

A LOOK @ BAPTISM

[important info for anyone considering baptism]

The Wedding Illustration

Imagine a wedding. The bride and groom stand side by side in the front of the church. They take turns promising "till death do us part." These two young lovers don't look any different on the outside, but in just a few moments they will be married – united for life by invisible cords. Signifying that unseen union, the bride and groom exchange rings. These bands of gold tell the world they are now married. They identify the couple as husband and wife.

Imagine that an unmarried couple is watching. They decide they want to get married too. So they give each other rings. No commitments, no vows are made, just the symbols of union. As they walk out of church right behind the last groomsman, their hands, like those of the bride and groom, bear the accepted token of lifetime love. But only the couple that has made the commitment to each other is really married.

Symbol is not substance. Marriage depends on a commitment, not on bands of gold. The same is true of becoming a Christian. What may outwardly identify you as a believer does not make you one. The wedding rings do not marry the couple. They are fitting symbols, but without the reality of commitment, a ring – like baptism – is void of meaning.

Biblical Passages Concerning Baptism

Of course, the real significance of baptism cannot be defined merely with the analogy of a wedding. Here, at the St.Louis 1st COG, the Scriptures are the source of our beliefs. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commands his followers to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..." Baptism is the means by which followers of Christ are identified.

In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48 it is evident that baptism follows an individual's decision to trust Christ alone for salvation. The New Testament only records the baptisms of those who have made a commitment to follow Christ. Baptism was never intended to provide salvation for an individual, but rather to publicly identify a person with Christ.

In Romans 6:1-11, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under water pictures Christ's death, and coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection. While the immersion mode of baptism best illustrates the work of Christ, this passage does not mandate how much water should be used. The value of the ordinance of baptism is in the life and heart of the believer, not in the amount of water used.

You do not have to be baptized to have Christ, any more than you must exchange rings to be pronounced man and wife. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone for salvation has been made, then the outward symbol of baptism should be valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed's finger. Furthermore, Christ commanded that His followers be baptized. This publicly identifies a new believer with Christ and His Church.

A Word Concerning Infant Baptism

If the purpose of baptism is to publicly identify a believer in Jesus Christ, the questions may well be asked by some, "What was the significance of my baptism as a baby?" In the Bible, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them and prayed for them and told us to welcome them. But He did not baptize them, and He did not tell anyone else to baptize them. We recognize Jesus activity with children more in the form of dedication. So we practice the dedication of babies or infants. Baptism is for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation.

Further Information Concerning Baptism

AM I READY TO BE BAPTIZED?

Baptism is for believers. Believers are people who have realized their sin separated them from God. All efforts have been given up to reach God through good works or religious activity. They have concluded that Jesus Christ's death on the cross for their sins is the only thing that can bridge the gap between them and God. Believers are those who have decided to trust Christ alone for their salvation.

If you have come to that point in your spiritual journey, then the answer is yes, you are ready to be baptized. Just as the bride and groom tell of their love for one another through the symbol of rings, you should also want to show the world through baptism of your union with Christ.

What's The Next Step?

Your Personal Testimony

Please write a paragraph or two, on the back of the last page, describing how and when you decided to trust Christ alone for your salvation. This will be helpful for you to recognize the difference Christ has made in your life.

When writing your testimony, do your best to focus on these points:

1. Be sure to explain your story in such a way that if someone heard it, they would know what to do to become a Christian.
2. Tell what your life was like before you decided to trust Christ.
3. Describe how and when you decided to trust Christ alone for your salvation.
4. Share how this decision made a difference in your life.

Mandatory Informational Meeting

Prior to the baptism service, we ask each participant to attend a brief informational meeting with Nathan or an Elder. This is a time when we can talk, questions can be answered and the day of the baptism can be reviewed.

STATEMENT ON BAPTISM

While recognizing the right of other churches to practice infant baptism if it conforms to their theologies, the church you are a part of [St.Louis 1st COG] understands the Scripture to teach that only professing believers qualify for baptism.

Scriptural teaching on baptism may be summarized as follows:

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have subjected themselves to His sovereignty.
2. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
3. Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.

ADDITIONAL THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

1. Appropriate attire for your baptism would be a swim suit or shorts with a loose fitting tee shirt. Modesty coupled with good sense is the key.
2. Please bring your own towel.

[want to talk? need more info? talk to Nathan]
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north bradley church of God [proclaim - heal - free - restore]

MY STORY...