

GRACE FELLOWSHIP

CHURCH OF WESTERVILLE



BAPTISM

THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM

Jesus established two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are to be practiced by the church. The church leadership is charged with overseeing and conducting these ordinances in a manner that is biblical and pleasing to the Lord. We practice "believer's baptism," which means that candidates must have a publicly credible faith before they are baptized and admitted into membership.

Water baptism is only intended for those who have received the saving benefits of Christ through the new birth of the Holy Spirit. In obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself and the world, believers are baptized by water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Water 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 former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts the release from the mastery of Satan, sin and death.

Baptism and communion (the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances 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 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.

GRACE Fellowship Statement of Faith describes baptism as a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts the release from the mastery of Satan, sin and death.

BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP

Baptism is a requirement for membership at GRACE Fellowship Church. We require anyone wishing to join the church to have displayed obedience to Christ's command following conversion. While we practice a baptism by immersion at GRACE Fellowship Church, we do require the mode of immersion for membership. If a person was sprinkled or immersed (or a possible other mode) after conversion, he or she has not met our requirement for membership.

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:

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.
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.

WHY SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Acts 2:37-41 (NKJV)

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

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.

While there are certain costs associated with baptism, 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?

GRACE Fellowship Church believes that “water baptism is only intended for those who have received the saving benefits of Christ through the new birth of the Holy Spirit.”

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 (NKJV)

⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

Acts 8:12 (NKJV)

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Galatians 3:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 6:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

SHOULD A PERSON BE REBAPTIZED?

Many people have the experience of coming to faith, only to realize that they had already been baptized. Depending on the context, we may or may not encourage these people to be baptized again.

If the baptism occurred as an infant, we maintain an unambiguous position: The believer should be baptized again. An infant baptism is more a symbol of the parents’ faith (and thank God for

it!) than an individual's. As mentioned above, every baptism in Scripture comes on the heels of a believer confessing her own faith.

For believers who were baptized as infants, we encourage them to be baptized again as adults—not dishonoring, but ratifying the choice their parents made for them when they were baptized as infants.

If the baptism occurred later, we take the situations on a case-by-case basis. As a general rule, if a person is certain he was not saved when he was first baptized (perhaps he was pressured into it or didn't understand what he was doing) then he should be baptized again. But if a person's baptism depicted the beginning of a journey of faith—a journey that is often marked by numerous awakenings—then we do not pursue a second baptism.

In practice, we know this distinction can be complicated. As Christians, we are continually having new experiences of grace that make us feel like everything we have experienced up to that point was dimness. C. S. Lewis describes a day in 1951 where he passed from “mere intellectual acceptance of, to realization of, the doctrine that our sins are forgiven.”

Note: This was several years after he wrote *Mere Christianity*—one of the most significant defenses of Christian faith in the 20th century! Lewis did not think of this as his conversion, but he did say that in light of this experience, “What I had previously called ‘belief’ looked absolutely unreal.”

If an experience like this happens to people in our church, we encourage them not to see it as conversion, but as a progressive deepening of their relationship with Jesus. In this sense, baptism is not a mark of faith we strive to achieve, but a mark of faith that fuels us as we live the Christian life. Baptism does not celebrate the culmination or maturity of faith in Christ; it celebrates the beginning of such a faith.

WHAT ABOUT BAPTIZING INFANTS?

As mentioned above, we do not baptize infants, nor do we believe this practice to be a biblically viable one.

WHEN SHOULD A YOUNG PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

There are differences among those who embrace believer's baptism concerning the timing of baptism for children who profess faith in Christ. Some argue for “immediate participation,” meaning that children should be baptized as soon as they can confess faith in Christ. We lean toward the second view, which suggests waiting to baptize children until there is evidence of regeneration and the ability to reason independently in spiritual matters.

It is our practice to wait until a child is at least 11 years old before considering him/her for baptism. More importantly, it is our practice to wait until there is evidence of regeneration and enough maturity to articulate the Gospel and give a credible profession of faith. Therefore we depend on the candidate's parents (or mentor) to discern when the young person is ready to begin the preparation process.

We encourage children to wait for several reasons:

Wait for Understanding

While children can confess faith in Christ when they are very young, they will likely not be able to contemplate the significance of baptism until they are older. It is important for children to understand the meaning of the ordinance and also to be mature enough to understand the significance of this act of obedience.

Wait for More Independent Thinking

It is not uncommon for those who were baptized during their pre-teen years to feel a need to be “re-baptized” when they are older. Memories of the first decade of our lives are often fuzzy at best. Even if we do remember a decision or an event like baptism, we usually cannot recall any reasoning behind the decision or event. Once young people have the capacity for reasoning and for more independent thinking, they are more likely to embrace as their own the decisions and commitments they make. Therefore it is reasonable that we refrain from baptizing children until they are more likely to remember the experience and more fully embrace the commitment that is represented by this public declaration of faith.

