

they die in infancy but it does lead me to expect that godly parenting should generally lead to godly children.

4. We don't break fellowship over modes of baptism. One thing which has hopefully come through this evening is that this is not an issue over which we should divide. I think of all the issues on our doctrinal distinctives this is the one I hold to the least strongly. It occurred to me this week while thinking about this and wondering why the Lord just hadn't made it clearer that in some ways the apparent ambiguity of the Bible over the mode of baptism is itself a grace from God. It's clear that we should be baptised which is important but we can never think that our baptism will save us because if it did the Bible would have been much clearer on exactly how to do it.

## Q & A

Lord's supper questions – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

## Why I am a Baptist

Doctrinal distinctives evening 2, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006  
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### Introduction

We're carrying on our series on our Doctrinal Distinctives this evening and tonight we're dealing with 2 of the distinctives – baptism and Lord's Supper – under the title 'Why I am a baptist'. That said we will really only come to the Lord's supper in the end if we have time – and I suspect not!

I hope that's not a cop out it's just that because we take the Lord's supper more often than we have baptisms we probably understand it better.

Before we 'dive' in! Just a quick intro to the series again.

Last week I gave 2 reasons why as a church family we have doctrinal distinctives even when genuine Christians disagree over them.

The first reason is because...

1. They significantly impact church life. What we believe about the Bible, baptism, election, membership – all of these things will have a big impact on the way we conduct church life. And it's

better to have thought through answers to these questions rather than blundering along working it out as you go along.

2. The second reason is that we love Jesus and love for Jesus is reflected by an eagerness to get to know him and understand what he's up to in our world. If we love him we won't be satisfied with misunderstanding and bumbling through the Christian life – we'll want to think theologically.

I also want to add that some of the doctrinal distinctives are more important and significant than others – partly because some impact church life more than others and others because they carry more emphasis in the Bible than others – but I will allow you to look at them and come to your conclusions on that or ask questions at the end.

So this evening...

### **Why I am a Baptist...**

I wonder if you were to ask a random person in the street what it meant to be a Baptist they'd probably either look at you blankly or else say something like... well some people are Catholics, others Anglicans and you're a Baptist – just like that church over there which says Bungle bungle Baptist church on it.

boat it takes a bit of time for the message to get through – if you're a Christian you should be baptised! If you're a Christian and were baptised as a baby but are now persuaded that believers baptism is what the Bible teaches then get baptised. Don't put it off till you feel ready – obedience to Jesus is a very important issue.

2. Baptism is an occasion to proclaim the gospel. The symbol itself proclaims the gospel as we have seen but a baptism service also provides an opportunity to declare the gospel to the person being baptised and to those gathered. That should be the emphasis.
3. Pray that children of believers grow up as Christians. Just because we don't baptise the children of believers doesn't mean that we should expect our children to rebel before coming to faith in Christ. The ideal testimony for someone who's grown up in a Christian family is that they can't remember not being a Christian. That they grow up trusting and loving Jesus and praying for forgiveness – we should raise our kids with that prayer and expectation. We should take children's confessions of faith seriously and disciple them and then when they are old enough to articulate an understanding of the gospel we baptise them and continue to disciple them. I don't think the Bible promises their salvation unless

But now the covenant people of God are the church and membership of the church is by faith in Jesus Christ – not by family tree.

Baptism is no longer given to an assumed group of people but rather to a visible church made up of people who confess they believe in Jesus Christ. We baptise where the faith already exists.

So to amend the quote from earlier...

We assume that the children of believers are holy, as long as in growing up they do not demonstrate themselves to be estranged from Christ. We do not exclude them from the church, but accept them as members with the hope that they are partakers of the divine election and have the grace and Spirit of Christ, even as they are the seed of saints. On that basis *we disciple them and baptise them when they are old enough to confess Jesus as Lord and demonstrate that they are not estranged from Christ.*

Finally in our look at baptism what are the...

### **Applications of the doctrine...**

1. Christians should be baptised. I've already said this but I know from experience that for people in this

But this evening when I say I am a Baptist I don't mean any of those things. Saying I am a Baptist does not mean that I am affiliated to the Baptist Union of Great Britain or that I belong to a church with 'baptist' in the title – because we don't!

What I mean is that **theologically I believe the understanding of the practice of baptism as taught by the Baptist tradition best reflects the teaching of the Bible.**

In other words it's a theological belief rather than a denominational position.

