



# Baptism

The aim of the *All in the Family* series is to explore the breadth of belief and practice that exists amongst FIEC churches on matters that our Doctrinal Basis doesn't touch on and yet are important in church life.

For each subject we ask a variety of church leaders to respond to the same questions, with an emphasis on seeing how belief shapes practice in a local church.

In this collection on Baptism, the viewpoints are:

- *a paedobaptist minister who leads a church with a mixed leadership and mixed membership*
- *a credobaptist minister who leads a dual practice church*
- *a credobaptist minister who leads an open membership church*
- *a credobaptist minister who leads a closed-membership church*

These papers can also be found online at: [fiec.org.uk/resources/series/all-in-the-family](http://fiec.org.uk/resources/series/all-in-the-family)

---

## Paper #1: Richard Hagan

**About the author:** *Richard is Senior Minister of Emmanuel Church Canterbury. He studied Law at Oxford University, Theology at Oak Hill College and is currently doing a part-time Master's degree in Historical Theology with Westminster Theological Seminary. Richard is married to Corinne and they have four young children.*

**Viewpoint:** *A paedobaptist Minister, in a church with mixed leadership and mixed membership.*

**Church:** *Emmanuel Church Canterbury was planted in October 2009 by myself (a paedobaptist) and eight other adults (who differed in their views on baptism). From its beginning the church has sought to keep the gospel front and centre in its teaching and mission. The church has grown in part through conversions as well as through Christians uniting from different church backgrounds under the straightforward preaching of the gospel. The church has sought to avoid excluding anyone from membership or leadership because of a particular view on baptism. Almost half of the church is students (who make up half of the city's population during term). They come from and will return to churches that hold different positions on baptism. It is not the ambition of the church to turn people from one view to another.*

*One retired Grace Baptist Minister who was at Emmanuel Church in the early days remarked how most of the Reformers and Puritans were paedobaptist and that he had much respect for them. Only in heaven, he said, would we know which of us was right, and at that time our hearts and minds would be taken up with the higher and greater privilege of worshipping Christ!*

## **1) What are your views on the meaning and significance of baptism?**

Water baptism was instituted by Christ in his Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Membership of the visible church is to be marked by the outward sign of being immersed or sprinkled with water. The visible church is to be distinguished from the invisible church, the latter being only those who are elect, regenerate and will persevere to the end. Only the LORD knows those who are his, however credible someone's profession of faith might seem to others. In Matthew 13 our Lord Jesus reveals what the visible church in the last days will look like. The parables of the Weeds and the Net show that the Kingdom of heaven on earth in the last days will be a mixed bag – there will be weeds mixed in with good plants and bad fish in the same net as good fish. Only when he returns with his angels in glory will the wicked and the righteous be distinguished unmistakably. So, even under the new covenant, the visible church will be mixed.

Baptism is the sign and seal of entry into the visible church. It gets someone wet, but does not make someone regenerate and decide their eternal destiny. When done correctly, it acknowledges someone to be a member of the visible church.

## **2) Who are appropriate subjects of baptism, and what mode of baptism would you practice?**

Appropriate subjects for adult baptism are those who show a credible profession of faith in Christ. The candidate is assessed for a clear understanding of the gospel message. This is done by asking them to write down their testimony without any help or guidance. We also look for a noticeable response in repentance and faith, and a counting of the cost. We would be swift to baptise after this, following the practice in the Book of Acts. Adult baptisms are conducted by full immersion in a paddling pool of the church car park. If there was for some reason a shortage of

water (through a hole in the paddling pool or a hosepipe ban- [we have had both!]), the baptism would go ahead by sprinkling instead. We do not see the amount of water as essential to the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Unbaptised children can also be brought for baptism upon request. As they move from infant to child, a credible profession of faith suitable to their age would be expected. As a child grows from infancy, so does their responsibility to articulate and appropriate personally the faith of their parents.

### *The baptism of infants*

Infants of believing parents would be welcomed for baptism on the basis of the unity of Scripture and the enduring covenant the LORD has with his people. In Genesis 17 the LORD gave Abraham and successive generations of faith an everlasting covenant. Each new generation was to be recognised as part of the covenant community by the circumcision of baby boys a week old. The child was presumed to be 'in' the covenant unless as they grew up they showed themselves to be 'out'. At the time of Christ the outward sign of membership changed from circumcision to baptism as smoothly as the day for corporate worship moved from Sabbath to Lord's Day.

