

# Baptism at WBC



## **WBC Statement of Faith. 2016**

We believe God's Word commands every true believer to be baptized and to observe the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of Christ's death until He comes. Baptism is a public testimony of one's identification with the body of Christ. The ordinances do not save or put a person in a relationship with Jesus. They are physical symbols of the spiritual realities of the gospel.

(Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3-11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Matthew 28:19-20)

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### **HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL:**

This booklet is designed to give an overview of the theological convictions of Wellsboro Bible Church on the topic of baptism. For those who wish to be baptized or desire to learn more, please connect with pastor Mike White for an initial appointment. Please read this material prior to the appointment and be ready to discuss any questions you might have.

Written by Josh MacClaren & Michael White, 2018

# What is Baptism?

Baptism and communion are the two ordinances given directly by Jesus to the church as visible pictures of his grace. They are tangible representations of the invisible realities of the Gospel.

With these ordinances believers have the opportunity to remember what Christ has done for them and formally identify themselves with the body of Christ.

Baptism is the public demonstration that a believer wishes to be identified with the death and resurrection of Jesus, which it symbolizes. In the likeness of Jesus, who died and was raised, so the believer has died to the old way of life and rises to the new (Romans 6:2-3).

Baptism, then, illustrates several realities:

1. The death and resurrection of Jesus
2. Our union with Christ in his death and resurrection
3. The death of the old way
4. The washing away of sin
5. The new life in which we walk
6. The public testimony that we wish to be identified with Christ

Baptism is a physical picture of these awesome spiritual truths. It is an external symbol of an inward, spiritual reality.

# Does Baptism Save?

In any discussion on baptism, it's critical to understand that baptism **does not** save or put a person in a relationship with Jesus. Scripture is clear that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves (Romans 3:23;6:23; 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 3:1-14). Salvation is a free gift of God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The moment you profess genuine faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus to save you from the penalty of sin, he instantaneously justifies you (declares you righteous), not on the basis of anything you have done, but based on His saving righteousness. At that moment he removes your sinful guilt, applies it to himself (which he paid for on the cross), and grants you His righteous standing before God. You are immediately freed from sin's consequences and given eternal life (Romans 3:21-31).

Baptism is a physical picture of this spiritual reality that has already happened inside of you. In other words, it is an act of obedience that happens **after** salvation, where you show the world that you now identify with Jesus. Your old self has died and he has resurrected you to a new way of life. Baptism is a way of formally identifying with Christ in a public way.

With that in mind, there are a few verses that seem to say that baptism does have saving value. It is outside the scope of this booklet to address each one. Needless to say, it is critical to interpret them in light of the overwhelming testimony of Scripture that salvation is by faith alone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These verses include Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21 and can be easily understood to NOT be supporting the idea that baptism saves.

# Why be baptized?

You probably agree that baptism does not save, so why be baptized at all? Why does standing in front of a bunch of people and being dunked in water really matter?

It's about obedience to Scripture:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ”<sup>2</sup>

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”<sup>3</sup>

Baptism is a command from the mouth of Jesus himself. In the great commission, Jesus assumes that baptism occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life. In fact, Jesus himself was baptized.<sup>4</sup> The goal of the Christian life is to bring glory to God by imitating Jesus so we are baptized after his example.

God is serious about this command. Baptism legitimizes your confession of faith before the church. It demonstrates that you have counted the cost and are willing to publicly declare your allegiance to Jesus. When the church recognizes a confession of faith through baptism, the leadership and corporate body are able to fulfill their responsibility to disciple and keep each member accountable. If you are unwilling to be baptized, there is not an objective way to confirm the validity of your confession.

If you haven't yet been baptized we urge you to take this important step of obedience. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>4</sup> Matt 3:13-17

# When should I be Baptized?

Jesus assumes that baptism occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life. However, there are two reasons many people delay baptism:

## 1. Fear of man. You might think:

"I am not a good public speaker, so I can't share my testimony."

"If I get baptized my family or friends will disown me."

"I get anxiety standing in front of a large group of people."

These fears and many more may be real concerns, but they should not keep from us being baptized. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Though baptism may be intimidating, God in His wisdom has created it for us to follow, so we should trust Him and fear Him more than we fear what any person may think of us. As theologian Andrew Davis writes, "Fear of the Lord has the power to free us from every other fear."<sup>5</sup>

## 2. A lack of spiritual maturity.

Many people think they should delay baptism until they have reached a certain point of spiritual maturity. While Christians should always be striving to be more Christ-like, it's also important to recognize that delaying baptism for any genuinely converted person is unscriptural. In every occasion in the book of Acts, new believers are baptized immediately after receiving Christ by faith. Several examples include:

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Davis, *An Infinite Journey*. (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International: 2014), 259.