That might sound a bit petty but it's actually quite important.

Imagine I moved to a town called Nowheresville and was looking for a church.

There were 2 churches in the town one called 'St Gospel Preaching Anglican Church' and the other called 'Barmy Baptist Church'. I went to both to try them out. The first 'St Gos' as they called themselves was great. The preaching was straight from the Bible and they obviously loved Jesus and wanted all of Nowheresville to hear about what he'd done for them. They did however baptise infants. The other church 'BBC' as they called themselves was crazy. The sermon was led by a man who spent most of the time talking about community politics and how

good the new recycling scheme was. They did however baptise believers.

Where would I go to church in Nowhere's Ville?

Well I wouldn't even think about it. I'd go to St Gos'

Why? Well because the Bible teaches me that my commitment to the gospel should be greater than my commitment to a mode of baptism however carefully I've thought about it.

We could be even more specific than that though. The Bible teaches me that my commitment to Bible teaching and Christian growth should be greater than my commitment to a mode of baptism.

Put it another way. I belong to Jesus through the gospel not a denomination through a sacrament.

This isn't lunacy this is exactly Paul's position who we find in 1 Corinthians is doing evangelism without baptising people.

I guess it's because by nature we're quite tribal people – we stick with people with the same labels – black, white, Baptist, Anglican, Red, Blue etc – that people don't forget labels when there are more important issues at stake. So you don't have to look hard to find Christians who have

### **Questions for group discussion...**

In what ways are circumcision and baptism linked in the passage?

What kind of circumcision is Paul talking about in these verses?

Do you think from these verses that baptism can be seen as the fulfilment of circumcision?

I just think it's a very difficult move to make from these verses. As I read the passage I'm convinced that Paul's point is that circumcision no longer carries on because what really matters is that Christ circumcises our hearts – which is the putting off of the sinful nature – which is preceded by regeneration which is symbolised by baptism.

Let me expand on that...

In the OT the covenant people of God were a nation – the Israelites – and the nation obviously followed the family tree of the people.

But also the nation included all sorts of people – servants, long term visitors, converts – all of whom seem to be circumcised in the OT – Gen 17:10-13.

because they never do anything wrong but rather because God's promises include the children of those who believe and that this carries on in the NT.

So to quote one reformed theologian...

"We assume that the children of believers are holy, as long as in growing up they do not demonstrate themselves to be estranged from Christ. We do not exclude them from the church, but accept them as members with the hope that they are partakers of the divine election and have the grace and Spirit of Christ, even as they are the seed of saints. On that basis we baptise them." Vermigli, Loci Communes

I have some sympathy with this and basically agree with him until his last sentence – which disagrees with his first sentence – as by the time the children have shown whether they are regenerate or not you've already baptised them!

So we'll return to the children thing in a moment but what about this idea that the NT ties circumcision and baptism together.

Colossians 2:11-12 is the main NT reference for the link between the circumcision and baptism.

Let's read it now

ship wrecked their spiritual lives by being Baptists more than gospel people or Anglicans first and gospel believers second.

Before we move on I would want to make one more qualification.

And that is that baptism itself is more important than the mode of baptism. In other words if St Gos' or BBC didn't do baptisms at all then it would be a different matter.

Jesus says in 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."

Notice that he says 'teaching them to obey everything...' and that part of Jesus' instructions here are baptism.

So while the mode of baptism might be a secondary issue baptism itself is a matter of obedience to Jesus.

I want to say – and will say in a moment – that Matthew 28 is about believers baptism by full immersion – but even if you disagree with that and you think there's provision for the baptism of the children of believers – you can't disagree that baptism itself is a command!!

Oh it's clear that you can be a Christian without being baptised – take the thief on the cross for example – but he

had a pretty good reason for not being baptised. A reason not shared by any of us – namely being nailed to a cross – which makes any form of baptism difficult.

In other words if you've not been baptised and you're a Christian – then you should be – Jesus says you should be – and if Jesus is your Lord then you should do what he says!!!

Right enough introduction... let me say why I believe that the understanding of the practice of baptism as taught by the Baptist tradition best reflects the teaching of the Bible.

The distinctives of the Baptist theology of baptism is that is that baptism is by full immersion and is for professing Christians – in other words it's for those old enough to make an intelligent, independent profession of trust in Jesus Christ.