The vast majority of Reformers and Puritans were paedobaptist and wrote extensively on this subject. John Calvin famously wrote:

*"The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation [or administration]" (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2.10.2, p 429)*

When Peter closed the deal in his Pentecost speech to fellow Jews he specifically mentioned that the offer of salvation and invitation to baptism extended to the children of his hearers (Acts 2:38-39). If the LORD had changed his attitude to children so that children of believers were now 'out' unless they were 'in' we would expect such a radical change to be discussed in the New Testament. Instead we find the opposite: entire households were baptised in the early church in a similar way that Abraham's whole household was circumcised in Genesis 17. In Acts 16 both Lydia's household and the Philippian jailer's household were baptised. When Paul and Silas answered the jailer's question "*Sirs what must I do to be saved?*", their response is jarring to individualistic ears. As well as answering that he must believe in order to be saved, they state that through *his* faith, salvation would extend to his whole household. That same night he *and all his family* were baptised without any mention of the faith of others in his household. This is not strange at all when compared to Genesis 17:23. The Apostle Paul was keen to tell the Galatians that the promises to Abraham were unchanged by the later covenant with Moses (Galatians 3:17). It is no surprise then that his Corinthian readers would know of the holy status of the children of believing parents (1 Corinthians 7:14). A true understanding of paedobaptism reflects the Bible's teaching on the corporate as well as the individual. Infants of believing parents are included alongside their parents in the church membership list. As children grow up and reach the age of majority, they appear as a separate entry.

It goes without saying that the infants of unbelieving parents are not admissible to baptism because faith is not in the parents and the covenant promises do not apply to them. This would be an abuse of infant baptism yet is a sad reality in some churches. Yet the abuse of infant baptism is not a reason for its cessation any more than the Catholic abuse of the Lord's Supper is a reason for us not to administer the Lord's Supper.

Parents who do not have paedobaptist convictions would on request be given the opportunity to have a Thanksgiving/Dedication, where the parents are dedicated, and the children are given thanks for – the parents dedicated to God in their responsibilities to bring the child up in the training and instruction of the LORD and public thanks are offered for the child's safe arrival.

### **3) Does baptism mean automatic admission to the Lord's Supper and church membership?**

Children who believe are not automatically invited to receive the Lord's Supper. They need credibly to profess faith in Christ (whether baptised or not) and articulate the meaning of the Lord's Supper. I liaise closely with the child's parents, recognising that in a church with mixed membership, parents will take different views on when their children should take part.

### **4) Do you require baptism for admission to the Lord's Table or church membership?**

Emmanuel Church allows all who repent of their sin and have faith in Christ to receive the bread and the wine. Baptism is encouraged as a precursor to this, but it is not a condition. This rests on the conviction that we are saved by faith plus nothing and we can be in the body of Christ without being baptised. Because the Lord's Supper involves recognising the body of believers, the only reasons for excluding people from the Lord's Table would be unbelief, church discipline, or voluntary exclusion through the need first to be reconciled to a fellow Christian.

### **5) Would you ever "rebaptise"? i.e. Are there any forms of baptism you would regard as illegitimate and invalid?**

When a paedobaptist changes in conviction to believer's only baptism and asks to be rebaptised as an adult, that is allowable.

### **6) How do you handle those who change their views on baptism?**

When members or leaders change their views on baptism (as I did from credobaptism to paedobaptism a number of years ago), there is no issue on membership or leadership.

## 7) Do you allow those with different convictions on baptism to join your church leadership?

Yes. In our church membership course we teach on what it means to be a 'gospel centred' church, distinguishing between matters of salvation and secondary matters. Any paedobaptist or credobaptist is capable of making baptism into another gospel by saying that someone is not truly saved unless they are baptised in a particular way or that their past baptism has some saving power. One week of the course we look at Galatians and teach how secondary issues can quickly interfere as primary and gospel issues unless our unity in the gospel of grace is taught clearly. We note how Paul got Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3 to win the Jews, yet was rightly utterly inflexible in Galatians where Judaisers were compelling others to become circumcised. Anything can become a 'gospel plus' issue – even particular views on baptism! Another week we teach on Ephesians, explaining the doctrine of the universal church and its implications for how unity is preserved in the fellowship.

