

In our statement of faith,

the body of doctrine to which this church is committed in its teaching, it is stated concerning the ordinances that “We believe that there are only two ordinances for the church regularly observed in the New Testament in the following order: a. Baptism, which is the immersion of the believer in water, whereby he obeys Christ's command and sets forth his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection,” and, “b. The Lord's Supper ...”

But, what is baptism? What does it mean? Who should be baptized, and when?

The Baptism of John the Baptist

was a baptism expressing repentance from sin and turning to God: “... they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. ... therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;” (Matthew 3:6, 8 NAS). When Jesus came to be baptized, he had no need to turn from sin, which was why John objected to baptizing Him. But Jesus declared His purpose to follow the will of God, saying to John, “... Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. ...” (Matthew 3:15 NAS)

So John's baptism was a means of expressing one's desire to turn from a life of sin and to turn to a life of following God.

But, this was not Christian baptism, for when Paul encountered believers who had only been baptized ‘into John's baptism,’ he ensured that then they ‘were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.’ (Acts 19:3-5)

What is Christian Baptism?

It includes those same elements of repenting of sin and turning to God, even as Peter on the day of Pentecost preached: “... Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 NAS) but it also included that this was to be done in the ‘name of Jesus Christ’ or “... in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19 NAS) – that is the Triune God.

Christian Baptism includes the forgiveness of sin and the confession that such forgiveness can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and receiving Him by faith as Saviour.

Christian Baptism is a pictorial confession, with the believer identifying with the Lord Jesus in His death and resurrection: “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,” (Romans 6:3-5 NAS)

To maintain that picture, and in keeping with the meaning of the word, baptism – ‘immerse, or dip’ – the mode of baptism is by going down into the water and then coming up again. This is the way that baptism was done in Jewish proselyte baptism, in John's baptism, and in the baptism in the New Testament church. This is our practice as a baptist church.

Who Should be Baptized?

The Lord Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19 NAS) A disciple is anyone who recognizes his or her inability to gain heaven on personal merit and entrusts his or her eternal destiny to the risen Saviour.

Although Scripture teaches the importance of believers being baptized by immersion, baptism is not the means by which one is saved from sin’s penalty. Men and women are only saved through repenting of sin and placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (read carefully through Romans 3:23-26). John wrote, “And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” (1 John 5:11-12 NAS)

The term “believer’s baptism” emphasizes the fact that profession of faith always preceded baptism in the New Testament. In it, there is no record of infants being baptized or christened.

When Should One be Baptized?

According to the New Testament, every new convert was baptized by immersion within three days of their conversions: some examples

- 3,000 on day of Pentecost (Acts 2:31)
- Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9)
- Cornelius & his household (Acts 10:44-48)
- Philippian jailer & family (Acts 16:30-34)

Baptism is a step of obedience of a believer, not a means of confirming one’s spiritual maturity.

What about Young Children?

Despite the foregoing, usually it is appropriate that young children wait before being baptized. Children may make a profession of faith or ask for baptism just to please a parent or Sunday School teacher, or to imitate another child. Time should be taken to ensure that they understand lest they be given a false sense of security.

Why should a believer be Baptized?

It is an act of obedience to the Lord and to the word of the gospel. The Lord Jesus commanded it in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The early followers of Jesus understood this and obeyed, as seen in the references already cited.

In the New Testament, baptism is a declaration of discipleship, followed by joining in fellowship in a local church and observing the Lord’s supper. “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:41-42 NAS)

Summary

Who should be baptized? ... believers.

Why should they be baptized? ... because Jesus commanded it.

How should believers be baptized? ... by immersion.

When should they be baptized? ... as soon as possible after repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

(NAS: New American Standard Bible, by permission)

A. Introduction—{3}.

1. today we are going to look at believer's baptism by water
 - a. There is a story, which is long treasured in my memory, of an argument between a Presbyterian and a Baptist on the subject of Baptism. The Baptist, of course, maintained that you have to be immersed in the water in order to be baptized.
 - b. Presbyterian: 'What if I were to go into the water up to my knees?'
 - c. Baptist: 'No, you have to be immersed.'
 - d. Presbyterian: 'What if the water comes up to my chest?'
 - e. Baptist: 'No, it has to be complete immersion.'
 - f. Presbyterian: 'How about if the water is up to my eyes?'
 - g. Baptist: 'No, it has to go to the top of your head.'
 - h. Presbyterian, victoriously: 'See, it's as I said; it's the water on the top of the head that counts!'

