

DISCOVERING BAPTISM



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
MARTINSBURG, WV



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THE BIG QUESTION

"Why haven't you been baptized yet?"

The question hung there for a second before I answered. I was twelve years old and my friend Eric was visiting our neighborhood again. Eric had moved away the year before to another town about two hours away. We went to church together at a small Disciples of Christ congregation at the end of our neighborhood. Eric was the only other person at that church that was my age and when he moved, I found myself all alone. Before he had left, neither of us had made any sort of decision about Jesus, salvation, or baptism.

During his visit, Eric told me about how he had just been baptized and asked when I would follow suit. That was a popular question in that little church. People seemed to be very concerned with my "taking the plunge." But I never felt comfortable with getting baptized. Even though I was only a pre-teen, I had questions about the entire process.

With the gift of hindsight, I can say that I did not have a peace about getting baptized because I had not yet made Christ my Savior and professed him as LORD.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

30 years later I have a better perspective on why I was hesitant to get baptized in that church.

It had nothing to do with the church itself. I love that church. That church meant and still means a lot to me. I am happy I was a part of it. However, looking back I now see that in His providence, God was churning my heart, causing within me a sense of spiritual unrest.

I was anxious about making the decision and that anxiety was caused by the Holy Spirit. Back then I just didn't have a strong enough understanding of scripture. In my mind, baptism meant and was equal to salvation. That is not a biblical understanding of baptism. Baptism is not something we do to become saved. It is something we do after we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone.

In my defense, back then people never asked me about my salvation or trusting Jesus as Savior. They asked about my baptism. It wasn't that people did not want me to be a Christian. They just felt more comfortable asking about baptism as an event than they did asking me about my salvation decision. People were concerned with my spiritual well-being, but at that time, I was not able to make that distinction. I did not fully understand.




For many reasons, I began attending a Southern Baptist Church. At the time, the main reason was relationships. I had friends there. I learned a lot about Jesus and the Gospel there. It was at this church where I was taught a more complete and biblical understanding about baptism. I was presented with the full message of the Gospel. I recognized that I was separated from God by my own sin and that the only way to remove the sin and to be redeemed was to receive salvation by accepting Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.

My personal salvation had to happen first before my baptism. I needed to be saved, first and foremost, from my sin by believing in Jesus Christ. Once that decision was secure and I understood it to the best of my 13- year-old ability, then I could proceed with baptism.


*Baptism is an outward and physical demonstration of that
new inward and spiritual reality.*

To this day, I appreciate the deliberate nature that church took in bringing me to baptism. If only a few more churches would slow the process down a little bit.

HEADED TO THE WATER



AT FIRST BAPTIST MARTINSBURG, WE LOVE TO BAPTIZE PEOPLE. WE LOVE TO PARTICIPATE WITH SOMEONE IN THAT JOURNEY AND WE LOVE WHAT IT MEANS TO THE CHURCH FAMILY THAT GETS TO WITNESS THE ORDINANCE TOGETHER.



Some people know what baptism is, they understand what the Gospel is, and, in many cases, they have decided to trust Jesus in their hearts. For various reasons, however, they are hesitant to take that public step of baptism. In these instances, we want to work with the believer and be sensitive to the reasons behind why they are hesitant to be baptized.

We want to find creative compromises that can allow new believers to take this very important step of biblical obedience. We want to help people overcome anxieties, physical limitations, relational obstacles or anything else that hinders someone from experiencing baptism.

This booklet is a resource intended to help you take this important step of faith in Christ. For some of you, this is a step of faith that you are taking later in your journey. Perhaps you were baptized without making a decision for salvation. Maybe you wanted to please parents or a friend. Perhaps a sibling made a decision and you felt pressure to follow along. Maybe you were baptized as an infant and now feel compelled to follow in believer's baptism following your profession of faith in Christ.



Regardless of the reason you picked up this resource, I want to encourage you.

**Baptism is a step that every Christian should take.
It is not necessary for salvation.**

The Bible says that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. And we believe that baptism is an important moment that each believer should experience. Let's explore further what baptism is.

But first, please answer a few questions in the space provided below.

Why did you pick up this booklet about baptism in the first place?

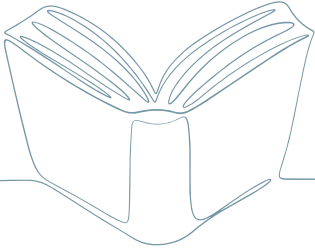
Have you been baptized before? _____

If so, describe the circumstances surrounding that experience?

*Are you 100% confident that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord?
Have you received salvation by accepting Him into your life?*

THE GOSPEL

Just in case you are not able to answer the previous question with a confident and resounding “YES!”, let me take a quick moment to share with you the simple message of the good news of Jesus Christ.