Our ambition for the church was characterised by a recent Sunday evening series on 'hot potatoes' where the Bible's case for both views on baptism were laid out. The aim of the evening was to get people understanding the opposite view of baptism that they currently held, being able to articulate it so well that someone who held that view could agree entirely with their summary. It was revealing how great the misunderstandings were on both sides as we began, but refreshing to end the evening understanding each other better.

---

## Paper #2: Greg Strain

**About the author:** *Greg practised as a doctor before training for Christian ministry. Having been an assistant minister in a church in Wolverhampton, Greg has been at Spicer Street since 1999 and has been Senior Pastor since 2003. He is married to Harriet and they have four children. He loves walking and fishing in his native west Cumbria, watching sports and reading.*

**Viewpoint:** *A credobaptist minister, in a dual practice church with mixed leadership and mixed membership.*

**Church:** *Spicer Street Church has a long and rich history. The church moved to its current premises in 1812, and the title deed requires that the minister hold to the (Westminster) Assembly's Shorter Catechism. During the second half the twentieth century the church became increasingly credobaptist in conviction and practice. Since that time, the church has been committed to respectfully catering for the convictions and consciences of both credobaptists (CBs) and paedobaptists (PBs) – who coexist in the membership and on the eldership.*

### 1) What are your views on the meaning and significance of baptism?

Given our mixed practice of baptism our views on its significance would vary. The CB majority of us would hold that baptism signifies and symbolises the cleansing from sin and our dying and being raised to new life through our faith union with Christ. It also goes hand in hand with repentance; in being baptised we declare our need for forgiveness and our turning from sin. Those who hold to a PB position would emphasise the promises of God being made to the candidate; it is a sign and a seal of the covenant promises.

## **2) Who are appropriate subjects of baptism, and what mode of baptism would you practise?**

We baptise those who have turned from their sin and placed their trust in Jesus. In most instances we baptise some time after conversion. This is not a theologically driven practice, as we note the way that in the New Testament those who professed faith were baptised immediately. Rather, it is pastorally driven; we like to make sure they understand the gospel and are willing to follow Christ.

Normally speaking we baptise from the age of 14 upwards.

We also baptise children of members who are convinced PBs. None of the pastors are under obligation to perform this ceremony. Currently two of our elders are of PB conviction so they will take responsibility for this short service which occurs outside of the main services.

## **3) Does baptism mean automatic admission to the Lord's Supper and church membership?**

We invite to the Lord's Supper all who are trusting in the Lord Jesus and are in peaceful fellowship with other believers. We therefore welcome to the Lord's Supper those who have been baptised irrespective of whether they are members or not.

## **4) Do you require baptism for admission to the Lord's Table or church membership?**

We do not insist on it. We are probably more lax and certainly less clear than we ought to be on this, and we need to review this area of church life.

## **5) Would you ever "rebaptise"? i.e. Are there any forms of baptism you would regard as illegitimate and invalid?**

We certainly do 'rebaptise' - this is driven by the convictions of the CBs. As baptism involves repentance, we (CBs) believe that it is right to (re)baptise on the basis of a person's profession of faith. A good number from various denominational backgrounds who were 'christened' do undergo (re)baptism.

However our policy is to respect individual consciences on this matter. If someone has been baptised as an infant and the person regards this as valid then we do respect this.

## **6) How do you handle those who change their views on baptism?**

Spicer Street is a place where this can happen without having to give up membership. The majority of movement occurs from PB to CB, although very often they were not committed to PB in the first place. We do see some movement the other way.

## **7) Do you allow those with different convictions on baptism to join your church leadership?**

We do. And we recognise this is where we part company with a good number of Independent churches.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, our constitution has, as a key document, the Shorter Catechism. We believe it would not be right to exclude men from leadership because of their view on baptism. Secondly, given that we think there are strong missional grounds in the UK for PBs and CBs to work together in local churches we think it is right if the mix of leadership reflects this.

Those who know how churches operate will rightly perceive that one theology is liable to dominate in teaching and in practice, and so it is with us: at this point in the church's history, the CBs are in the majority – both in the membership and on the eldership.

The unity is maintained by having a careful respect for each other and a deep bond of affection exists amongst us in the leadership team.

As a CB I think our approach gives those who have not explored the baptism issue room to do so and to examine the scriptures on this subject in a peaceful and non-threatening environment. With regard to children; they become eligible for membership at 16. Prior to then, pastorally, we believe that it is unhelpful to think of children as simply being either "in until they are out" or "out until they are in". Children need to be evangelised and disciplined and to be treated as individuals.

