

BAPTISM

There are a number of things that distinguish Baptist churches from other Protestant denominations. One obvious distinction is the practice of believer's baptism by immersion. We believe that the symbol of being baptised (being plunged under water and then brought up again) is an illustration of burial and resurrection. This indicates a believer re-enacting Jesus' death and resurrection as being substitute for his or her own. Baptism does not make a person right with God but is an expression of an inner spiritual commitment.¹

ICEBREAKER: If you have been baptised, how old were you? What do you remember about the experience? Where were you baptised? What is the significance of baptism for you?

READ: Luke 9:18-27

Jesus recruited people with the words "Follow me". (Lk 5:27) Ordinary people left their jobs and homes to follow him. Compare that with this ad on the Australian Defence Force (ADF) website:

"In the ADF you'll enjoy a rich and rewarding blend of career and lifestyle opportunities, plus fulfilling, well-paid work, job security and numerous benefits."²

But serving members of the ADF know well that they must go where they are sent and that might involve serving in situations where their lives are at risk. In the same way, following Jesus requires us to be obedient to him - wherever, whenever and whatever. In Luke 9, Jesus was blunt: he was going to die a painful death. For the disciples to follow him, they would need to be willing to follow his example: by obeying him and dying to self on a daily basis and being willing to even lay down their lives.

- In its most basic meaning, a 'disciple' is a follower of Jesus. What do these verses teach us about:
 - The challenges and risks that go with following Jesus;
 - The benefits of following Jesus.
- Read John 11:25-27. At a certain point in our lives, we physically die. What did Jesus mean when he said "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Is eternal life something we experience now? Or is it something that we will inherit in the future?

READ: Romans 6:1-14

In Rom 6:6-14, we read that our old self was crucified with Christ and we are freed from sin. We enter into what Christ has done for us in the past in dying to sin, we have a present responsibility to not let sin exercise dominion in our mortal bodies, knowing that, in the future, we will fully realise this newness of eternal life which is completely free from temptation and sin.

- When John the Baptist practiced baptism, it used the OT image of 'washing'. It involved confession and repentance of sin, then people were baptized as a symbol of that. In Rom 6, the meaning of baptism is extended. What additional meaning(s) did Paul ascribe to the practice of baptism?
- In baptism, we dramatize what Jesus has done for us. However, we also identify with Christ and his body, the church. What does it mean for us to be "united with him in" his death and resurrection? (Rom 6:3-5)

"The meaning of Baptism is expressed in many ways in the Bible:

- It is a sign of the forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:38; 22:16)
- It portrays death to the old life of sin and resurrection to the new life that comes through faith in Christ. (Romans 6:3,4)
- It is a symbol of participation in the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- It is a confession of faith in Christ as Lord, and of the desire to obey the Lord's specific command. (Romans 10:9, Matt 28:19,20)
- It is a dramatic presentation of Christ's death burial and resurrection. (Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12)
- Full immersion of the body is the appropriate mode of baptism since it best signifies the believer's death, burial and resurrection. (Romans 6:3,4)
- It is linked with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 12:13)³

¹ <http://eppingbaptist.org.au/baptist-distinctives/>

² <https://www.defencejobs.gov.au/lifestyle-and-benefits>

³ <https://www.buv.com.au/about-us/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-baptist>

- In Rom 6:10 we read: "The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God." Why is it important for us to have a concrete symbol and 'rite of passage' to represent our 'break' with our old life and that we are entering a new life and lifestyle?

In Acts 2:38, Peter preached "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ ...". As both a disciple and apostle, Peter taught that baptism was integrally connected with – and follows on from - repentance. In Acts 2:41, we read that "those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand persons were added."

- In the early years of the church, converts were immediately baptised on confession of faith. In later generations, converts had to go through a course of training before being baptised. When should someone be baptised? Is it an 'optional extra' in our Christian lives?

Few people realise that, during the Protestant Reformation and two years before the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was written, another document – the *London Baptist Confession of 1644* – was written. It includes relevant Scripture verses/ passages. Below are three paragraphs which relate to baptism.

XXXIX. That Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized (Added later: "...and after to partake of the Lord's Supper.")

XL. The way and manner of the ⁽¹⁾ dispensing of this ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a sign, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the ⁽²⁾ washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ; secondly, that interest the saints have in ⁽³⁾ death, burial, and resurrection (of Christ) ; thirdly, together with a ⁽⁴⁾ confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water, and rises again, so certainly shall the bodies of the saints by raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reign with Christ.

XLI. The persons designed by Christ, to dispense this ordinance, the Scriptures hold forth to a preaching Disciple, it being nowhere tied to a particular church, officer, or person extraordinarily sent, the commission enjoining the administration, being given to them under no other consideration, but as considered Disciples.⁴

- What comments do you have about these statements? What do you think of the idea that baptism can be administered by any person who is a disciple?

Baptists hold that there are two ordinances: baptism and communion. These are things that were instituted, ordained and practiced by Jesus. In some churches, people cannot take communion and/or be a member, without being baptised. By contrast, in Catholic and some Protestant traditions, baptism and communion are regarded as 'sacraments', ie a "visible sign of invisible grace." In some traditions, sacraments can only be administered by a priest or ordained minister. In some traditions, baptism is also seen as the means of becoming a member of the faith or of the church. We believe that baptism does not make us a Christian.

- In what ways do we experience and/ or get a better appreciation of God's grace by participating in baptism?

In Baptist churches, we believe and practice baptism of believers by immersion upon profession of faith because we believe it best represents the New Testament mode and best signifies death, burial and resurrection. Baptism and communion are activities that we do together. Baptism and communion use physical elements (water, bread and wine) to remind us what Christ has done for us.

- Why is it important for us to continually remember what Christ has done and "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes". (1 Cor 11:23-26) Why is it also important for us to celebrate that "this son/ daughter of mine was dead and is alive again; he/ she was lost and is found!". (Luke 15:24)

PUT IT INTO ACTION: Consider the following comment from a Mennonite (Anabaptist) website:

"our emphasis on the importance of individual choice in baptism captures a crucial aspect of what it means to follow Jesus - God does not coerce belief; accepting God's offer of forgiveness and becoming a disciple of Jesus is a genuine decision. But in our contemporary Western context, our emphasis on the need to say yes to God's gift of grace can easily be confused with the individualism and single-minded pursuit of liberty that defines modern consumerism and liberal democracy. In the Anabaptist understanding, baptism by consent is always a public statement of allegiance - a profession of loyalty to Christ and the church - not an assertion of individual rights."⁵

- We do not coerce people to get baptised. Baptism is an act of profession of faith, an act of identifying with Christ and the church, as well as an act of obedience. What will you do with the challenge: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ ...". (Acts 2:38)

⁴ <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccf/h.htm>

⁵ <https://themennonite.org/feature/remembering-baptism-2/>