a sign and a seal of what must already be a spiritually reality.

### **6.1 It is a Sign**

Believer's baptism is an outward and visible sign which you receive (you get wet!), of an inward and invisible reality in the soul. What is symbolised has been described in Section 4. Now we think about those who see the sign.

Believer's baptism is a sign to:

- a) The Believer

Here is a visible and tangible sign which God gives to you, the believer, to experience with all your 5 senses!, so that you can strengthen your faith in the reality of what has happened to you spiritually. The washing of the body is a tangible experience to remind you of the cleaning of your soul (Titus 3:4-8). Afterwards you'll

be able to look back to your baptism day as a reminder of all God has done for you and in you. It will become an encouragement to you (Ephesians 2:11-13). Maybe one day you'll be tempted by Satan to think that your faith means nothing and never did. Then you'll be able to look back to your baptism and say "on such and such a date I was baptised, knowing that God had saved me and I was obeying Him. So my faith is real, God loved me then and led me to be baptised and He'll go on leading me even if I'm tempted to believe it's not true".

b) The World

Baptism is much more a sign made by God to you, the believer, than it is a testimony made by you to the world. That's secondary, but it's not unimportant. Baptism is a clear, visible, public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are baptised you'll be nailing your colours to the mast that you love God and want to follow Him. We know that this is what baptism's always been - it's implied by the practice of the New Testament when people were publicly baptised in rivers (Matthew 3:6).

The responsibility for this testimony is yours. It is upon your profession of faith that you will be baptised because baptism is an expression of that profession. Unless the profession is sincere and the faith genuine, baptism is an empty gesture (Acts 8:36-7) as we've already seen in Section 2, above.

When someone is baptised and makes their declaration of faith in Christ that testimony is, in effect, God speaking to everyone who witnesses it. He's saying "unless you give up relying on yourself and start relying on me, you have no share in my family, no protection

from my anger for sin, no hope of a home in Heaven”  
(Acts 1:8, Acts 22:14-16).

c) Not to God

Baptism isn't a sign to God. He hears your prayers and sees your heart, so He knows (better than you know yourself!) your relationship with Him. He doesn't need a sign from you because He knows the reality. But He does delight in the obedience of His children keeping His command.

**6.2 It's often a seal**

Just as baptism is an outward sign given by God to confirm the inner reality of His cleaning from sin, so it *may* be accomplished by an inner testimony of the Holy Spirit to the soul. Water baptism *may* thus be accompanied by a Spirit baptism in which God, by His Holy Spirit, impresses directly upon the soul the assurance that the believer is a child of God and acceptable in His sight. This 'sealing' or 'baptism' is a direct work by which the believer receives the felt impression of the love of God, in his soul.

The Lord Jesus Christ received such a testimony at His baptism (Mark 1:9-11). Some of the same experience *may* be given to the believer (Romans 8:14-16). Thus the believer is sealed, confirmed or assured in the most direct manner, that he is a child of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). This experience *may* accompany baptism and ought to be the desire of every believer. We can ask God for it in prayer and plead the promise that He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:11-13).

Of course, every true Christian receives the Holy Spirit when God saves them (Romans 8:9-15; 1 Corinthians 2:12 and 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 3:2; 4:6 and 5:25; 1 John 3:24).

The Spirit baptism mentioned here is one of God's generous refreshings which he may send us from time-to-time.

## **7 Membership follows baptism**

As baptism comes almost at the beginning of a Christian's life (or should do), it follows that most of the Christian's life comes after they've been baptised. So your baptism is, in many ways, the start of what follows - and what follows is clearly laid out in Acts 2. Here's verses 41 to 47:

Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

So we see

- ◆ acceptance of the message followed by baptism,
- ◆ baptism followed by listening to the disciples (or "apostles") as they preached,
- ◆ sharing (that's what the word "fellowship" means) of time, of praise of God, of care of each other and of money and other contributions,
- ◆ communion as we break bread and drink wine together – remembering and thanking Christ for His death which saved them, and looking forward to His return,

- ◆ prayer together,
- ◆ the salvation of more people as they see the Christians doing these things.

In other words there was a real joining together of the new Christians into a common group. The Bible uses two pictures to describe this group. First it describes believers as God's family (Galatians 6:10). Second, as we saw in Section 5.3, it describes this group as Christ's body.

At SBC we demonstrate this coming together and joining God's family, becoming part of Christ's body, by becoming a member of the church. When you do this you will be committing yourself to the other members just as those early Christians committed themselves to each other. If baptism is a symbol of this joining (see Section 5.3 above), then membership is its fulfilment.

There may be some people for whom this committed membership isn't possible because of family difficulties, but we expect that nearly everyone who's baptised will join the church. If you want to be baptised but don't want to commit yourself to the church that would suggest that you don't want to develop as a Christian in the way those early Christians did. And that would very likely mean that you didn't meet the requirement for baptism which was discussed in Section 2 - the requirement to be a believer who's determined to go on in the Christian life.

You'll find membership and its meaning discussed in much more depth in the second booklet - "Truly Belonging". If you haven't already got a copy please ask for one.