1. The believers at Pentecost (“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls,” Acts 2:41)
2. The Ethiopian eunuch (“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Acts 8:36)
3. The Apostle Paul (“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized,” Acts 9:18).
4. The gentile believers at Cornelius’ house (“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” Acts 10:47)
5. The Philippian Jailer (“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family,” Acts 16:33)

Delaying baptism until we are “good enough” is not a good reason because we will never be “good enough!” Instead we take the important step of baptism at the beginning of our Christian walk and trust the Lord to help grow us into maturity.

# What about Infant Baptism?

Many believe that infants should be baptized. The Roman Catholic church teaches that baptism is a sacrament that saves the child from sin and grants the child God's grace.<sup>6</sup>

Presbyterians and Lutherans reject this assumption but believe that baptism is a commitment by parents to raise their child in the covenant community of faith. They compare it to the Jewish practice of circumcision.

Wellsboro Bible Church practices believer's baptism. We believe that genuine faith in Christ must happen before taking the step of baptism. Though we are not part of the Baptist denomination, we are a baptist (small b) church. Here are a few reasons why we practice believer's baptism:

1. In Scripture there are no examples of infant baptism. Every baptism recorded in the New Testament is done with adults who have already professed faith and repentance.<sup>7</sup> Several of these examples are recorded under "When Should I be Baptized?"
2. The idea that baptism is a commitment by the parents is also not recorded in Scripture. In the New Testament baptism is a commitment by the individual being baptized after salvation. We encourage parents to raise their children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord"<sup>8</sup> and to dedicate their children to God with the goal that children will later

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<sup>6</sup> This practice began fairly early in church history. In a time of high infant mortality- and given the unbiblical Roman Catholic assumption that baptism saves- you can see how well-intentioned parents would have wanted to baptize their children as soon as possible.

<sup>7</sup> There are a few examples of "household" baptisms (Acts 16:33) but none explicitly mention infants being baptized.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 6:4

come to the knowledge of the Gospel and be baptized as believers.

3. The New Testament does not describe baptism as a new covenant replacement for old covenant circumcision.
4. Romans 6 compares baptism to the death of the old life and rising to the new, in union with Christ. Bobby Jamieson writes, "Baptism is a sign that the gospel has taken effect in someone's life, that a person is united to Christ. Baptism points to a promise fulfilled."<sup>9</sup> This picture only makes sense for a believer.

While we respect other traditions, we feel so strongly about believer's baptism that we encourage our prospective members who were baptized as infants to now be baptized as believers, even if their salvation occurred many years ago. The bottom line is obedience to God's command.

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<sup>9</sup> Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding Baptism* (B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, 2016), 54.

# Is there a Minimum Age for Baptism?

It's clear that all genuinely converted believers should be baptized without exception. However, a question a parent might be wrestling with is how old should my child be before he or she is baptized?

Many Christians believe there should be no age limit and that any child able to profess faith and articulate the basic elements of the Gospel ought to be baptized. Jesus himself said "Let the little children come to me."<sup>10</sup> Many Baptist churches baptize children as young as 4 or 5. "Childlike" faith is beautiful and precious. Valid conversion can and does happen at young ages.

However, a genuine believer is also able to demonstrate some element of tangible fruit. Fruit is generally obvious in adults but difficult to discern in the life of a young child, especially one who is being raised in a godly home where the pull to look and act like a Christian is strong.

Baptism is an assurance that an individual has died to the old life and is living for Christ. We are hesitant to baptize young children because we do not want to give a false sense of assurance to those whom we can't objectively discern their salvation testimony beyond their verbal confession. Historically, Baptist practice was to wait until the candidates are at a point in their lives where they are able to make their faith their own and reach functional adulthood.

For these reasons we are hesitant to baptize young children but we do not set a minimum age. We encourage the parents of young children who wish to be baptized to speak with our elders to discuss and pray through the matter.

