



## **baptism:** An explanation of believer baptism

### **introduction:**

In any church, there are inevitably a variety of opinions and beliefs regarding various theological issues. We the elders of Living Faith believe it is therefore vitally important to distinguish between primary and secondary theological issues. **Primary** theological issues are those matters that are necessary for Christian orthodoxy. They include such things as our belief in: one God, the Trinity, Jesus (i.e. His deity, Virgin Birth, sinless life, death for sin, and resurrection), the perfection and authority of the Bible, and salvation by grace and faith through Jesus alone. **Secondary** theological issues are those matters that are of varying degrees importance, but are not necessary for salvation. They can be and are disagreed upon among many Christians, and include issues such as speaking in tongues, different worship styles, and baptism.

At Living Faith, we hold a fundamental belief that our unity is held together by our agreement upon the primary theological issues, and we therefore require all leaders and members of the church to be in agreement concerning them. In dealing with the secondary theological issues we practice liberty. In all of our beliefs we desire to show true charity (1 Corinthians 13:2). As a result we have written a curriculum (Gospel 101 & 102) that is intended to instruct each of our potential church members on these primary theological issues of our faith.

Because secondary theological issues impact the quality of our worship to God, the quality of our witness to the world and the quality of our Christian lives, we also have strong convictions about these matters of the faith. However, we are committed and willing to welcome into church membership Christians who disagree with us on some secondary theological issues, provided they agree with us on the primary theological matters. Our only requirement is that none of us become divisive, and that we all accept the fact that some secondary theological issues may not be supported by the church leadership. In this way, we seek to simultaneously heed the Bible's commands to have sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:9; 2:1), love our Christian brothers and sisters (1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:7-21), and avoid unnecessary divisions (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:25; Titus 3:10).

When we need to clarify Living Faith's position on various primary and secondary theological issues, we will study and publish our agreed-upon biblical convictions. Our hope in doing this is simply to bring clarity and unity that will help

our people to grow in their Christian lives, as well as answer any questions they may have.

For some who attend Living Faith, the Bible's teaching on baptism in general—and Living Faith's practice of baptism specifically—may remain unclear. As a result, this document is intended to explain Living Faith's convictions concerning the issue. In so doing, we are not saying we have a monopoly on the truth, nor are we trying to be divisive or disrespectful toward many fine Christians who disagree with our position.

**Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)** “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” In this wonderful verse, we discover a reciprocal relationship between church leadership and church members. We see clearly the obligation of church leaders to church members as well as the obligation of church members to their church leaders. Every leader at Living Faith must give an account to God for the people entrusted to their care, including their doctrine and baptism. We also see the command given to church members to obey our leadership so that our job does not become burdensome unnecessarily.

What the Bible does not command is that everyone in the church agrees with the leaders on everything. Rather, it teaches that the leaders must take responsibility for the overall health of the church, while people in the church must respect the leaders enough to refrain from divisiveness. Therefore, if you should have any questions after reading this document, you are free to meet with an elder. If you continue to disagree, we simply ask that you not be divisive or disrespectful, so that we may continue to welcome you in our church and enjoy Christian fellowship with you.

Living Faith supports baptism of people who claim and demonstrate saving faith (both adults and children). We do not promote infant baptism, because those who do not profess and demonstrate faith in Jesus should not be baptized, including children who are too young to do so. But, we are happy to baptize Christian children who are old enough to embrace the Gospel, and we have done so.

## answering common questions about baptism:

### **What is baptism?**

Baptism is the Christian act of immersing a believer under water and then bringing the believer out of water. It is a practical representation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as the person being baptized is immersed in water and brought out of the water in the same way that Jesus was buried in the earth and resurrected on their behalf in forgiveness of their sins (Romans 6:1-10; Colossians 2:12). Baptism identifies a Christian with Jesus (Acts 10:48; Romans 6:3; Galatians

3:27), the universal church (1 Corinthians 12:13), and the local church (Acts 2:41).

