

Introduction to Baptism¹

The purpose of this document is to provide an introduction to the doctrine of baptism from a uniquely Baptist perspective. If you have questions about baptism, or anything presented in this document, please reach out to one of the elders in person or by email at office.clbcmn@gmail.com.

What Does the Word “Baptize” Mean?

The word *baptize* is a transliteration of the Greek word, *baptizo* (βαπτίζω), meaning to wash, dip, or immerse. This word occurs frequently in the New Testament, used both as a general term for washing (Mark 7:4, et. al.) and as a technical term relating to Christian baptism (Matthew 28:19, et. al.).

Baptists historically have practiced baptism by full immersion in water as the normal mode and method. Baptism by immersion appears to be the norm in the practice of baptism described in the New Testament and in the early church. However, some exceptions were made, such as when a large volume of water was unavailable.²

As a technical term, baptism refers to the washing with water by immersion, picturing the washing away of sin by participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What Is Christian Baptism?

Christian baptism is an ordinance of the church in which a follower of Jesus physically displays his or her participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, signifying his or her commitment to follow Christ as his disciple in obedience to his teaching. This ordinance is administered by a local assembly as an act of affirmation of the believer’s understanding of the gospel and

¹ For a more robust teaching on the doctrine of baptism, please participate in our Membership Seminar or attend the recurring Doctrine of the Church adult Bible class.

² *The Didache*, Early Church writings that have been traced back to the first century, provided basic instructions for the Church. *The Didache* describes baptism by immersion as the preferred practice, though it makes exceptions when immersion is impractical.

commitment to Christ and as an act of acceptance into fellowship as a member of Christ's body.

How Do Southern Baptists Understand Baptism?

Churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention endorse and subscribe to the Southern Baptist statement of faith, *The Baptist Faith & Message 2000*. In this statement, baptism is taught as follows:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

There are three important aspects of Southern Baptist conviction:

- 1) Baptism is not salvific—it does not contribute to salvation. Baptism is an outward act of obedience, picturing the regeneration and conversion that has already taken place.
- 2) Baptism is a pre-requisite to the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted two ordinances for his followers: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a singular act of obedience, whereas the Lord's Supper is an ongoing act of remembrance.
- 3) Baptism is a pre-requisite for membership in the local church. Baptism is the public declaration of one's commitment to Jesus. As such, one who has not been baptized should not be welcomed into the membership of a local assembly because membership is limited to followers of Jesus Christ.

Is Baptism Necessary for Christians?

Baptism is necessary for Christians. Christians participate in baptism in imitation of their savior, Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:16) and in obedience to the commission given to his followers (Matthew 28:19).

The Bible teaches that genuine followers of Jesus will obey his commands. One of those commands is to participate in baptism.

Furthermore, Christians should joyfully participate in baptism because it is the way that Jesus gave his followers to declare their loyalty to him. Although baptism does not contribute toward one's salvation, it does proclaim that salvation and provide verification of one's profession of Jesus Christ.

Does Baptism Contribute toward Salvation?

No, baptism does not contribute toward salvation. The Bible teaches that baptism is an outward sign of new life in Christ, but that salvation is a gift of grace that cannot be earned or contributed toward in any respect. Baptism, then, is an act of believers—those who have already received salvation.

Does Baptism Always Follow Conversion?

Baptism should always follow conversion because of the nature of baptism as an act of a believer. Some Christians realize that they had not yet accepted Christ and the gospel when they participated in baptism. As such, that act was not a true baptism. In other words, pre-conversion baptisms are not genuine baptisms.

Individuals in this situation should pursue baptism, knowing that their previous experience does not adhere to the purpose or descriptions of Christian baptism in the New Testament.

How Often Do Christians Get Baptized?

Christians get baptized only once. Baptism is a one-time act, signifying the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ died once for all for sin, so also Christian baptism is a once in a lifetime act picturing that death.

Therefore, baptism is not to be repeated upon local church membership transfers, renewed enjoyment of Christ, or any other experience.

How Are Baptism and Church Membership Related?

Baptism and church membership are closely related in the New Testament. As such, those who are baptized are generally added to the membership of the church by whom they are baptized.

If an individual desires to be baptized, but does not desire to join a church, there should be close evaluation and consideration of the New Testament teaching on baptism and church membership in conjunction with the particular circumstances of the person seeking baptism without connection to local church membership.

Why Is Baptism Required for Church Membership?

