REDEEMER BIBLE CHURCH
santa barbara

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism and communion (the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances[1] prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ as visible symbols of invisible grace. They are discernible and tangible representations of both the invisible realities of the gospel[2] and the Spirit's application of this gospel to our lives.

With both ordinances, believers have an opportunity to "remember" God's goodness and grace, especially as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both baptism and communion picture Christ's death and resurrection and our participation in His death and resurrection through union to Him in faith. As we enter into the waters or watch another do so, we are reminded that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and that we too have died to the old self in order to live for Christ.

What a person believes about baptism affects how they will perform the ordinance. Who should be baptized? When should they be baptized? How should they be baptized? All of these questions are answered as we reflect upon what baptism means.

Baptism is a ***visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a person's former way of life has been put to death and depicts a release from the mastery of sin.***

As a symbol, baptism illustrates a number of significant realities:

1. Christ’s death and resurrection
2. The disciple's union with Christ in His death and resurrection
3. The new life in which a disciple walks
4. Cleansing and washing away of sin

IS BAPTISM MERELY A SYMBOL?

Within the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of the sacraments was fiercely debated, even between the various Reformers. Without attempting to justify any particular position, it is important to assert that baptism is in some mysterious sense a "means of grace," in which God sanctifies and encourages His people. That said, it is important to bear in mind a few helpful truths regarding what baptism is not and does not do:

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[1] Protestant theology has often chosen the term "ordinance" rather than "sacrament" in order to distance itself from the accompanying nuances of the Roman Catholic usage of that term. That said, if understood properly, either term is acceptable.

[2] Though there are various ways to describe the "good news," it centers on the provision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a substitute for our sins. He lived a perfect life, was crucified, and was raised three days later. Through faith in Him, we are united to Him and thus reconciled to God.

1. **BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE.** Though grace is mysteriously mediated through the ordinance, it is not saving grace but rather sanctifying grace. We are more conformed to the image of Christ as we obey Him in the call to be baptized.[3]

2. **BAPTISM IS NOT "NECESSARY" FOR SALVATION.** Without in any way diminishing the duty and delight of baptism for a believer, we must also warn against thinking which suggests that salvation is dependent upon baptism. The gospel is one of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.[4]

WHY SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

MATTHEW 28:18–20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

ACTS 2:37–41 *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

ACTS 22:16 *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*

1. To obey the commands of Christ
2. To evidence that a person is a disciple of Christ
3. To follow the example of Christ

Baptism is not merely a responsibility but also a privilege. We have the opportunity to evidence our trust in and love for our King through obedience in this ordinance. If we think of baptism as a mere burden, we have not properly understood the joy of following Christ in the call to be baptized. We should have a similar response as the Ethiopian eunuch who, when he believed the gospel, proclaimed, "What prevents me from being baptized?" It should be our joy, and we should eagerly anticipate our participation in the ordinance.

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[3] While 1 Peter 3 states, "baptism...saves you," it is important to note the context and particularly Peter's immediate clarification that it is not the water but the "appeal to God" which saves. This corresponds to passages such as Romans 10:13, which states that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." We appeal to God and call upon Him as an expression of faith. Baptism is a symbol of this faith which alone saves.

[4] John 3 states that unless a person is "born of water and the Spirit" he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Many point to this as evidence of the necessity of baptism. However, nothing in the context suggests that Jesus is speaking of baptism. Rather, He is alluding to the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, which speaks of both "water" and "Spirit." Therefore, Jesus is saying that "new birth" or "regeneration" is necessary for salvation, not baptism.

While there are certain costs associated with baptism,[5] the reward of obedience is always worth it. The desire to be baptized should be motivated by a desire to glorify God in faithful obedience. Any other motivation (to join a particular local church, to please a friend or family member, etc.) should not be the ultimate reason for seeking to be baptized.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

MATTHEW 28:18–20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become His disciple. We practice what is called "believer's" or "confessor's" baptism, which means we only baptize those who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reading through Acts, we find baptism explicitly related to repentance, receiving the Word, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. There is no explicit evidence to suggest that nonbelievers were baptized.

ACTS 2:41 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

ACTS 8:12 *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*

GALATIANS 3:27 *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

ROMANS 6:3–4 *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

WHEN SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

ACTS 22:16 *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*

As soon as a person trusts Christ, he or she should be baptized. The Scriptures do not speak of a delayed baptism in which a regenerate believer refrains from obedience to the ordinance. In all the accounts in the Scriptures, baptism is rather immediate. This pattern of somewhat immediate baptism should be emulated unless there are convincing reasons to delay baptism.

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[5] In certain cultures, those who are baptized open themselves up to public persecution. Even in our context, participants often face the ridicule of family and friends.

IMPROPER MOTIVATIONS FOR DELAYED BAPTISM:

1. FEAR. One of the most common reasons for delaying is fear, but such anxiety should not hinder our obedience. It is important to know that fear is sin and thus should not to be passively accepted. Confronting sin is an essential aspect of discipleship, and a person's obedience in this area is an excellent way to begin the process of sanctification in the area of the fear of man.

2. NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH. There will never be a time where a person will be "good enough" for baptism. Our right to enter the baptismal waters is grounded upon Christ's righteousness, not our own. If we have been united to Him, we should confidently draw near in obedience to His command and example.

HOW SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Though other denominations and theological traditions baptize by pouring or sprinkling, Redeemer Bible Church practices baptism by immersion.[6] We do so in light of the following considerations:

1. The Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizo) literally means to plunge, submerge or immerse.

Our English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek baptizo. Baptizo was used in Greek literature to describe the act of immersing something in water or another liquid. It later became a technical term that referred specifically to the Christian ordinance of baptism.!

2. The representation of union in Christ's death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion.

Whether buried below or above ground, the symbolism of burial is still that of being placed under something. Likewise, resurrection is accomplished by coming out of something (whether grave or tomb). Immersion best symbolizes this reality by actually placing the believer under the water and bringing them out.

In addition, it is interesting to note the use of water to symbolize judgment in the Scriptures (e.g. the flood of Genesis 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exodus 14). Thus, by passing through the waters of baptism, the believer expresses trust that God's judgment has been satisfied by Christ.

COLOSSIANS 2:12 *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

ROMANS 6:3–4 *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

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[6] Except in those rare cases in which immersion is impossible or impractical. By way of examples, baptism by sprinkling is certainly to be practiced in the case of a person who is physically unable to be immersed or in the case of a particularly severe drought in which water is sparse.

3. The surrounding context of baptisms in the Scriptures suggests baptism by immersion.

MATTHEW 3:16 *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately* ***he went up from the water,*** *and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him…*!

MARK 1:5, 10 *And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins…And when* ***he came up out of the water,*** *immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*[7]

JOHN 3:23 *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim,* ***because water was plentiful there,*** *and people were coming and being baptized…*!

ACTS 8:38–39 *And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both* ***went down into the water,*** *Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they* ***came up out of the water,*** *the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.*[8]

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[7] The prepositions here are crucial. Verse 5 has the Greek *en,* not another preposition meaning beside or near. Verse 10 has *ek not apo* which would have been used for merely going away from the water.

[8] It is important to note that this verse speaks of both Philip and the eunuch going down into and coming up out of the water, but the significance is found in the fact that they actually entered into the water which would have been unnecessary if baptizing by sprinkling or pouring. Surely the caravan would have had sufficient water for those modes had they been a preferable practice.