And I'll try and show you why I think that's right...

### **1. Baptism in the Bible is by full immersion**

There are only narrative accounts of 11 Christian baptisms in the NT.

The most detailed account is that of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

The third point I have dealt with briefly already and I think at best it is inconclusive either way – although I would concede that scripture is silent on what to do with the children of believers I don't think you can argue that you find infant baptism in the Bible.

So let me deal with the 2<sup>nd</sup> point in a bit more detail...

### **Baptism is parallel to circumcision...**

The main point here is that circumcision in the OT was a boundary fence which marked out the people of God and that now circumcision had been done away with baptism is the equivalent fence.

The argument is tied also to a view of children.

The view is that in the OT the covenant people included children so too the NT covenant includes the children of believers – because – the argument goes – that to not include children would make the covenant worse and a new covenant which is better in so many ways surely couldn't be worse. So as OT children were circumcised children of believers today should be baptised.

I guess you might compare it to owning a car – swapping for a rubbish one – you wouldn't do it.

The argument goes on that children of believers are heirs also of the promises and are regenerate at birth – not

Rather baptism is used to teach salvation and is given to believers.

Well that might all seem quite straight forward – and I guess it is in one way. However we must also interact with the arguments of those who disagree with me.

### **Reasons for disagreeing with me...**

I am not going to talk any further about the Roman Catholic position which is outside the limits of a biblical understanding of salvation. Rather I want to deal briefly with arguments put forward by brothers and sisters in Bible believing churches which baptise infants.

Without going into a lot of detail there are 3 main steps in the evangelical argument for infant baptism. And if this is what you believe then maybe you could confirm at the end that I haven't misrepresented you.

1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant
2. Baptism is parallel to circumcision
3. Household baptisms are recorded in the NT

Well I don't have any argument with number 1. Abraham was told to circumcise himself and his children and from that point onwards it becomes one of the marks of covenant people of God.

READ Acts 8:34-40

How does Luke describe the baptism?

What might make us think that it was by full immersion?

Here it seems clear that Philip goes down into the water with the eunuch – which presumably means that he went in quite a distance as opposed to stood at the edge or paddled – and it would seem rather odd to go to all the trouble of walking that far if all you did was sprinkle or pour water.

I agree that it's by no means conclusive but it does appear to be the plain meaning of the passage.

### **2. Immersion makes best sense of the word**

The Greek word translated by our Bibles means to 'plunge, dip or immerse'. You can see that from the context around the passage and the way it's used in relation to John the Baptist's baptism in the Jordon with Jesus coming up out of the water. Even if the John's baptism isn't theologically the same as the one we receive the word – or description of it – is the same.

Again this point is contested by some systematicians wanting to argue for sprinkling but it's very difficult to do

particularly given the word 'batizo' is used in non Biblical material to mean 'sink' 'drown' 'plunge' etc. and given also the existence of a totally different word in the Greek for sprinkle.

It is quite difficult to drown from sprinkling.

### **3. Immersion makes best sense of the symbolism**

In Romans 6 Paul talks about salvation in baptism categories – let's turn there now.

READ Romans 6:1-4

I don't think we should be too scared of Paul putting baptism and salvation so close together. He's been very clear in Romans to this point that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone - in other words the way that Jesus' death means something for us today is simply by putting our faith in it – not by doing anything – including baptism.

The Roman Catholic view of baptism which states that baptism is one of the means by which someone is made spiritually alive – can't be supported anywhere in the Bible.

But Paul does put the events closely together not because salvation depends on baptism but rather because baptism teaches salvation.

And baptism by immersion teaches this death and resurrection image which Paul is talking about here.

So as our doctrinal distinctive says – baptism, where practicably possible, should be by full immersion.

### **4. Those baptised in the NT are always believers**

We've moved on now to talk about who should be baptised.

All the times baptism is mentioned in the NT it is for Christians. There are a couple of occasions of 'household' baptisms – one in Acts and one in 1 Corinthians. But in both those passages it is not implied that the candidates were babies rather than believing children.

### **5. Believers baptism follows the order in the Bible.**

Matthew 28:19 again. Jesus tells us to baptise the disciples who we are teaching.

The apostles practice in Acts also then follows this pattern – so the Ethiopian eunuch again – he believes and is baptised.

Romans 6 again. Baptism symbolises something which has happened for Christians.