---

## **Paper #3: Bill James**

**About the author:** *Bill has been pastor of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa, since 1991. He is chair of the Carey Ministers' Conference. Prior to entering ministry Bill trained as a*

*chemical engineer and worked in industry for six years, followed by three years at Toronto Baptist Seminary. He is married to Sharon and they have two children.*

**Viewpoint:** *A credobaptist minister who leads a baptist church with open membership.*

**Church:** *Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa, was constituted in 1986. Our elders and deacons subscribe to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, and this is the teaching standard of the church. While teaching a baptist position, and practising believer's baptism by immersion, we operate an "open membership" policy, welcoming believers who are convinced of a paedobaptist position.*

*Baptism is a command of the Lord Jesus Christ for all believers, not to be minimised or neglected. We need to understand the Bible's teaching on baptism, practice it faithfully and consistently, and rejoice in it as a demonstration of the salvation we enjoy in Christ. However, at Emmanuel we appreciate that there are godly believers with different convictions about this ordinance; some hold that believers should baptise their infants. While we disagree, we don't want to make our differences a stumbling block to Christian fellowship. If we were completely consistent about our baptist principles we would only welcome baptised believers to membership and the Lord's Table. But if we did this we believe we would be inconsistent on the principle of Christian love and unity. So we operate an "open membership" policy.*

## **1) What are your views on the meaning and significance of baptism?**

The Lord Jesus Christ defined the mission of the church as making disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, in obedience to Jesus' command, and following the example of the early church in the book of Acts, we immerse believers in water as a sign that they have become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Baptism signifies that the believer has been united with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3), and thus enjoys the benefits of:

- *Forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16 "be baptised and wash your sins away")*
- *Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 10:47)*
- *Spiritual new birth (Colossians 2:12-13)*
- *Adoption as a son of God in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27)*
- *Union with the Body of Christ, the church (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 4:5)*

Baptism is therefore a great celebration of the saving work of God in someone's life. It has significance for the baptismal candidate as the means which God has ordained to testify to repentance towards God and faith in Christ. And it is a powerful demonstration to the church and the world of the benefits and blessings of salvation in the life of the believer.

At Emmanuel we have enjoyed many baptismal services as opportunities for the gospel to be preached, and visibly demonstrated in baptism. It is a reminder to believers of our own baptism,



and stirs us to rejoice again in what Christ has done in our lives, and to recommit ourselves to Him. The apostles clearly expect that believers will be able to recall their own baptism and its significance, and that this will spur us on in our own discipleship (Romans 6:3).

Believer's baptism, like the Lord's Supper, points to the central importance of the gospel to the life of the church. Baptism reminds us that it is only through the Good News of Christ's finished work, received by faith, that we join God's people. The Lord's Supper reminds us that it is only through looking to Christ crucified and depending on Him that we persevere together until glory.

## **2) Who are appropriate subjects of baptism, and what mode of baptism would you practice?**

Jesus commanded baptism to be administered to those who have become his disciples. The example of the early church was to baptise those who had come to faith in Christ, responding to the message of the Gospel, e.g. Acts 8:12 *"when they believed... they were baptised."* It is a mark of those who have repented of sin and turned to Christ, e.g. Acts 2:38 *"Repent and be baptised..."*; it is for those who have *"put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:27).

As seen earlier, baptism is inseparable in the minds of the apostles from the blessings of forgiveness, new birth, Spirit baptism, and adoption. It is a mark of those who have been united to Christ by faith. Indeed, so close is the association between baptism and Christian conversion that the apostle Peter speaks of *"baptism that now saves you"* (1Peter 3:21).

Paedobaptists would argue that the promises were made to Abraham *"and his seed"*, i.e. physical descendants, and so we should baptise the children of believers. But Paul makes clear that the seed of Abraham is Christ (Galatians 3:16), and we become the seed of Abraham not by physical birth, but by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:29). When households were baptised in the New Testament, it is because all members of the household had come to faith in Christ.

We therefore baptise on *"credible profession of faith"* in Christ. We ask if the candidate understands the message of the gospel, and has a love for Christ. We look for signs of a new attitude towards the Lord, and a desire to live for Him. It is not for us to determine if someone is *"elect"*. But we follow the biblical pattern of looking for repentance and faith, discipleship of Christ, as the marks saving grace. If we see those marks we seek to baptise without undue delay.

