

BAPTISM: THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

A Statement by the Elders

First Baptist Church of Durham, NC

2014

Introduction

Baptism is a spiritual ceremony ordained by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to signify the conversion of a person to faith in Christ and the beginning of a life of discipleship. It is often called an “ordinance” because it was “ordained” (commanded) by Christ. It is an outward and visible sign of an internal spiritual reality. The Greek word *baptidzo* means to immerse or dip something in a large quantity of fluid, like a cloth being immersed in a vat of dye. Biblically speaking, baptism is the immersion of a believer in water as a symbol of their union with Christ and their immersion by the Spirit into the Body of Christ by grace through faith.

We recognize that different Christian traditions debate the subject, mode, and meaning of baptism. For that reason, it is important that we conform our theology and practice of baptism as close to the Scriptures as possible. The elders of First Baptist Church of Durham believe that the New Testament teaches believer’s baptism by full immersion. Rightly practiced, baptism visually depicts the gospel, represents the public, personal owning of the gospel, and identifies a believer with the community created by the gospel in both its local and universal manifestations. Baptism is an act of obedience signifying that a person has embraced Christ as Lord and Savior and is a visual proclamation of the gospel the body of Christ and the watching world.

New Testament Baptism: An Overview

The first known baptisms were performed by John the Baptist as a sign of repentance from sin and faith toward God. John’s baptism of repentance was a sign anticipating Christian baptism following the inauguration of the new covenant.

[D]uring the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:2-3 ESV)

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (Matt. 3:5-6 ESV)

Jesus Himself was baptized by John as a sign of identification with John’s message and solidarity with the sinners He came to save.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the

heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him (Matt. 3:13-16b ESV)

John clearly highlighted the difference between his water baptism and the baptism of the Spirit, which Jesus had come to give.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11-12 ESV)

Thus it is noted in John’s Gospel that Jesus Himself did not perform water baptisms, perhaps to clearly display that He would be baptizing His followers in the Holy Spirit.

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples) (John 4:1-2 ESV)

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is referred to several times in the Book of Acts. First, Jesus mentioned it just prior to his ascension to heaven.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5 ESV)

Second Peter, referenced Jesus’s teaching Spirit baptism in describing what had happened to Cornelius and the other first Gentile converts.

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 11:15-16 ESV)

Therefore, we should emphasize the baptism in the Spirit that Jesus performs above the water baptism that symbolizes it. For, as Paul says, regardless of one’s view of water baptism, the Holy Spirit has baptized all believers into the Body of Christ.

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. (1 Cor. 12:13 ESV)

Spirit baptism is the more significant of the two baptisms, and it happens at the moment of genuine faith in Christ. The water baptism that comes later is merely an outward and visible representation of this Spirit baptism.

Peter calls baptism a spiritual pledge of a good conscience toward God, not something just for the physical body.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 3:21 ESV)

Water baptism is a symbol of these spiritual realities: that repentance and faith has already occurred, that our consciences are cleansed by the blood of Christ, that by faith and by the Spirit we are united with Christ and joined eternally to His Body, the church.

The most important passage for understanding the meaning of baptism is Romans 6:1-11, which shows how baptism is a visual depiction of the gospel.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. 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. 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:1-11 ESV)

Water baptism displays the gospel by identifying us with Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection. The spiritual realities of our Spirit baptism are visibly and publicly symbolized in our water baptism. Those who have been baptized have publicly embraced a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. From this point forward, they are to be different from the way they were before they were converted.

Water baptism was commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ for His church to administer to all who by faith in Christ became His disciples.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20 ESV)

Clearly, then, baptism is an important part of the life and ministry of the church. This outward and visible symbol is vital to the advance of the gospel through the world, and a great assistance to our own souls in sanctification. Spirit baptism is more important than water baptism, but the latter visually symbolizes the invisible spiritual reality of the former. Water baptism is commanded by Jesus Christ and should be administered to all of his followers.

Baptism and Regeneration

As we have seen, water baptism and Spirit baptism are closely connected in the New Testament, in part because there was never a long delay between belief and baptism. For this reason, some traditions argue that baptism plays a role in regeneration. For example, Roman Catholics and many Lutherans and Episcopalians believe that baptism regenerates an individual, causing them to be born again. Other traditions, especially the Churches of Christ, suggest that Spirit baptism occurs at the time of water baptism. When a new Christian is baptized, he or she is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and sealed for salvation. Though those in this camp do not believe we are born again through baptism, they do believe that baptism completes the conversion process, thus contributing to our salvation.

