

BAPTISM AT THE CORNERSTONE

INTRODUCTION

Baptism has been the practice of the church since its very earliest days. In fact, Jesus included baptism in the mission of the twelve disciples and, by implication, the church in every generation.

(Matthew 28:18-20) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So, what is baptism, what does it mean, and how is it done at the Cornerstone?

THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

1. Jesus linked baptism to discipleship

Matthew 28:18-20 links baptism to the making of disciples – "make disciples ... baptizing them". In Jesus' mind, baptism was as much a part of the discipleship process as learning and obeying his commands.

2. The first Christians were baptized soon after believing

In the book of Acts, which is a record of the earliest days of the Church, baptism followed closely upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ:

- Acts 2:38: repentance was followed by baptism.
- Acts 8:26ff: the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized immediately.
- Acts 16:14,15: Lydia responded to the gospel and was immediately baptized.
- Acts 16:30-33: the Philippian jailor was baptized "immediately".

3. Baptism Has Always Been The Initiation into the Local Church

It has been the normal practice of the Christian Church since the beginning to require baptism before membership in a local congregation.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

1. Baptism is a symbolic way to express our faith in Jesus Christ

Noah and his family escaped death in the great flood by taking refuge in the Ark that God instructed him to build. 1 Peter 3:20-21, tells us that Noah's experience is a picture of baptism – the Ark is Jesus who saves us from the waters of sin and death.

(1 Peter 3:20-21) ... when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Baptism is our “pledge of a good conscience toward God”. John Piper has written, “Baptism is a calling on God. It is a way of saying to God with our whole body, ‘I trust you to take me into Christ like Noah was taken into the ark, and to make Jesus the substitute for my sins and to bring me through these waters of death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus my Lord.’”

(1 Peter 3:18) For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

2. Baptism is itself an act of faith

The apostle Paul described his baptism as a "calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 11:16). So baptism is both a symbolic act pointing to faith (see point 1) and a very real act of faith in which we openly call on Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and bring us home to God.

3. Baptism pictures our union with Jesus Christ

Baptism is a powerful picture of our union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection – a reality that is ours through faith (Galatians 2:20). In baptism, we are declaring through a powerful visual act that we are dead to our old lives and alive to God through faith in Jesus Christ, ready to walk in loving obedience to him.

(Romans 6:3-4) Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was

raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

HOW SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

The Greek word for baptism means to dip or plunge under water. There is little doubt that the early church practiced immersion (Acts 8:38-39). The symbolic character of the act is best preserved in total immersion.

BAPTISMAL PROMISES

At our baptism event, the candidates are asked to make the following promises.

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who lived, died and rose again for your sins?
2. Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?
3. Do you accept the spiritual energy, freedom and authority God gives you to live the new Christ-centered life?
4. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to follow him as your Lord, in union with the Church?

FINAL WORDS

Baptism is for people who have experienced Christian conversion; that is, it is for those who, having been given new birth by the Holy Spirit, have responded to the Gospel in repentance and faith; that is, by turning from sin to God and by following Jesus – putting faith in his person and work.

We believe that baptism is a vital element in the practice of our Christian discipleship. Every believer ought to be baptized and it is our conviction that this should properly take place before church membership.