God created us to be with Him. In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God creates everything – all creation is brought into existence by God. When God created humans, He intended them to have a perfect relationship with Him. That is where every person’s story with God begins. God intended us to have a perfect relationship with him and created us with that in mind.

Our sins separated us from God. In Genesis chapter 3, humans sin and break God’s rules. The result of that betrayal and rebellion is a breaking of relationship and community with God. God is completely holy and when humans sinned, it drove a wedge between God and humans. Romans 3:23 says that every person has sinned and has missed the mark and fallen short of God’s righteous expectation.

Sins cannot be removed or covered up by good works. We cannot do anything about our sin. We cannot be good enough, kind enough, attend church enough, give enough money to get sins forgiven. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8 that we are not saved by anything we do. We cannot earn salvation and we certainly do not deserve it.



Paying the price for our sin, Jesus died and rose again. God wants to restore us back to what we were created for. Because he loves us, Jesus came from heaven to earth. He lived the perfect life that we are unable to live. And he died our death on the cross. He paid our sin debt for us. Romans 5:8 says that even though we were sinners, God the Father showed us how much he loved us through His Son, Jesus.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus alone can have life. Any person, regardless of what they have done, can be saved. They can be saved by accepting Christ as Savior. Romans 10 tells us that if we believe in our hearts Jesus is Lord and then confess with our mouth, we can be saved. We can have life in Christ.

Life in Christ is life that can start now and lasts forever. Jesus came to give us full and complete life on earth and everlasting, forever life in heaven with Him.

Now, let's answer that question we asked before this section:

*Are you 100% confident that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord?
Have you received salvation by accepting Him into your life?*





If you are not completely confident, or if you have never asked Jesus to be your Lord, you can do that now by praying a simple prayer. If you mean it, you can begin your journey in faith with Jesus right now. That prayer will begin the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Christ in what you think, say and do. If you want to be saved and receive salvation, simply pray and mean this prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I confess to you that I have made mistakes. I am asking you to forgive me of my sins. I invite you into my heart and life as Savior. And in the best way that I know how, I commit to live for you and make you the lord and boss of my life. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer, write today's date in the space provided:

If you wrote a date there, that date is now your **spiritual birthday!**



One more thing: if you did pray that prayer above and wrote the date down, would you take a quick second and email me at **craig@fbcmartinsburg.com** to let me know you have made this decision?

I want to celebrate with you and begin to prayerfully help you move forward with Jesus.

Thank you so much for sending me that information.
I LOVE hearing great news and salvation is the best news ever!

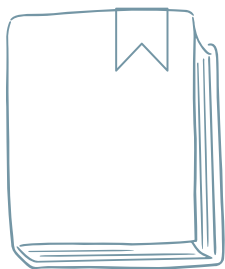


From this point forward, we are working under the assumption that you are a Christian and are curious about baptism and how you can go about taking that step. We do not want you to take that step without understanding what baptism is. We will look at what the Bible says about it. And we will focus on what our church believes about baptism specifically.

In the pages ahead, I will be asking you to answer some questions to help you process the information. I encourage you to take the time to answer the questions in writing so you can have a record of this process for you.

Let's start now.

Briefly write what you think and believe baptism to be?



You may want to mark or dog ear this page so you can easily refer back to it when you complete the entire booklet.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT BAPTISM



John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus

The New Testament provides a significant amount about baptism. Baptism is associated with and connected to the new covenant. We see that a man named John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus's ministry on earth. John was a relative of Jesus and he had a popular, if somewhat unorthodox, ministry in Judea. John the Baptist called people to "repent because the Kingdom of heaven had come near" in the person of Jesus Christ. Matthew chapter 3 tells us about John the Baptist and his ministry.

A lot of people in Jerusalem, in all Judea and the vicinity of the Jordan River were coming to John, confessing their sins and being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

John's baptism is important as an early influence for the ordinance we practice today in believer's baptism.

John's message was simple: John baptized in water and with water in a way that is preparatory like the Old Testament purification rituals. John's baptism helped prepare a person for Jesus through repentance and commitment to his message. Jesus would come and bring spiritual renewal by forgiving sins once and for all. His sacrifice would be complete and final.



Today our practice of baptism differs slightly from John's baptism. Where John baptized in preparation for a relationship to be established with Jesus, we now baptize in response to a relationship that has already been established and entered with Jesus.

Jesus, as an adult at the beginning of his earthly ministry, came to John the Baptist at the Jordan River so John could baptize the Son of God. John was initially reluctant. Jesus tells John that his own baptism is necessary to fulfill God's redemptive plan of righteousness. Jesus is baptized by John and this signals the beginning of his ministry.