### **Why should Christians be baptized?**

One primary reason is Jesus commanded that all Christians be baptized (Matthew 28:19). His apostles also commanded that all Christians be baptized (Acts 2:38). Therefore, Christians should be baptized because their God and His servants command it. This clears up any extra-biblical apprehensions about water baptism. Sometimes simple obedience is a doorway to great liberty.

### **Do I need to be baptized to be a Christian?**

Salvation is a gift given to people whose faith rests in the grace of God to forgive their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). By way of example, when the Philippian jailor asked what was required of him to be saved, Paul did not mention baptism, but simply said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 16:31). Likewise, the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus was promised by our Lord that, "...today you will be with Me in paradise," though he had not been baptized (Luke 23:43). We can see that someone can be unbaptized and yet be a Christian who is destined for heaven.

### **How should baptism be conducted?**

First, the Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament means to plunge, dip or immerse in water. In secular Greek this word was used, for example, to explain such things as the sinking of a ship that had been submerged in water.

Second, John the Baptizer immersed people in water (Mark 1:5). He even selected the Jordan River as the place for conducting his baptisms because there was "plenty of water" (John 3:23).

Third, when Jesus was baptized He was immersed in water (Mark 1:10).

Fourth, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch by immersing him in water (Acts 8:34-39).

Fifth, baptism is, in a very real sense, the remembrance of Jesus' burial and resurrection, and is therefore best conducted by immersion (Romans 6:1-10; Colossians 2:12).

Sixth, in the Old Testament (and in the present day), when someone who was not racially Jewish converted to Judaism, they underwent a Jewish proselyte baptism to show that God had cleansed them from their sin. The mode of this baptism was (and is) by immersion.

In conclusion, Christians should be baptized in the same manner as Jesus: immersed in water and then brought up out of the water.

### **Who should conduct baptism?**

The Bible does not command exactly who should perform a baptism. At Living Faith, the elders have chosen to baptize people as a public church event for the following reasons: so that new Christians may be welcomed into the church, so their unbelieving friends and family can hear their testimonies, and so

fellow Christians may rejoice with them regarding God's work in their lives. Typically, the elders conduct the baptism, but parents and friends who have been used by God to bring someone to faith are often invited to help in the baptism event. It is important to understand that baptism is an opportunity for evangelism, where the convert is able to publicly testify about God's work in his or her life. This is a compelling proof of the Gospel, and it cannot be similarly conveyed by an infant who is being baptized and is too young to testify of God's goodness.

### **Who should be baptized?**

First, John the Baptizer required that people repent of sin before they could be baptized (Matthew 3:2, 6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Therefore, only Christians who have repented of sin should be baptized.

Second, every baptism in the New Testament is preceded by repentance of sin and faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 9:18-19; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 40; 16:29-36; 18:8; 19:1-7; 22:16). Therefore, only Christians who have repented of sin and have trusted in Jesus should be baptized.

Third, baptism is reserved solely for people who have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, only those who are Christians should be baptized.

Fourth, baptism represents Jesus' burial and resurrection for their sin—and are therefore awaiting their own resurrection one day—should be baptized.

Fifth, the Bible does record occurrences in which entire households were baptized (Acts 10:33, 44-48; 11:14; 16:15, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:16). But the Bible also records that each member of these households believed in Jesus and was saved (John 4:53; Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 16:15). Therefore, any member of a household who repents of sin and trusts in Jesus alone for salvation should be baptized.

Sixth, both Jesus (Matthew 28:19) and his apostles (Acts 2:38) demanded that Christians be baptized. Therefore, believing Christians should be baptized.

In summary, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus are the marks of a Christian. And all Christians are commanded to be baptized in order to identify themselves with the death, burial and resurrection of their savior Jesus. Subsequently, no one but a Christian should be baptized, and this exclude non-Christians and children who are too young to demonstrate repentance and articulate faith.

### **How may I be baptized?**

If you are a Christian who has repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus, but you have not yet been baptized, you should call the church office or email [baptism@lf-church.com](mailto:baptism@lf-church.com) and request to be baptized. One of the elders will then meet with you to hear your testimony, explain how we conduct baptisms, answer any questions you may have, pray for you and schedule your baptism.

