

An Introduction to Baptism

This article introduces Calvary Baptist Church's position on the church ordinance of baptism for those interested in being baptized. (It is not designed to interact with the teaching of others on baptism.) If you would like to be considered for baptism after reading this article, please speak with Pastor Brian or email him at swillum@gmail.com

1. Our Position on Baptism

Calvary Baptist Church practices believer's baptism. All Christians should be baptized after they repent of their sins and believe in Christ for salvation. Scripture teaches that Christ commanded baptism for His repentant disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38). We baptize in response to His command, as did the early church (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38).

We baptize by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). The scriptural examples of baptism are consistent with immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. For example, Jesus "came up from the water" at His baptism (Matthew 3:16). In Acts 8:38-39, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water."

Baptism by immersion is an outward symbol that testifies to a prior inward reality. It pictures the believer's death, burial, and resurrection in Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12). It is a critical step of obedience in which the Christian publicly identifies with Christ and associates with the local body of believers, regardless of any personal cost his confession may entail.

Baptism is important, but it does not obtain salvation for us. No outward act can save us from our sins. The Bible says it is "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We must be saved in order to be baptized, not baptized in order to be saved.

2. Our Practice of Baptism

A church's approach to the symbol reveals what it thinks about salvation itself. Baptism is a joyful and reverent time. We rejoice because we love to see Christ honored by the obedience of His disciples. We are reverent because baptism symbolizes our deliverance from God's wrath in our salvation.

Our baptism services will usually take place on a Sunday evening. We will enjoy a time of singing before the actual baptisms. Each candidate will read the personal testimony he/she prepared beforehand (3-5 minutes in length) before being baptized. Following the service, the audience will greet those baptized and encourage them for their obedience to Christ.

It is not the practice of Calvary Baptist Church to baptize young children. We realize that differs from the customs of some, so we want to explain our reasoning here. We love children and affirm salvation is available to every child who comes to Christ. The Lord is gracious to children and said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:13-15). Christ saves many at a young age. We rejoice in that manifestation of His mercy. We preach the gospel to children and encourage their every expression of faith.

Yet we are mindful of other biblical truth as well. Scripture repeatedly warns against the dangers of false assurance and self-deception (e.g., Matthew 7:21-27; James 1:22-25; 1 John 2:4). Children are not exempt from those dangers. They are vulnerable to sincere but misguided spiritual impulses that do not necessarily express saving faith—while lacking the development to examine themselves to see whether they are truly in the faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5).

We protect them from their innate vulnerability by refusing to hurry them to baptism at their first interest in Christ. We prefer to be alongside parents, teaching children over time, and allowing them room to manifest the sustained fruit of true repentance. If a child persists in the desire for baptism in that environment, the proper timing will become evident to everyone concerned.

This position serves Christian parents as they raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). It allows them to help the child see over time whether his/her life is consistent with conversion and avoids a premature baptism that might confuse the issue.

A truly converted child will not lose the desire to be baptized. God works in a true Christian's heart to promote the desire for obedience (Philippians 1:6; 2:13). By contrast, a child who loses interest in baptism and obedience to the Lord was simply never truly converted. In such cases, time proves the child never should have been baptized at all.

These things are not to be rushed. Genuine conversion and lifelong discipleship to Christ are infinitely more important than early baptism. Thus, we believe there is wisdom in the general practice of postponing baptism until the early to mid-teen years, at the earliest.

3. Our Preparation for Baptism

We want your baptism to be meaningful to you and for you to pursue it with excellence unto the Lord. Preparation starts with the article that you are now reading. We want you to understand our approach to baptism before you proceed and are available for any questions you may have.

If you still wish to be baptized, we ask you to prepare a written testimony with three sections: (1) how you came to be convicted of sin and your need for Christ; (2) your conversion to Christ; and (3) the things you see in your life that are consistent with biblical salvation. Our pastor will gladly review your testimony with you before scheduling you for baptism.

We will let you know what to wear for the baptism when we schedule the date. Immediately prior to the service, our pastor will explain the actual immersion so you know what to expect.

Your joy in giving your testimony before other believers will be a lasting highlight of your Christian walk. It's something to look forward to! God bless you as you seek to be faithful to Christ in this important step of obedience.