Jesus was baptized not because he is following a decision he made. As God the son, he did not need to experience salvation. His baptism is symbolic as a means of identifying with sinful humanity. His baptism is also symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection that was to come at the end of his ministry.

In Matthew 3:16, the text says Jesus was baptized and then he went up immediately from the water. Jesus was immersed completely over his head under the waters of the Jordan River and then came back up from under the water.





Before we move on to some questions, it is important to realize that when the Resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to his 11 remaining faithful disciples to share with them the Great Commission in Matthew 28, he commanded them to go and share the Gospel making new disciples, baptizing them like He was baptized.

This command isn't just for the 11 disciples back then. It remains so for believers today. We are directed by Jesus to follow His example of baptism.

Whose baptism did we model our church's mode of baptism on?

We modeled our baptism on the very baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 3:13-17.

According to the text in Matthew 3, was water (a) sprinkled over Jesus as an infant, (b) poured over his head at age twelve or (c) was Jesus fully immersed in water over his head as an adult on his own decision?

Jesus chose as an adult to have John the Baptist baptize him by immersion completely under water in the Jordan River.



WHY DO WE BAPTIZE THIS WAY SPECIFICALLY AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MARTINSBURG?

It is a specific command of Christ that we are to observe and there is clear evidence in the New Testament that this style of baptism was practiced in the churches by Paul and other early church leaders.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Someone who has already experienced the grace of God in salvation and now wants to take the step of Biblical obedience according to the direction and example of Jesus Christ.

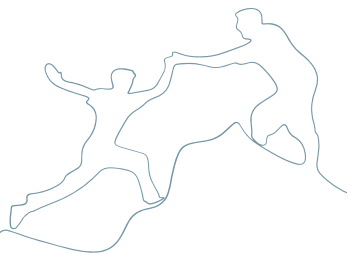
It also needs to be clarified that someone wanting to take the step of baptism at First Baptist Church of Martinsburg needs to be attending the church consistently. We believe that baptism is one of two ordinances that our specific church body practices. The other ordinance is the Lord's Supper. Because this is an ordinance of the church, we practice this ordinance in the context of church involvement.

If someone wants us to baptize their child or if they want to become baptized themselves, they need to engage with our church in worship. There needs to be some church connection. We do not baptize someone with whom we are not walking in worship connection and an integrity-based relationship. Baptism is something we take seriously, and we want to walk all our candidates through the process.

IMMERSION

Even the word baptize shares a clue as to the correct mode or style for baptism. The word itself is a transliteration of the Greek word baptize, which means to immerse or plunge into. It was the manner of the disciples' baptism. In fact, the picture of death, burial and resurrection demands immersion. We immerse or dip people completely under the water over their heads backwards and then draw them back up face first because baptism is a picture of our total identification with Christ in his atoning work and glorious resurrection.

When it is physically possible, we choose to practice baptism by immersion. We understand that occasionally there are physical issues that do not always permit complete and full immersion. In those rare instances, we will accommodate the baptism candidate however we can. Most of the time, baptism by immersion is the mode and style that we will practice. We do understand that there are sometimes other factors that affect a person's baptism. While a person may be physically able to be fully immersed, perhaps there is an issue with a personal phobia, such as a fear of water or a fear of being up in front of a crowd. Our first response would be one of encouragement. While we may have social phobias, we claim the teaching of scripture that nothing is too hard for God. God can help us overcome our fears and baptism is something we share together. It is a public declaration.



THE PROPER AUTHORITY

Baptism is a public example.

It should be practiced as an ordinance of the church and we prefer that someone ordained by the Church should perform baptism.



Baptism is performed with the acknowledgement of the Trinity. When we speak of the Trinity, it means that we understand that God exists in one divine nature as God and in three specific persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When Jesus commissioned his 11 disciples in Matthew 28, he told them to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is an acknowledgement of the role each Person of the Trinity plays in our salvation.

God the Holy Spirit draws us to the point of repentance by revealing the need for salvation and preparing our hearts to receive salvation. God the Son saves us by grace through faith in his sacrificial atonement. Through the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are restored once again back to God the Father.

When we baptize, we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit acknowledging the role each played in our salvation.



YOUR TURN!

Why do we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

We baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to acknowledge the role each member of the Trinity plays in salvation.

THE PROPER ORDER

Baptism is to be observed by individuals who profess an established belief in Christ as Savior and Lord. When the Ethiopian asked Philip in Acts 8 if he could be baptized, Philip responded by clarifying the man's confession of faith in God.

That confession must be in place, already held and established. A person is first saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Then that person can follow that decision with baptism.

What is the proper sequence in being prepared for baptism?