We do not baptise children until they reach at least their mid-teenage years. Scripture teaches us that children are immature in understanding, and will generally follow the lead of their parents. The children of good parents *"believe"* (this is a qualification for eldership Titus 1:6). So while we encourage faith from an early age, we wait until the child demonstrates some independence from parents before accepting a credible profession of faith. Just as we would not allow a child to marry, so we cannot expect a child to understand the commitment of Christian discipleship or to accept the responsibilities of church membership at an early age.

Regarding mode of baptism, the Greek word *baptidzo* means literally to immerse or dip. We therefore practise baptism by immersion, and it best expresses the significance of the ordinance: union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection; washing away sins; immersion in the Holy Spirit; and spiritual new birth, rising to a new life. It is a very powerful image. Just as God saved Noah through the waters of the flood, and the children of Israel through the Red Sea (the waters in both cases symbolising death and judgment), so the believer emerges from the waters of judgement by virtue of Christ's finished work to live a new life (1Peter 3:21-22).

### **3) Does baptism mean automatic admission to the Lord's Supper and church membership?**

As we have already seen, baptism is a mark of those who have been united to Christ. Having been united with Him, we are also united with His people, the church. We are "*all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28). Spirit baptism (signified by water baptism) goes hand in hand with membership of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

So, at Emmanuel, when someone is baptised they automatically become a church member, and are welcomed to the Lord's Table. This was also the practice of the early church (Acts 2:41) – to be baptised is to be added to the number of the church.

### **4) Do you require baptism for admission to the Lord's Table or church membership?**

At the Lord's Supper we give a call welcoming those who have been baptised according to their understanding of the Scriptures. So, while the call is broad enough to embrace those who have different views of baptism, we recognise the importance of baptism in coming to the table.

The Lord's Supper is for believers; we gather to express our unity in Christ as God's family, and celebrate what He has done for us at the cross. Baptism is the mark of those who have become disciples, united to Christ. If someone is unbaptised, are they unconverted? If they are converted and unbaptised, they are in clear disobedience of the Lord's command to be baptised. To invite the unbaptised to the table would be contrary to both the Scriptures and the historic practice of the church through the centuries.

Sometimes it is suggested that we should welcome children to the table before they are baptised. Our response is that if they are able to make a credible profession of faith in Christ, then they should be baptised as their first act of obedience to Him. If they are unable to make a credible profession then they should not come to the table. The Lord's Supper is not a "private" ordinance. It is a demonstration of our unity in Christ; we recognise the Lord's body as we look around at other believers at the table who have testified to their common faith in baptism.

Just as we welcome convinced paedobaptists to the Lord's Supper, so we also welcome them into church membership. While we hold a baptist understanding of the Scriptures, we do not want this

to be a barrier to Christian fellowship for those who take a different view. Our practice is expressed in these words:

*“For the sake of spiritual unity, applications for church membership will be considered from those who have been baptised as infants, provided that they have been the subjects of infant baptism in a church with which we could expect to enjoy evangelical Christian fellowship.”*

This does not mean that we accept infant baptism as valid, Biblical baptism. But we accept such members because we love them in the Lord and want to express spiritual unity. We ask paedobaptist members to respect the position of the church, and so not to propagate their views actively in the fellowship.

## **5) Would you ever “rebaptise”? i.e. Are there any forms of baptism you would regard as illegitimate and invalid?**

We believe that the biblical understanding of baptism is by immersion for believers, and this is our only practice at Emmanuel.

Sometimes believers have been baptised as infants, and were convinced that this was a valid baptism. However, when they come to request membership, or perhaps some years after they have joined the church, they change their views. In these circumstances we are happy to baptise them. We do not consider this to be rebaptism, because we do not believe that their original “baptism” was biblically valid. Similarly, if someone has been “baptised” in a situation where there was a clear misunderstanding of the nature of the gospel, or of baptism, we would baptise them. This would be similar to the case of the Ephesians who had received John’s baptism but never heard of the Holy Spirit; Paul baptised them into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-7).

If someone doubts whether they were truly converted when they were baptised, we would consider their situation. Perhaps they were baptised as a child or in a setting where they did not understand the nature of Christian faith or baptism. However, we would proceed with great caution in such cases; baptism is not to be repeated simply because we now have better understanding or greater assurance of faith.