Wait for Significance

Encouraging children to wait until they are more mature reinforces the significance of baptism. This is especially true in a “me-oriented” culture that reinforces a mistaken notion that “if you want it, you can have it and you can have it now.” Our hope is that as children wait, there will be a growing sense of anticipation as they look forward to following the Lord in the obedience of baptism. Such anticipation can add meaning and significance of the experience when they are eventually baptized.

Wait for Maturity

The process for preparing young people for baptism is designed to instruct and encourage them in their faith. It is also designed to help parents and church leadership to discern the candidates’ readiness for baptism. As it is, this process is a stretch even for many eleven year-olds, and most children younger than this simply lack the maturity they need to satisfactorily complete the process. Moreover, baptism can be one of the experiences in a young person’s life that mark “coming of age” – the time when a person puts “childhood” behind and picks up the mantle of maturity.

We never want to deceive anyone into thinking they are saved simply because we allowed them to be baptized, so we make every effort to ensure that anyone requesting baptism has actually given his or her life to Christ. While we do not expect an eight-year-old to articulate what it means to follow Christ in the same way as a college student, we do look for an age-appropriate response that reflects an understanding of the gospel. If an eight-year-old girl truly understands that Jesus has done everything necessary to save her, and is fully prepared to follow Jesus wherever he calls her, we baptize her. We pray that she maintains this confession of faith for the rest of her life. As with all converts, if these children endure to the end, that shows that their conversion is a real one (Hebrews 3:14).

If they do not, it shows that their faith was like the seed that fell upon shallow soil—sprung up quickly and showing encouraging signs of life, but withered under the sun of persecution and the weeds of temptation because its roots did not go deep enough.

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 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.

THE PRACTICE OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

At GRACE Fellowship Church, we ask believers who wish to be baptized to temporarily delay for a brief season while they go through a baptism class and wait for a Baptism Service.

First, this practice allows us to discuss the gospel and the meaning of baptism and to teach our theological convictions regarding both. Second, it allows the church the opportunity to celebrate together as a congregation sharing in the joy of a person's obedience and agreeing to walk with him or her in fellowship. Finally, it allows the person being baptized to invite family and friends who will have an opportunity to celebrate and hear the proclamation of the gospel.

HOW SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Though other denominations and theological traditions baptize by pouring or sprinkling, GRACE Fellowship Church practices baptism by immersion. 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 Gen. 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exod. 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 (NKJV)

¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Romans 6:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

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

Matthew 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

Mark 1:5, 10 (NKJV)

⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

John 3:23 (NKJV)

²³ Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

Acts 8:38-39 (NKJV)

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

WHERE SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Although there are no prescriptions in the Scriptures to location, we prefer to practice the ordinance within the context of the local church in order to allow the congregation to celebrate together in a person's act of obedience and submission.

WHO CAN PERFORM BAPTISM?

Since baptism is an ordinance to be practiced by the community of saints, we at GRACE Fellowship Church administer baptism through our pastors and deacons. However, the role of "baptizer" is not limited to the pastors and deacons of our church, and anyone GRACE Fellowship Church pastor appoints to baptize is authorized to baptize.

HOW WE BAPTIZE AT GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

PRIOR TO THE BAPTISM:

1. We ask those wishing to be baptized to participate in a baptism class, where we explain the gospel, core Christian beliefs, theological distinctive (articulated in our "Statement of Faith") and our theology of baptism.
2. After taking the class, we ask for participants to submit a testimony of conversion in which we look particularly for evidences of grace and a proper understanding of the gospel. For instance, we want to make sure a person does not articulate that he or she was born a Christian or thinks that Christianity consists merely in moral improvement.

BAPTISM SERVICES:

1. We will schedule a baptism service in which the church celebrates baptisms together.
2. Participants are asked to personally share their testimonies if possible or to have the person baptizing them to share for them.
3. After the testimony, the person performing the baptism will ask, "Do you confess and believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?" to which the baptizee will respond, "Yes" or "I do."
4. The baptizer will then immerse and subsequently raise the baptizee out of the water while saying, "I baptize you, my (brother or sister) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." 14 [Some will choose to also say, "Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life," which is taken from Rom. 6:4 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.]

HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Wear dark shorts and a dark shirt to maintain modesty.
2. Bring a change of clothes, towel and bag to hold your wet clothes after you change.
3. Arrive 30 minutes prior to the service where you are being baptized. You will receive an email the week before with further details on when and where to arrive.

On your own: Please answer questions on pages 11-16.

Before you start to learn about baptism, answer the following questions.

1. Why do you want to be baptized?
2. Who do you think should be able to be baptized?
3. What do you think is the reason we go under water to get baptized?
4. What does it mean to be a Christian?

Why Do People Get Baptized?

Let's start by looking in the Bible for our answers. Look up the following scripture passages and answer the questions.

Read Matthew 3:1-6

Who was baptizing people in the Jordan River?

What did the people do along with being baptized?

So, we see that before people fully knew that Jesus was the Savior of the world, people were baptized to show they had repented or confessed their sins. That is part of why people get baptized today. But there is more.

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Who do these verses tell us was baptized?