First we respond to the message of the Gospel and are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Then we follow in obedience the teaching and example of Jesus Christ from the New Testament in the Bible and are baptized.



RE-BAPTIZED?



Because so many traditions practice infant baptism and christening, sometimes people can find it strange or confusing that we “re-baptize” individuals after their experience later on in their life of genuine conversion.

We do this because we want to be sure that a person has confidently expressed a decision for salvation. We believe baptism is something a person chooses for themselves after they have been saved according to the Biblical message of the Gospel. It is not something to be practiced before becoming a believer according to the Biblical message of the Gospel.

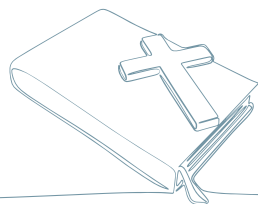
We do not believe it is a “re-baptism.” We believe it is biblically described as Believer’s Baptism by Immersion according to all the Bible has to say about it. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see infants baptized in the manner or style that Jesus modeled.

Baptism is a public testimony. It preaches something to an audience. While it is personal, it is not private. If a person comes to faith in Christ after a previous “baptismal experience,” regardless of style (sprinkle, pour over or even immersion), then biblically based baptism should still be pursued.

Baptism should always follow salvation.



WHAT DOES THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE SAY ABOUT BAPTISM?



The Baptist Faith and Message is the doctrinal statement of faith, belief and practice that Southern Baptists hold. We at First Baptist Martinsburg affirm the version of the BF&M that was published in the year 2000. It says on the topic of baptism:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.



ONE FINAL WORD

In Romans 6:4, Paul talks about being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in a new life with Jesus. That is the language that we use when we actually baptize. It is that understanding that we take in our practice of believer's baptism through immersion.

IN SUMMARY

Baptism is a sign indicating that an inward change takes place when we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. We practice and experience baptism in large part because Jesus commanded the apostles and the church to baptize believers. We believe that in some way, baptism is associated with the beginning of the Christian life - that is the new life we have spiritually in Christ.

Baptism serves as a public testimony of one's faith in Jesus Christ. we are baptized into the name of Christ. We are not baptized into the name of first Baptist church. Baptism does not produce any spiritual change in the believer. We practice it because Jesus commanded it and because it serves as a powerful form of proclamation. Baptism also can help to confirm and assure the person being baptized of their salvation.

I encourage you to be baptized not because I want you to join the church. I want you to experience baptism because of the symbolic connection to Jesus himself, because of the powerful testimony and proclamation of faith it is to others who struggle, because of how affirming and confirming it will be for your own personal, private devotional life and for the worship and celebration the church experiences as a body when people are baptized.



WHAT ABOUT MY BABY?

While we understand that many churches do baptize or christen infants, we do not practice that here at First Baptist Church. Our practice is consistent with most Southern Baptist churches as well.

That does not mean we do not have a special time for infants and young children. We provide special services throughout the year in which we have a Parent and Child Dedication.

In this service, the parents and the child stand before the congregation. We introduce the child and ask other family members present to stand as well in their seats. We then extend the blessing of the grace of the church onto the parents and children. We ask the parents to respond to a covenantal statement of dedication in raising their child and we follow that with the congregation making a commitment as well to help parents and families raise their children in a home that will place emphasis on godliness and the Bible.

After these times of commitment, we then pray together and will offer some gifts to the families including a Bible for the little one.

If you have a small child and are interested in participating in this service the next time it is offered, please email Pastor Craig Smith at craig@fbcmartinsburg.com.



NEXT STEPS



So now that you have worked through this book- let, what are the next steps you need to take?

If you made a decision for salvation working through this booklet, your next step is to email Pastor Craig Smith and set up a meeting with him. He would love to encourage you, pray with you and help you by giving you some resources to help you grow. He will also then begin the process of preparing for your baptism.

If you are ready to be baptized your next step is setting up a time with Pastor Craig to talk through this booklet with him and then you can schedule a Sunday morning to be baptized.

If you have a small child and are interested in Parent and Child dedication, your next step is also contacting Pastor Craig so he can notify the Children's Ministry leadership and get a dedication service planned.

If you still have questions or concerns about anything you read or are working through, please contact Pastor Craig and work through whatever may be holding you back.

Regardless, please take the next step in faith!

Pastor Craig - craig@fbcmartinsburg.com



THE DECISION CARD

Please fill this card out and tear it off and bring to Pastor Craig during the invitation or immediately following the conclusion of the worship service.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

CHECK EACH THAT APPLIES:

I have accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord and I know without a doubt that I am saved and will go to heaven to be with Him.

I am ready to follow the example and teaching of Jesus and be baptized