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WHAT IS BAPTISM ABOUT?

1) NEW LIFE:

through baptism we share in the death of Jesus and are dead to the stranglehold that sin has on life without Jesus. Because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we are raised to new life with Him and are empowered to live this new life with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. It means that death no longer has the last word about the purpose of our lives – God does. Through God's Holy Spirit the life of Jesus is alive in me. Before Jesus I was a hostage of sin and couldn't do what was godly. Jesus has set me free from this imprisonment and I am now free to choose for or against God.

2) IT CAN'T BE EARNED OR DESERVED:

the new way of living that baptism brings with it is not something that I can buy or deserve by being good or nice; it is a present that God gives those who love Jesus and like any good present we can only accept it gratefully and unwrap it and enjoy it.

3) IT IS A GIFT FROM GOD:

God gives this new quality of life and approach to reality as a present to those who love Jesus and all one does with a present is to say "Thank You" and accept it.

4) RECEPTION INTO THE FAITH COMMUNITY:

God is community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God longs to share real community with those who love Jesus. Baptism brings us into a new family of all those who are baptised. This family is meant to be characterised by meaningful fellowship, not just friendly small talk, but real caring for one another. All of this happens because we have faith in God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is God who makes all these quite different people into a community which is marked by self-sacrificing love.

5) **LIVING THE RELATIONSHIP:**

in Romans Paul makes the point that human beings are not as free as we would like to believe. In reality we choose to live our lives with or without God. Choosing to “do our own thing” is no different to choosing against God. Deciding not to choose, is effectively a denial of God. *“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (Matthew 12: 30).* Human beings cannot live without making this choice. Once we have chosen Jesus, it means taking Him seriously and listening to Him and doing what He teaches.

However, Paul also makes clear that the freedom to choose is given us through the immense **love of God** for us. The fact that God empowers us through the Holy Spirit is further proof of that great **love**. *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5: 8).* The **love** that God longs to share with us is very special – *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 39).*

6) **HOLY LIVING:**

Baptism engages our lives with the life of Jesus. We should expect to start seeing a family resemblance; i.e. we should start seeing the development of a way of living that reminds others of Jesus. God calls on us to become holy as God is holy. Jesus (God) is holy and as His sisters and brothers, we start showing the family likeness.

Here *“holy”* is **not** the same thing as *“perfect”*: *“holy”* means being focused on Jesus and on pleasing Him by living in ways that are like His.

7) **IT IS AN ONGOING LIFESTYLE:**

being baptised is the signal that we want to approach life in a new way; the way that Jesus does. Not only do we want this, we are going to exert ourselves to do it! It does not end with the service, but is a persistent life-style that we adopt and work at for the rest of our lives. The baptismal life that counts most is not the short period of preparation **before** baptism, but the long stretch of life afterwards that stretches into eternity. The former can easily be faked by anybody; the latter not.

8) **CLEANSING AND POWER TO LIVE:**

with baptism comes the power of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus needed the power of the Holy Spirit to live the life God called Him to live. We need the same power to live the lives that God calls on us to live. The Holy Spirit is the power of God's love that raised Jesus from death and transformed the apostles at Pentecost. It is understandable that when this holy power of love comes into our lives, there won't be space for all the accumulated rubbish that mars our lives. The Holy Spirit gets rid of it (with our co-operation) and makes us new in our approach to life. The Christian life is not always easy and so God gives the strength we need to persevere by giving us the Holy Spirit to empower us to witness to God's love in Jesus.

9) **IT IS A FIRST STEP TO DISCIPLESHIP:**

Baptism is not the end of the journey! It is just the beginning. When Jesus left His friends, He told them to make disciples of all people everywhere. The first step to making disciples is to baptise people. The next step is to teach them everything that Jesus taught. We are to rely on God's presence with us always.

10) **IT LEADS TO MISSION:**

Jesus expects His friends to carry on with the work that He has started – that is:

- ❖ to tell people about God's great love for all
- ❖ how God longs to draw us closer to Himself
- ❖ to point out that God has even made it possible for us to come to God despite our sin against God.

The mission of God is into all the world and to all people everywhere. God doesn't want anyone to die without hearing the good news that a new life is possible and freely available to all who come to Jesus. And Jesus, who lives in us by the Holy Spirit, continues to make the Father known through us.