2. This is a subject on which there is much difference of opinion
 - a. some church practising water baptism, refuse to have anything to do with any church or denomination that does not practice this the way we do: they will not meet for prayer with them, they will not cooperate in evangelism with them, and they may, in the extreme, claim such people are not saved
 - b. that's like the anecdote of the group being shown around heaven and coming to a high wall and being beckoned to keep quiet because the baptists were behind the wall and thought that they were the only ones up there
 - c. now, not everyone who practices baptism in the way we do is part of Christ's body the church
 - (A) many cults and sects also practice water baptism
 - (B) some of these teach that most pernicious doctrine of baptismal regeneration – that the new birth does not take place until a person is baptized in water – which we will cover in the second part of this message
 - d. but I have had the privilege of having fellowship with many who were of a different persuasion regarding baptism

- (A) men who were fine Christian scholars and teachers
- (B) women who served and lived to the glory of God
- (C) you, like me, have probably been blessed through the reading of books by those differing in this matter such as J. I. Packer, John Stott, Louis Berkhof to name a few
- (D) but, I believe, that though this is the case, such men and women have missed a blessing by not obeying their Lord in this matter of baptism.

3. the message today is in two parts

- a. the first covers the brochure handed out to you
- b. the second, the passage in Colossians which we read

B. Brochure on Baptism – What’s the Meaning of Going into the Water? – this statement should be in front of you ...

1. Our Statement of Faith

a. here you will read, “We believe that there are only two ordinances for the church regularly observed in the New Testament in the following order: a. Baptism, which is the immersion of the believer in water, whereby he obeys Christ’s command and sets forth his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection,” and the second ordinance, is that of observing the Lord’s supper.

b. for the moment just note a few things from this statement:

- (A) one: baptism, as we practise it, is modelled not from what has developed in the history of the church, but from what we find was carried out from the earliest days of the preaching of the gospel by the apostles;
- (B) two: baptism, is an ordinance, something ordained or established to be carried out by God’s people;
- (C) three: it is applied to one who believes, through their being immersed in the water: the Greek word *baptizo* simply means dip or immerse and, I am told, its being translated that way in the King James Version was narrowly defeated by vote of the bishops involved
- (D) four: it is a matter of obedience to Jesus Christ as our Lord, not the observance of some manmade rule
- (E) five: it depicts what spiritually has taken place between the believer and his Saviour, and as such

is a graphic presentation of the Gospel; it is a preaching ordinance

2. The Baptism of John the Baptist

- a. it seems fairly certain from records among the Dead Sea Scrolls and else where, that the practice of baptism among the Jews preceded that carried out by John
- b. this was the baptism of proselytes to Judaism, as a means of signifying their being cleansed from their former lives as Gentiles – so when John baptized it wasn't a strange thing
- c. John's baptism was one of repentance – a turning from sin and a turning to God – and those who submitted to it were declaring, 'Though a Jew, there has been no difference between my life and a Gentile's life – I want that to change.'
- d. so men and women came to John in repentance: 'Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.' (Matthew 3:5-6)
- e. such repentance was not to be mere lip-service, for then we read, 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;"' (Matthew 3:7-8)
- f. and Jesus, Himself, was baptized
 - (A) Jesus' baptism was in obedience to the Father, who commended him saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'
 - (B) Not in order to repent of sin: for He was '... tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.'" (Hebrews 4:15) – but as it says in verse 15, 'to fulfill all righteousness'
 - (C) it was part of His identifying Himself with our sin so that what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21 could be true: 'He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' – it was so that He could 'fulfill all righteousness'

3. What is Christian Baptism?

- a. when you examine baptism through the New Testament, you do not find it far away from repentance.
 - (A) Peter in his Pentecostal sermon preached, 'Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; ...' (Acts 2:38)
 - (B) but Christian baptism, though it includes the visible confession of sin and repentance – part of the

formula used in the baptismal service from very early times was the question, 'Do you renounce the devil and all his works?' – it is marked as Christian by something else

- b. Christian baptism is – and this is another part of the formula in the service – performed 'in the name of Jesus Christ;' or, in the longer form found in the great commission, 'in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19); one name because there is but one God, existing as three distinct Persons,
- c. So baptism is the public carrying out of Romans 10:9-10: 'that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.'
- d. in this fashion, just as Christ identified Himself with us in His baptism, we identify ourselves with Him in ours – with His death, with His resurrection. To maintain that picture, and in keeping with the meaning of the word, baptism – 'immerse, or dip' – the mode of baptism is by going down into the water and then coming up again.