Even though there is not a verse in that Bible that directly teaches that baptism is required for church membership, we require all who desire to join this church to be baptized. This is because:

- 1) Baptism is where faith goes public. Baptism is the means that Christ gives for publicly declaring one's faith in him. Baptism makes an invisible reality a visible reality. In a somewhat analogous way, membership in the universal church (simply being a believer) is made visible through joining with a local church.
- 2) Baptism is the initiating sign-oath of the New Covenant. That is, in baptism we identify as part of the New Covenant in Christ. So, when the church asks, who belongs to the New Covenant, the answer is those who have taken the oath of the Covenant—baptism.

- 3) The local church is comprised of New Covenant believers. If one has not identified with the New Covenant through faith and repentance followed by baptism, the New Covenant community (the local church) cannot receive that individual into membership.
- 4) Therefore, baptism is required for entry into church membership.

What Is the Difference Between an Irregular Baptism and a False Baptism?

The term “false baptism” refers to an act of baptism that falls outside the nature and description of baptism in the New Testament. False baptisms include acts of baptism that occur pre-conversion, such as infant baptism.

The term “irregular baptism” refers to an act of baptism that falls outside the description of baptism in the New Testament, but arguably coheres with the nature of baptism. These baptisms take place following conversion, picture one’s identification with Christ, and are intended to follow Jesus’ command. Irregular baptisms include acts of baptism that take place at a Christian camp, in a family reunion, or by a mode other than full immersion. Although the method of these acts of baptisms falls outside the norm, making them irregular, they are genuine baptisms.

How Does CLBC Practice Baptism?

- 1) The Recipient:

Without exception, the pastors will only recommend professing believers, whose life reasonably matches that confession, for baptism. Upon the acceptance of the prospective member by the congregation, baptism may be received.

While there is no age limit given, we are cautious in baptizing young children.³ While we do not want to withhold baptism, we also do not want to baptize someone who either has not shown evidence of regeneration

³ For children seeking baptism, the elders will consult with the parents in the baptism process.

and conversion or someone who does not understand the meaning of baptism.

2) The Administrator:

The Bible does not limit the administrator of baptism to the pastors of the church. Because we believe all Christians are priests before God, any member of the congregation is eligible to baptize upon the recognition of the church and endorsement of the pastors.

Generally speaking, though, one of the elders will perform the baptism as a representative of the congregation. Pastors are those who already act on behalf of the church as they preach the Word, and baptism is a public rite of response to the Word that visibly proclaims the Word.

3) The Mode:

We believe that baptism by immersion is representative of the descriptions of the New Testament. Inasmuch as it is possible, we should baptize people by immersion. There may be extreme cases where other alternatives are necessary: particularly as it relates to baptizing the physically disabled or elderly.

4) The Result:

Baptism into the church results in inclusion in membership. In baptism, a believer commits to God's people and God's people commit to that individual. So, baptism is not merely a prerequisite for church membership, it is the entry to church membership itself. Those who are baptized already and desire to join our church do not need to be re-baptized; baptism happens once.

5) The Context:

Baptism does not have to take place in a church building (though we have a baptistry), nor does it have to take place during a service (though that may be most natural). However, baptism should be celebrated at an official

gathering of the church—not merely a gathering of a small group of believers who happen to be members at the same church.

6) The Timing:

The timing of a new believer's baptism requires wisdom and will be thoughtfully evaluated by the pastors. We do not want to delay a new believer's baptism unnecessarily. Nevertheless, we want to have sufficient time to affirm that individual's profession of faith and educate them on what it means to be baptized and what it means to become a member of this church.

What Do I Do if I'm Nervous?

It is okay to be nervous about getting baptized. Let your nervousness remind you that following Jesus is a life-changing commitment in which you are called to die to yourself in pursuit of Christ. Know that the church participating in your baptism is excited for you as you take this step of obedience to Christ.

How Do I Pursue Baptism?

Some indications that you are ready for baptism are that you can positively answer the following questions:

- 1) Are you certain that you have been saved from God's wrath? Can you explain how you have been forgiven from sin and have received eternal life? Are you certain that your eternal destiny is in heaven with God?
- 2) Do you understand the biblical meaning of baptism? Can you articulate the nature, mode, and purpose of baptism? Can you explain why you should be baptized?
- 3) Are you committed to live as a follower of Jesus for the rest of your life? Are you willing to represent Christ to all, identifying with his people and separating yourself from the world?

If your answer to these questions is yes, then to pursue baptism at Crystal Lake Baptist Church you should talk to one of the elders and express your desire to be baptized. One of the elders will review this document with you, answer any questions you have, and describe the baptism and membership process to you.

Recommended Resources for Further Reading:

- 1) *The Baptist Faith & Message 2000*
- 2) *Understanding Baptism (Church Basics)*, Bobby Jamieson
- 3) *Going Public: Why Baptism is Required for Church Membership*, Bobby Jamieson
- 4) *Believer's Baptism*, Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright
- 5) *Baptist Foundations*, Mark Dever