The two most frequently cited texts by advocates of baptismal regeneration and similar views are both found in Acts.

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 ESV)

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

A casual reading of these verses would seem to confirm that baptism contributes to the forgiveness of our sins. However, we do not believe the Bible teaches that baptism contributes in any way to one’s salvation. Instead, we believe that water baptism symbolizes physically the invisible transformation that occurs at regeneration. The confusion over this issue arises because faith and baptism occur so close together in the New Testament—sometimes almost immediately. Therefore, it is important that we interpret these verses in light of the wider teachings of the New Testament.

The view that salvation is by faith and not a combination of faith and baptism is confirmed throughout the New Testament. When he spoke of his own apostolic ministry, Paul stated explicitly that baptism is not part of the gospel.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Cor. 1:17 ESV)

When Paul summarized the gospel to Titus, he argued that our washing comes through regeneration when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us when we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is a clear reference to Spirit baptism rather than water baptism.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7 ESV)

Of course, the consistent message of the New Testament is that we are saved by grace through faith and not good works.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

[Y]et we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal. 2:16 ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV)

Baptism is most certainly a good work—one that is commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ! But like all good works, it does not contribute to our salvation. The biblical meaning of baptism is a symbolic depiction of gospel realities such as the death and burial of the old self, the resurrection unto new spiritual life, the washing away of sin, union with Christ, and public identification with the gospel community both local and universal. However, baptism neither contributes to our regeneration nor completes the process of our conversion. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Believer's Baptism

Every Christian tradition agrees that baptism is for believers. However, most Christian denominations also believe that baptism is also for the children of believers. They are “pedobaptists” because they practice infant baptism, normally by sprinkling or pouring water over the head of the baby. Baptist Christians are “credobaptists” (*credo* = “belief”) because we reject infant baptism and argue that baptism is an ordinance reserved for those who can give a

credible profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ. We believe the practice of exclusive believer's baptism by immersion is the consistent witness of the New Testament and thus represents the proper subject (a professing Christian) and mode (immersion) of baptism. Consider the following evidence.

First, every time baptism is mentioned in the book of Acts, it is administered to believers. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter called upon his hearers to respond to the gospel message with repentance and baptism.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41 ESV)

When new believers in Samaria and the Ethiopian Eunuch responded to Philip's gospel message with faith, he baptized them as new believers in Jesus Christ.

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12 ESV)

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. (Acts 8:35-38 ESV)

In Philippi, both Lydia and the Philippian jailer responded to Paul's preaching with faith. As a result, both were baptized as believers.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:14-15 ESV)

Then he [the Philippian jailer] brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the

same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:30-34 ESV)

In Corinth, again through Paul's preaching, a synagogue official and his family, as well as others in the city, believed in Jesus and Christ and then were baptized.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. (Acts 18:8 ESV)

In sum, in every single instance of baptism in the book of Acts in which the spiritual state of the individuals can be determined from the text, baptism is administered to those who have heard the gospel and believed it. The argument for infant baptism is an argument from silence.

Second, the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ provides us with a clear order: make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey all of His commands. No one should be baptized who has not first become a disciple of Christ through faith. Part of what it means to obey the Great Commission is to baptize believers and teach them how to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20 ESV)

Third, there is not a single instance of infant baptism or a single command that Christians should baptize infants. Simply put, there is absolutely no reference to infant baptism in the entire New Testament. In fact, there is no explicit reference to the practice until Tertullian's treatise *On Baptism*, which dates to AD 198. Nevertheless, pedobaptists often make two different arguments for their practice: household baptisms and covenant symbolism.

In the case of household baptisms, the aforementioned passages in Acts 16 and 18 mention entire households being baptized. The practice is referenced a couple of other times in Scripture (Acts 10:2, 48; 1 Cor. 1:16). Many pedobaptist believers argue that these household baptisms at least imply the practice of infant baptism in the New Testament. However, upon closer inspection, their case is not a strong one. In the case of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-34, the text tells us that his entire household believed in God. The same is true of Crispus's household in Acts 18:8. In Acts 10, we learn that Cornelius's whole family feared God prior to their conversion, were baptized in the Holy Spirit, which signified their saving faith, and then were baptized. In the case of 1 Corinthians 1:16, the text is completely silent on the matter of who believed—including Stephanas, the head of the household!