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<sup>10</sup> Mathew 19:14

## **Do I need to be Baptized Again?**

There are many who were either baptized as infants or were baptized prior to truly trusting in Jesus. It does not hurt to be baptized again if you were unsure of your conversion when you were originally baptized. In fact, it would be wrong not to if you were not genuinely converted at the time. As you reflect on your own conversion and feel like this may apply to you, we encourage you to speak with an elder.

# How should we be Baptized?

There are a number of different ways Christians throughout the centuries have interpreted the mode (or method) of baptism. Presbyterians practice sprinkling, Mennonites practice pouring, and Baptists practice immersion.

Wellsboro Bible church has always practiced immersion but this conviction is not based out of church tradition or denominational practice. We believe that immersion is what the Bible actually teaches for two reasons:

1. The New Testament Greek word behind baptism is *baptidzo*, which means “to immerse, plunge, dip, or wash”<sup>11</sup> and refers to something being submerged under water. When the apostles urged people to be baptized they were literally telling them to be immersed under water.
2. The symbolism in Romans 6 of believers identifying with Christ’s death and burial (going under) and his resurrection (rising from the water) doesn’t make sense if the person being baptized isn’t actually going under water.

While we respect the traditions of other denominations, we clearly see immersion as the most biblical. However, in the event that an individual wishing to be baptized had serious health issues that prevented him or her from being immersed, the elders of WBC would consider sprinkling or pouring for that particular individual.

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<sup>11</sup> “βαπτίζω.” A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. Danker, Frederick William, Bauer, Walter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2000.

# Writing your Testimony

Those who are baptized at WBC are required to write and present their personal salvation testimony, which we like to call your grace story. Generally it should be simple and concise, not be more than a page in length, and can be shared in 3-4 minutes. Consider the structure below to guide you:

- What your life was like before Christ
- What your life is like now
- How Jesus made the difference
- What Jesus is doing in your life today
- Remember to include the Gospel in your grace story

Here's an example:

My name is Mike White and I am 23 years old. Having grown up in a Christian home, I was graciously exposed to the Gospel and was baptized at an early age. For years I had thought that I was a genuine Christian. I went to church almost every Sunday, read my Bible occasionally, and prayed with my family before I would go to bed. Yet, as I grew older, particularly in high school, my lifestyle would prove that, though I professed to believe, I was not a genuine Christian at all. While I was not the most flagrantly immoral or rebellious person, I differed little from my unsaved peers at school. My thoughts, my actions, and my goals were practically the same as those around me. My focus was

not on Jesus but on myself. I was too concerned about the approval of others and seeking to be popular. Later, I thought, I could make a commitment to Christ and “get things right.” But for the time being, Christianity was not a lifestyle but an embarrassing label. I never talked about the faith and made many unfortunate moral choices.

Yet my life changed drastically in 2004. At the directive of my parents, I was sent, unwillingly, to a very strict Christian college. Though I did not particularly enjoy the rigid rules, it was there that God changed my life. For the first time, I made many Christian friends, listened to countless sermons during chapel, and began reading my Bible consistently. I deeply pondered the meaning of eternity- the fact that everyone is going to be somewhere forever, either heaven or hell, and that this life is only a vapor (James 4:14). Most significantly, I thought about the sacrifice that Jesus made for me. I thought that if Jesus is God, and he bore the punishment that I deserve, then what else is worth living for? So I responded to the Gospel by trusting in Jesus.

After being born again, God transformed my life. My desires, my actions, and my goals changed drastically. No longer was the greatest purpose in my life to please myself but I placed God first in my life. I also began, for the first time, sharing the Gospel at a nearby state school and was given victory over the slavery of sin. I continue to grow and rejoice in the salvation that Christ has provided for me. So today I am thrilled to be baptized as a believer in Christ.

## Other Details

We perform baptisms throughout the year in different locations. Most of our baptisms occur at Sunday evening Refresh services (2-3x per year). But we occasionally baptize people on Sunday mornings and at outdoor events.

Please plan on arriving to your baptism 30 minutes early. Bring a towel, a change of clothes, and a printed copy of your testimony.

We ask that you dress modestly. For women please wear a swimsuit under your clothing. For many baptisms we will give you a "Raised to Life" T-shirt in advance.

The elders of the church perform all of our baptisms. If you wish you may request the elder/pastor of your choice.

We appreciate your interest in baptism. We are thrilled to see people come to know Jesus and take the next step of obedience by publicly identifying themselves with Christ. If you would like more information or would like to schedule a baptism please contact [mike@wellsborobible.com](mailto:mike@wellsborobible.com)