### **May I be baptized if I have previously been baptized?**

Once a person has been baptized there is no need for him or her to be baptized again (Ephesians 4:5). The only exception to this is if someone was

baptized as a non-Christian and desires to profess his faith and be baptized as a Christian (Acts 19:1-5). This exception would include people who were baptized in cults and heretical churches, as well as those baptized as infants at the request of their parents. Living Faith does not require that those who were baptized as children be re-baptized as believing adults, but leaves this decision to the conscience of each Christian.

### **How does Living Faith recognize infants?**

Infants of Christian parents who are member of Living Faith are welcome into the church and counted as members in conjunction with their families. As a church one of our core values is Family and we aspire with parents to help all of the children in our church know and love Jesus from a very early age. Paul said that Timothy had known the Scriptures since his infancy, which shows that it is possible for even young children to learn Scripture, love Jesus, and be vibrant Christians (2 Timothy 3:15).

### **Does Living Faith ever baptize children?**

Living Faith baptizes any adult or child (usually as witnessed by his or her parents) who is able to demonstrate repentance of sin and to express faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not uncommon for very young children to be baptized as Living Faith, providing there is evidence that they are Christians by their profession and demonstration of faith.

Living Faith does not baptize anyone (including infants) unless there is evidence that they are Christians. This practice is absolutely consistent with the teaching of the New Testament, in which there is simply not a shred of evidence that an infant or an unbelieving child was ever baptized.

### **Why does Living Faith dedicate children?**

As an infant, Jesus was not baptized, but was dedicated to the Lord by his parents (Luke 2:21-23). Likewise, at Living Faith we dedicate children born into our church in an effort to rejoice with the parents as members of their spiritual family, welcome the child into the church, and commit ourselves to prayerfully supporting the family and the child in hopes that he will grow to love and serve the Lord.

### **How can I have my child dedicated?**

If you are a member of Living Faith and would like to have your child dedicated, please call the office or email [\*\*babies@lf-church.com\*\*](mailto:babies@lf-church.com) to schedule that event. Due to the number of births, multiple baby dedications are scheduled at once, typically as a special event the whole church is invited to attend.

### **What books can I read to study the doctrine of baptism further?**

*Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, Paul K. Jewett

*Baptism in the New Testament*, G.R. Beasley-Murray

*Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem

## teaching on water baptism:

**Romans 6:1-11 (ESV)**<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin.

- **Baptism, the sign and seal of initial union with Christ, is the burial service for the 'old self' (v. 6) as well as the inauguration ceremony for the new person in Christ.**

**Christian Baptism: A sign from God that signifies the following...**

### **1. Inward cleansing and remission of sins...**

**Acts 22:16 (ESV)**<sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

**1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

**Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)**<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

### **2. Spirit-wrought regeneration and new life...**

**Titus 3:5 (ESV)**<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

### **3. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as God's seal testifying and guaranteeing that one will be kept safe in Christ forever...**

**1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)**<sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

**Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)**<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

### **Fundamentally...**

#### **1. Baptism signifies union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.**

**Romans 6:3-7 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin.

**Colossians 2:11-12 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,<sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

#### **2. This union with Christ is the source of every element in our salvation.**

**1 John 5:11-12 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

#### **3. Receiving the sign of baptism in faith assures those baptized that God's gift of new life in Christ is freely given to them. At the same time, it commits them to live in a new way as disciples of Jesus.**

**Matthew 28:19 (ESV)**<sup>19</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,

**1 Corinthians 10:2 (ESV)**<sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

- This formula means that the covenant relation which baptism formally confers is with the three Persons of the Godhead. When Paul says that the Israelites were 'baptized into Moses', he means that they were put under Moses' control and direction. Baptism into the name of the name of the Triune God signifies control and direction from God.

**Warning:**

The outward signs do not automatically or magically convey the inward blessings that they signify. No prescription of a particular mode of baptism can be found in the New Testament. You are being baptized into the body of Christ, not Living Faith church.