

## **ARE YOU READY FOR BAPTISM?**

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If I was given £10 for every time a person had said to me “I am not ready for baptism”, I would have a good deal of money in the bank! Time and again people say to me: “I am not ready for baptism – yet”, the implication being that one day they will be ready. And by being ‘ready’, they mean that they will be ‘better’ Christians – they will have sorted out their prayer life, they will read their Bibles every day, they will be living a truly ‘Christian’ life. In other words, once they are ‘good enough’, then they will be baptised. To which I retort, ‘The moment you are good enough, that moment you are not fit to be baptised’. For baptism – like salvation – is for sinners only. It is precisely because we know that we need Jesus, that we commit ourselves to him in the waters of baptism. Peter on the Day of Pentecost did not say ‘Wait – and then be baptised’. Rather he said, ‘Repent and baptised’ – and there and then 3000 did precisely that. The fact is that conversion and baptism go hand in hand. From a New Testament perspective, baptism is part of the conversion process – in baptism we make our response to the grace of God. I find it significant that Peter did not say ‘Repent and believe’, but ‘Repent and be baptised’ – baptism is faith in action. All this we as Baptists know – but do we know? All too often we separate conversion from baptism. On the other hand, I am not arguing for people to be baptised on the very day that they ‘open their hearts to the Lord Jesus’. For conversion is a process, and there is much to be said for people to go through baptismal preparation before they are baptised – indeed, in our church the course is 10 weeks in length. In these weeks the candidates have an opportunity to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. So on the day of their baptism they can with full confidence make their public commitment to Christ. To do without such preparation is as sensible as to get married without any marriage preparation. Just as it is good to have an interval between the engagement and the wedding, so it is good to have an interval between the initial prayer of commitment and baptism. But this, of course, is no argument for a lengthy interval. To my mind the one exception involves children. I am glad, for instance, that although I ‘opened my life to Christ’ when I was eight years old, I was not baptised until I was thirteen. At eight I was not ready for baptism – not in the sense that I was not ‘good enough’ for Christ, but that I had yet to become clear about the demands of Christian discipleship. For this reason, in spite of a number of requests from 9 and 10 year olds, I will not baptise young children. I want them to wait – until they are ready!