The baptism of Lydia in Acts 16:14-15 is more debatable. She was from Thyatira (modern Turkey), but was working in Philippi (modern Greece). Because no husband is mentioned and she is clearly the head of her household, Lydia was most likely either a widow or single free woman who was working as a merchant in a major port city. Thus, it is as likely her household included slaves as it did any small children. Even if her household did include children, nothing in the text suggests they were baptized based upon Lydia's faith. For this reason, it seems the most reasonable way to interpret this passage is by comparing it to the other household baptisms where the faith of all the baptized is mentioned explicitly. In the New Testament, including the household baptisms, the emphasis is upon believing and then being baptized.

In the case of covenant symbolism, many pedobaptists (especially our Presbyterian friends) argue for infant baptism on the basis of their understanding of the biblical covenants. They correctly point out that faithful Israelites were commanded to circumcise their male babies on the eighth day to symbolize their place in God's covenant community (Gen. 17:10-12; Lev. 12:3). They contend that baptism is an analogy for circumcision and thus the infants of believers should be baptized to symbolize their place in God's new covenant community.

We agree that there is an analogy between circumcision and baptism in that both mark out one publicly as a member of God's people. However, we would argue that there is discontinuity between the old and new covenants specifically at the point of how one becomes a part of God's people. Under the old covenant, the children of Israelites were part of God's people by virtue of their birth. To symbolize this reality, all male children were circumcised. Under the new covenant, however, only believers are members of God's people. We believe this was prophesied in the Old Testament when Jeremiah declared that "all" in the new covenant would "know" the Lord.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:31-34 ESV)

Though both circumcision and baptism are signs of their respective covenants, Paul makes clear that baptism is based upon an internal circumcision "made without hands," which is the "circumcision of Christ."

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, 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. (Col. 2:11-12 ESV)

While physical birth provided the basis for entry into the old covenant, we believe this heart circumcision, which is a metaphor for the new birth, provides the basis for entry into the new covenant. So while both circumcision and baptism are covenant signs, the membership terms of the covenants has changed. Baptism is a sign that is to be applied to believers, who alone are members of God's new covenant people.

We appreciate our pedobaptist brothers and sisters and have learned much from them in other matters. We rejoice that we share in the baptism in the Holy Spirit that is common to all true followers of Jesus Christ! However, when it comes to water baptism, we must follow the clear New Testament pattern: 1) the gospel Christ is preached; 2) a person responds in faith, calling on the name of the Lord; 3) based on that verbal testimony of inner faith, water baptism is administered.

Having made the case that baptism is for believers alone, this begs the question of how we can tell if someone is actually a believer. Furthermore, how long should we wait to discern whether or not someone seems to be born again? The case of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 is important for this issue, for clearly he could not display much of a Christian lifestyle to Philip before Philip stopped the chariot and baptized him. Thus we are not looking for many good works or a settled lifestyle commensurate with a mature believer in Christ. Apparently words are enough, if they are the right ones.

You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:34-37 ESV)

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.... For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Rom. 10:8-10, 13 ESV)

Based upon the teachings of both Jesus and Paul, therefore, a pastor can tell by talking to someone sufficiently whether or not he or she is a fit subject for baptism. Since baptism is

intended to be a beginning ordinance, rather than one administered years into the Christian journey, the words of a new believer must be sufficient for baptism. Therefore, the elders believe no significant time delay is called for where a “credible profession of faith” is seen.

Baptism and Children

One of the most emotional and sensitive issues for any true believer of Christ is the salvation of his or her children. Though the Apostle John was probably not speaking of his biological children when he wrote these words, yet many parents rightly pick up this sentiment:

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 John 1:4 ESV)

In like manner, there can be few sorrows in life greater than to hear (or see) that our children are not walking in the truth. Though we know full well that our own salvation does not carry with it a guarantee of the salvation of our children, for Jesus said plainly:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:34-37 ESV)

However, Paul gives us some indication of the great confidence we have that God deeply desires to work through Christian parents to bring their children to Christ:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 ESV)

And again, in dealing with a marriage that has become mixed because one partner alone has been converted, Paul says:

For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. (1 Corinthians 7:14 ESV)

So, though we have no guarantee that our children will become believers, yet we are commanded to bring them up in the Lord and are told they are (in some sense) holy to the Lord. Because of this, we earnestly pray for our children's conversions and desire to see them become baptized church members who are flourishing in their relationships with the Lord.