## **6) How do you handle those who change their views on baptism?**

If someone joined Emmanuel, but then came to paedobaptist convictions they would of course be able to continue in church membership. We would not baptise their infants. If a paedobaptist came to baptist convictions we would gladly baptise them.

## **7) Do you allow those with different convictions on baptism to join your church leadership?**

Our elders and deacons are all baptist by conviction and practice, and subscribe to the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

To operate a leadership with mixed convictions on this issue or to operate “dual practice” is essentially a paedobaptist position – baptising both believers (converts) and infants. It involves a different view of the nature of the church.

In all of this we are conscious of our fallibility. But we seek, before the Lord, to be faithful both in following the biblical teaching on baptism, and in our expression of love and unity to those of differing convictions.

---

## Paper #4: Mike Gilbert-Smith

**About the author:** *Mike has been the pastor of Twynholm Baptist Church since 2008. He is married to Hannah and they have three sons and two daughters. Mike previously served as Assistant Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC (2005-2008) and at Farnham Baptist Church, Surrey (2002-2005). Mike holds a degree in Theological and Pastoral Studies from Oak Hill College, and in Mathematics from Cambridge University. Mike is also a visiting lecturer in New Testament at the London Theological Seminary.*

**Viewpoint:** *A credobaptist minister who leads a closed membership church.*

**Church:** *Twynholm Baptist Church is an inner city multi-ethnic church in Fulham, West London. It was founded in 1893 as a Church of Christ church, believing not only that believers' baptism by immersion is the only biblical baptism, but also that it is necessary for salvation. In the 1920s Twynholm left the Churches of Christ and became a baptist church, but has possibly had stronger sentiments on baptism than some other baptist churches, though nobody in the congregation now holds to its necessity for salvation.*

### 1) What are your views on the meaning and significance of baptism?

In [our church's statement of faith](#) we highlight five elements symbolised by baptism:

- a) Fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5)
- b) Belonging to Christ (Galatians 3:26-27)
- c) Forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16)
- d) Entry into his church (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- e) Commitment to God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:5, 1 Peter 3:21)

We do not believe baptism effects anything that it symbolises; rather Spirit baptism effects all of the above, including membership of the invisible church.

However, we do see baptism as highly significant in bearing public testimony to the baptism of the Spirit already received, and as obedience to a command given to all believers. It is a means of grace for the one being baptised, and a witness to the world of what it means to be a believer.

We also see baptism as the moment at which a believer becomes a member of the visible church. Water baptism is therefore the ordinance that makes the invisible church visible and necessary for local church membership.

## **2) Who are appropriate subjects of baptism, and what mode of baptism would you practice?**

When Peter preached at Pentecost *“Repent and be baptised”* (Acts 2:38) we believe that the order is important. This is in continuity with John’s baptism, which was a baptism of repentance for those who bore fruit in keeping with repentance. Only those who are already members of the invisible church are properly to be members of the visible church.

Our statement of faith puts it like this: *“Only those who profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the proper subjects of baptism.”*

We also think that it is both permissible and wise to allow time for evidence of genuine repentance to be shown. We therefore hold baptismal classes where the responsibilities that go along with baptism are laid out. Once someone has completed the classes we interview candidates to ensure that they understand the gospel, and have come to repent and believe.

We would want to hear of some evidence of a changed life. We do not think that the fact that baptisms were fairly immediate in some instances in Acts means that we ought to baptise immediately upon someone’s profession of faith. There are various reasons why the situation there is different. Most significantly those being baptised in a context where baptism identifies one with the Messiah who was crucified under Roman rule through the pressure of Jewish religious leaders would clearly understand the cost of discipleship. This is not the case in a context where baptism does not automatically make one subject to persecution.

In the case of young children, we do not baptise them. We see the locus of discipleship for the children of believers as being the family rather than the church. As we see baptism as being closely linked to church membership, we do not think it appropriate for young children to be subject to the discipline of the church, but rather to be brought up by their parents in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Also, we do not think that it is helpful for the discipleship of young children of believers for us to try to discern whether their profession of faith is genuine and personal, or whether they are merely echoing their parents’ faith. We prefer not to try to separate these with young children, but, while giving encouragement for every sign of faith, we

would allow time to tell as the child approaches adulthood before sealing that faith with baptism.