4. Who Should be Baptized?

- a. consider our Lord's command in Matthew 28:19: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'
 - (A) the order is clear: the apostles and their successors were first to 'make disciples'
 - (B) Jesus own words show us what it is to be a disciple; it means total commitment to Jesus Christ – 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ... So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.' (Luke 14:26-27, 33)
 - (C) Paul understood this when he renounced all that he once trusted in for salvation and said, 'More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,' (Philippians 3:8)
- b. then 'baptizing them' becomes appropriate
 - (A) this order is inviolate throughout the New Testament
 - (B) men and women believed, and then were baptized

5. When Should One be Baptized?

- a. Mark 16:16 is a verse that has been much abused by some who err, knowing not the Scriptures – ‘He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.’
- b. they add words to it, making it say what it doesn’t, namely that a non-baptized believer is condemned
- c. rather, what is said is that the most nature result of believe, as we found in Romans 10:9-10, is public confession, and that public confession is through baptism
- d. in the brochure are a number of instances of conversion and in each case this was followed shortly by baptism; in the case of those who had only known John’s baptism, but had believed, when they clearly understood the truth this was followed by believers baptism. (Acts 19:3-5)

6. What About Young Children?

- a. this is a subject upon which there is no unanimity, even amongst us on the board of this church; some dangers are given in the brochure
- b. suffice it to say, that understanding in some degree of what lies behind baptism is very important
 - (A) because it is very easy for this act of obedience to be simply considered as a ‘rite of passage’ giving a status to the child within the community of believers
 - (B) when interviewing a prospective church member and asking the question, ‘how and when were you saved?’ it is somewhat distressing to hear the answer, ‘I was baptized at the age of ...’ – baptism is important, but the preceding salvation is paramount in importance
- c. so that children may not have a false sense of security of their salvation, I believe it wise to wait until they show they are clear on this point.

7. Why Should a Believer be Baptized?

- a. there can be a lot of secondary reasons, some being very commendable, such as so that one to serve as a member in a local, baptist church
- b. but the primary motivations should be obedience to Jesus Christ in declaring oneself to be His disciple

C. Some comments from Colossians 2:8–15

1. it is now almost seven years ago since we were looking at the book of Colossians in our adult Bible class and we discussed this passage,
 - a. comparing circumcision with baptism
 - b. noting the similarities and the differences involved
 - c. and from it I want to make a few additional points

2. it is important first to understand what circumcision is,
 - a. it was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham
 - (A) in Genesis 12, God called Abram to leave his home and promised that He would make his name great, and that in Abram's descendants all the families of the earth would be blessed
 - (B) in Genesis 15, they followed God's promise to give descendants to Abram who would inherit Canaan. In verse 6 of that chapter we read, 'Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.'
 - (C) in Genesis 17, God confirmed His covenant of promise with Abraham by the rite of circumcision; a token or mark upon Abraham's obedient descendants
 - b. in Exodus 12:44-48, Moses gave the law of circumcision whereby an alien could become part of God's covenant people and partake of the passover.
 - (A) it is this law, in particular, that Paul deals with in the letter to the Galatians
 - (B) where the Judaizers would first have Christian become Jews by being circumcised, to enter the covenant
 - (C) but Paul's argument was the promise, that out of Abraham's seed would come blessing to all the families of the earth, was made in Genesis 12, before Abram himself was circumcised, and 4 centuries before Moses made the law concerning circumcision of proselytes
 - c. so Paul argues, '^{3:9} So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer ... ^{3:29} And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.' (Galatians 3:9, 29)

3. now, in some ways circumcision is analogous to baptism
 - a. but not in the way that it can justify infant baptism

b. rather,

(A) first, that as the promise was made to Abram on the basis of his faith without the condition of circumcision, so salvation comes to the believer on the basis of his faith without the condition of baptism

(B) second, as circumcision was to reflect an inward reality ('Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.' (Deuteronomy 30:6)) so outwardly, baptism reflects the inward reality of the Holy Spirit's 'washing of regeneration and renewing' the believer in salvation:

c. as we read, 'and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;' (Colossians 2:11)

D. In conclusion then,

1. that this is 'without hands' is behind what Paul then says, 'having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.' (Colossians 2:12)

a. water baptism is only an external symbol which bears witness to an internal reality, by God 'made without hands'

b. but baptism is by man, made with hands, a work of man, and salvation is not by works but by God's grace: so

(A) baptism cannot secure our salvation

(B) baptism is not to give assurance us of salvation

c. baptism is an act of obedience, of good conscience toward God, representing the like figure, portraying the picture of Christ's death for our sin, and resurrection for our justification (1 Peter 3:21).

2. We have only touched on some highlights respecting baptism this morning. For any who would like to discuss further this matter of obedience in baptism, I invite you to speak to Carlos or myself about it.

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

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| ASV | American Standard Version of 1901 |
| AV | Authorized (King James) Version |
| ERV | The Revised Version of 1885 |
| NAS | New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation |
| NIV | New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society |
| NKJV | New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers |
| NLT | 1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. |
| PHIL | New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. |
| WEY | The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth |

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. Though not pursuing extensively the same lessons, I am much indebted to Rev. John Piper’s clear exposition of this passage in his message of May 11, 1997, “Buried and Raised in Baptism through Faith: – Kerux sermons, #4113.
3. Bible quotations are from the New American Standard version of the Bible, © 1960, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, used by permission.