The elders are troubled by two trends we observe in Baptist life. The far larger trend, and ultimately the more troubling one, is the rush to baptize children at younger and younger ages. According to the [report](#) issued by a 2013 task force appointed by the North American Mission Board to study Southern Baptist baptismal trends, between 1974 and 2010, “The only consistently growing age group in baptisms is age five and under.” We are extremely uncomfortable with the baptism of children this young and feel like it ultimately undermines such core doctrines as believer's baptism and a regenerate church membership.

We certainly understand why parents would want to baptize very young children. Many children raised in godly homes have a fairly clear understanding of the gospel from a young age. Many parents want to be as sure as they can be that their children are saved from as young an age as possible. Nevertheless, we fear that young children are often baptized because they know the “right answers” and are reasonably well behaved. Our fear is that many of these children are not actually believers because they are too young to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The baptism of young children is a leading contributor to the trend of church membership rolls that are significantly larger than a congregation’s active members.

We are confident that very young children can be saved; we are less confident that parents, elders, and ultimately the church can discern a credible profession of faith among preschoolers and younger elementary aged children. Many baptized as young children might well be regenerate, but we fear they will later struggle with assurance of salvation. The baptism of young children is a leading contributor to the unfortunate trend of “re-baptisms” among those who are uncertain of their prior conversion experience and baptism. For all of these reasons, we are uncomfortable baptizing young children.

However, we are also troubled by the trend of some parents to indefinitely delay baptism until they are certain their child is regenerate. We believe this is unwise for many reasons. First, we can never be absolutely certain that another person is regenerate. Even people baptized by the apostles proved themselves to be false converts (see Acts 8:12-13; 1 John 2:19). We do not baptize someone based upon the certainty of his or her regeneration, but based upon a credible profession of faith. Second, while there are no clear examples of children being baptized in the New Testament, all baptisms in the New Testament, including household baptisms, occur soon after one’s conversion. To delay baptism indefinitely, for whatever reason, is to require more of a convert than is required by the New Testament.

Third, in the New Testament, baptism was prerequisite to church membership and participation in the Lord’s Supper. Delaying baptism at least implicitly communicates these are not important priorities. As Baptists, we believe they are vital means of grace that contribute to our growth in godliness. Finally, part of what it means to obey the Great Commission is to baptize disciples. To delay baptism indefinitely is to fail to follow Christ’s final command given to his followers and at least implicitly communicate that we can pick and choose which aspects of the Great Commission we choose to obey.

Our desire, insofar as it is possible, is to avoid the two extremes of baptizing young children and indefinitely delaying the baptism of children who seem to be regenerate. To that end, the elders strongly request that parents wait until their child is old enough to make a credible profession of faith before presenting them for a baptism interview with one of the elders. Children will be interviewed, and their readiness for baptism considered on a case-by-case basis. However, our normal—and, we pray, frequent—practice will be to baptize those who can provide a credible profession of faith.

Some of our members are the parents of teenagers whom they believe to be regenerate, but who have not yet been baptized and become members of our church. If you are in this situation, while we respect the conscience of parents who struggle with this issue, the elders strongly urge you to bring your child to one of the elders for a baptismal interview. When both parents and the elders

are confident that the teenager can make a credible profession of faith, we will move forward with baptism and church membership. Our prayer is that the vast majority of our teenagers would become followers of Christ, receive baptism, become church members, celebrate the Lord's Supper, and fully own the ministries of our church.

Similar to the question of at what age can a child give a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, because of the spiritual maturity and responsibilities expected of covenant members of First Baptist Church, the elders believe it to be wise to have younger believers wait until the age of sixteen before going through the membership process. It is our hope and prayer that all young believers, once they turn sixteen years old, eagerly pursue covenant membership at First Baptist Church.

Conclusion

As Baptist followers of Jesus Christ, we want to conform our church's baptismal theology and practice as closely as possible to the pattern of the New Testament. As the elders of First Baptist Church of Durham, we want to lead our church into greater obedience and fruitfulness in all matters, including baptism. Join us in praying for a harvest of disciples whom we can baptize and teach to obey all Christ's commands as we seek to fulfill His Great Commission to His church.

For Further Reading

Scott Holman and Jared Kennedy, "Childhood Baptism and Church Membership: A Position Paper for Sojourn Community Church," available online: <http://sojournkids.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/childhood-baptism.pdf>

Erroll Hulse, *The Testimony of Baptism* (Carey Press, 1982).

Fred A. Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* (Founders Press, 2003).

Tom J. Nettles, "Baptists and the Ordinances," Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, available online: <http://www.reformedreader.org/bao.htm>.

Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (B&H Academic, 2007). See especially chapters 1–4.