Another reason people get baptized is to follow Jesus' example.

Read Matthew 28:18-20

What was Jesus telling his disciples to do?

Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make more disciples and to baptize them. So, another reason people get baptized is because Jesus commanded it, and if we love Jesus we want to obey Him!

Who Should be Baptized?

Read Matthew 28:18-20

In order to be baptized, they had to be_____.

Read Acts 2:41

What had the people done that were being baptized?

Read Acts 16:30-34

What did Paul tell the Philippian jailer he must do to be saved?

From what was he going to be saved? See Matthew 23:33 for help.

When was the jailer baptized?

Read Acts 10:34-48

Peter preached about Jesus to Cornelius and his household. At first he didn't want to baptize them because they were not Jewish. What made him change his mind?

So, in making your own conclusion after reading these passages; what must people do before they can be baptized?

Do these passages indicate that baptism should come before or after salvation?

What Does Baptism Mean?

Baptism is a symbol of something that has already happened!

In Romans 6:3-4 underline the phrases that show what baptism symbolizes.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.

Three parts of being baptized symbolize something that happened in our lives. Draw lines to match the symbolism with the real event.

- Getting into the water Being buried with Jesus
- Going down under the water Rising to new life in Jesus
- Coming up out of the water Old self dying with Jesus

Baptism is a public acknowledgement that the old man and his ways are (Romans 6:6) and the new man is raised to walk (live) (Romans 6:4)

Read Galatians 3:27 below and fill in the blanks of the sentence underneath it.
You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

It is by _____ in Jesus that you become a child of God. If you are _____ into Christ, you will have Jesus covering you with his clothes, which is his righteousness.

What Other Things Are Important To Know About Baptism?

Water is needed, and the person being baptized must go under the water or be immersed. The original Greek work for baptism is baptiso. The definition is : “To make fully wet, to dip or immerse.”

Let’s see examples of this in the Bible.

1. Read John 3:23. What does this passage say about the amount of water present for John’s baptisms?
2. Read Matthew 3:13-17. Where was Jesus baptized? It says, “Jesus came _____ of the water.”
3. Read Acts 8:36-39. Phillip led the Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Christ. The Bible says they got off the chariot and went _____ the water, then came _____ the water.
4. What mode of baptism does this sound like to you? Circle the right answer.
Sprinkling on the head **Pouring water over the head** **Immersion**
5. Jesus commanded what name(s) to baptize others in. Read Matthew 28:19 and finish this phrase ... baptizing them in the name of the _____, in the name of the _____ and of the _____
6. From all the examples you have read from the Bible so far, do you think you can baptize yourself? Baptism involves other people; the one baptizing and those witnessing it.

Circle the correct answer for each question below:

Baptism is a _____ of something that has already happened.

- A. confirmation
- B. symbol
- C. guarantee

In order to be baptized, a person must first _____.

- A. join the church
- B. do service projects
- C. made Jesus their Savior and Lord

Salvation from hell only comes through _____.

- A. faith in Jesus to take our punishment
- B. doing good works
- C. baptism

When a person asks Jesus to be his or her Savior, Jesus gives them a _____.

- A. new life
- B. guaranteed place in heaven
- C. both a and b

In order for someone to be baptized, they must _____.

- A. go under the water
- B. be baptized by someone else
- C. both a and b

People get baptized in order to _____.

- A. obey Jesus
- B. declare to the world that they want to follow Jesus
- C. both a and b

Answer true or false to the following questions:

T/F Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

T/F Baptism is what you need to do to go to heaven.

T/F People who have not asked Jesus to be their Savior should not get baptized.

T/F Going under the water during baptized symbolizes being buried with Christ.

T/F One thing baptism shows is that a person has decided to repent of his sins.

T/F You should be baptized in the name of the God and in the name of the church.

Answer the following questions with your own words:

Have you made repented, confessed your sins to Jesus and asked him to be your Savior and Lord? When did you do that?

Tips for Writing Your Testimony

When writing your testimony; be sure to include the following:

- What was your attitude toward God or life before you became a Christian?
- Who told you about Jesus?
- When did you first realize that you were a sinner?
- When did you ask Jesus to forgive all your sins and become your Savior?
- When you did that, what did he give you? (cleansing, new life, the Holy Spirit)
- If you asked Jesus to be your Lord, that means he is the ruler of your life. Did you turn your life over to him to rule? That means you will follow him and his instructions. Explain this in your testimony if this is true for you.
- Lastly, what helps you grow as a Christian?

PARENTAL CONSENT

Candidates under age of 18 gain the consent of their parents before beginning the preparation process. This includes candidates whose parents are not believers.

**Baptism
Parental/Legal Guardian Consent Form**

Please be advised that I, _____, being the parent
(name of parent and/or legal guardian)

and/or legal guardian of _____, hereby
(name of child)

authorize Grace Fellowship Church to proceed with _____'s request to
be baptized by immersion (name of g child)

Respectfully submitted,

(Signature of parent and/or legal guardian) (Date)