

BAPTISM POSITIONAL PAPER

Official Positional Paper | November 28, 2024

This statement of Baptism and its practice is the result of prayerful consideration by the Elders of Northampton Bible Church and is intended to present a Biblical view of the issue involved. Baptism is one of the sacred ordinances practiced at Northampton and needs to be understood by those who desire to be baptized within the church. The Elders affirm the importance of Baptism as an outward symbolic action, declaring to the world and community of believers, an inward change perfected in Christ (Acts 2:37-38, 41).

We believe that:

- The Bible instructs all believers to make a public declaration of their faith in Jesus by being baptized (Acts 2:37-38).
- Jesus Himself was baptized as an example for believers (Matthew 3:13-17).
- The believer symbolically identifies himself/herself with the community of believers through the practice of Baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5; Romans 6:3-4).
- The local church body is encouraged and strengthened by the witness of Baptism (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- The following represents the biblical position of “Baptism and practice of the ordinance of Baptism in the life of Northampton Bible Church” and should be used to guide those involved in the upholding of this sacred institution.

What is Baptism?

The word Baptism comes from the Greek word baptizo, which means to dip or immerse. In the New Testament there is one primary type of Baptism mentioned which has to do with repentance and identification (Luke 3:3; Matthew 3:11; John 3:22; Acts 19:2-5). Baptism symbolizes identification with Christ and a community of followers by immersion under water. Commonly, in the New Testament, Baptism immediately followed conversion of an individual who placed his/her faith in Christ (Acts 8:12-13, 8:38). Baptism is symbolic of new life in Christ (Romans 6:4). In every New Testament command and instance of Baptism, repentance and faith precede Baptism (Acts 2:37-38, 41). We strongly encourage all those who profess faith in Christ to be baptized as a sign of obedience (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20).

- In all four Gospels it is recorded that Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). The reasons for Christ's Baptism were to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15), empower his earthly ministry (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32), and signify His acceptance by God (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). The dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit given throughout Scripture as a picture of anointing and provision of power (Acts 10:38).
- We believe Baptism is not necessary for a person to be saved. Salvation occurs once through faith in Christ, the repentance of sin, and belief in the gospel (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13, 15:2; Romans 1:16).

How does Northampton practice Baptism? (What is the mode of Baptism?)

- Baptism is a symbol of a transformed life that was dead to sin and is now alive in Christ (Romans 6:3-6). As Christ was buried in the sealed grave and rose out of the tomb to new life, so we practice Baptism by complete immersion under water. Symbolically we are buried with Christ in death and raised to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Therefore, we practice Baptism by immersion in water of the believer in Christ.
- Acknowledging this, we recognize exceptions may need to be made if disabilities or other circumstances require another mode of baptism. The aim of baptism is the public profession of faith regardless of the mode.

What if I have already been baptized?

- For those who have been baptized as an infant or who have participated in some sort of Baptism experience previous to their personal salvation through Christ, we would highly encourage them to consider being baptized as a public profession of faith in Christ.
- We also recognize the high call of unity and respect within the family and understand that obedience to this issue could be divisive (Matthew 10:34–38). As such, we desire to come alongside individuals processing this decision and shepherd them through these conversations. Our hope is to both maintain peace and open doors to the gospel whenever possible (Romans 12:18) while walking in obedience to God's Word.
- If a person has already expressed their faith in Christ through believer baptism within another congregation, they do not need to be baptized again.

Who is eligible to be baptized?

- Individuals who have placed their faith in Christ are eligible for Baptism. Biblical examples are especially highlighted throughout the book of Acts. These instances describe people who've heard the gospel, repented and placed their trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and then got baptized out of obedience to what Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-41, 8:16, 8:36-39, 9:18-20, 10:47, 16:14-15, 19:5; Mark 16:15-16).

What about children?

We believe parents are the primary overseers of their children and ultimately responsible for their children's spiritual development (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The Elders are responsible to guard and uphold the ordinance of Baptism (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Peter 3:17-18). Together we work to help young people take steps of faith and grow in their spiritual development. We strongly believe the decision for Baptism needs to be birthed from within the heart of an individual and not declared by the parent. We want to partner with the parents and child to help ensure Biblical readiness for Baptism. Because the Scriptures do not set a minimum age, we allow any who have trusted Christ to be baptized regardless of age. Therefore, we depend heavily on the parents, Elders and Directors involved to make a Godly decision and discern through prayer and counsel when a young person is ready. We would desire to see the child clearly communicate on his or her own initiative what the gospel is, who Jesus is, what their faith in Him means, and why they want to get baptized (Acts 8:37).