We practise baptism by immersion. Our statement of faith says *“Immersion in water is necessary to the right administration of baptism”*. Personally, I do not think that the baptism of a believer by some other mode (such as affusion or sprinkling) is invalid, but merely irregular.

### **3) Does baptism mean automatic admission to the Lord’s Supper and church membership?**

Being baptised into Christ demonstrates our status as children of God (Galatians 3:26-28). Our clothing with Christ is the basis of our unity with each other. We are baptised not only into Christ (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27), but also into his body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Thus, baptism and church membership are very clearly linked. Our normal practice therefore, is to baptise only those who will become members of our church. This is not automatic, but would usually follow almost immediately. Admission to the Lord’s Table would be one of the privileges of church membership.

If candidates are to become members of some other church, it would be more appropriate for that church to baptise them.

For people who feel that they want to be baptised but don’t feel ready to become church members, I would reply that one of the ways in which we discern whether someone is ready for baptism is whether they are ready for the responsibilities of church membership.

There is, of course, one clear example of a New Testament baptism where the subject for baptism does not become a member of a church: the Ethiopian Eunuch; yet this must be seen as the exception rather than the rule. He cannot join a church precisely because there is at the time no Ethiopian church for him to join.

Similarly, in a missionary situation, or in a situation where someone is about to leave the country and go somewhere where it might take some time for them to find a gospel preaching church, we might consider baptising someone and not taking them into membership. However, this would never be because we didn’t feel that they were ready for church membership. Church membership would always have to have been appropriated had they stayed in the area.

### **4) Do you require baptism for admission to the Lord’s Table or church membership?**

The biblical order seems to be baptism, then church membership, then the Lord’s Supper. So Baptism is the initial sign of publically belonging to Christ; church membership is the community of those who belong to Christ, and the Lord’s Supper is the ongoing meal of those who belong to Christ.

Therefore we require biblical baptism for church membership (and by biblical, we understand this to mean believers' baptism). There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, we believe that biblical baptism is the entry sign into the visible church, and we may not admit those who have not received this sign.

Secondly, because our view on baptism defines our view on what the church is (is it a body of believers only, or a mixed body of believers and their children?) we think that it is important for us to agree on what a church is in order to be a church together. We therefore do not admit conscientious paedobaptists into membership, whether or not they have personally been baptised as believers. We will not baptise their children, and we think it important that they find a church where they may practise their beliefs on baptism with a clear conscience.

If someone is not ready to be baptised they are certainly not ready to take the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper has stronger warnings than baptism associated with taking it (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). It is also not merely an expression of one's individual trust in Christ's death, but also a corporate meal. Therefore, there needs to be a church that takes responsibility for admitting someone to the Lord's Supper. In my opinion local church membership is by definition the body of people who take responsibility for one another's discipleship including admission to the Lord's Table.

However, we are happy to share the Lord's Supper with people from other gospel preaching churches who are visiting us. They would be doing so under the discipline of their own church and not ours. That church's baptismal practice and their own baptismal status would not be a bar to them receiving the Lord's Supper as a guest at our church.

## **5) Would you ever "rebaptise"? i.e. Are there any forms of baptism you would regard as illegitimate and invalid?**

We would only regard as valid believers' baptism practised under the authority of a local church.

Thus, if someone was not a believer at the time when they were baptised, then we would be happy to baptise them.

If they had professed faith when they were previously baptised but had subsequently concluded that the profession was false, we would be very cautious, and careful to hear their reasons as to why they are convinced that they were not actually a believer at the time. But we would in the end leave that up to their conscience.

We would not accept the baptism of churches whose official teaching denies the gospel (e.g. Roman Catholic, Mormon or Jehovah's Witness) or private baptism that was not under the authority of any church, though we don't think that the baptism must take place within the context of a church service.

## **6) How do you handle those who change their views on baptism?**

All members of our church on joining the church must sign the statement of faith, which is explicitly baptistic. Like any other statement in the statement of faith, if someone is struggling as to whether they still believe that statement, we would take a long time (months if not years) to meet with them and talk through their struggles. But eventually if they come to a settled conclusion that they disagree with our statement of faith on this or any other item, we would encourage them to find a church where they might be able to practise their faith according to their own conscience.

## **7) Do you allow those with different convictions on baptism to join your church leadership?**

We have some differing opinions among our leadership on minor issues (e.g. should we admit to membership those baptised as believers by sprinkling) but only credobaptists can be in our membership, let alone in our leadership.