

Life Bridge Christian Church

A Statement of Belief Regarding Water Baptism

When someone decides to “get right with God,” part of the acknowledgement and declaration of accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord is being baptized in water. It is an exciting time, but there are many questions regarding baptism that should be clarified, since so many conflicting ideas regarding this topic have developed over the centuries. This study should answer many questions you may have regarding what the Bible says about baptism.

- What does the Bible say about baptism?
 - What is baptism?
 - What takes place during baptism?
 - When should someone be baptized?
 - What do I need to do before being baptized?

We know that we are not smart enough to have the ultimate answer regarding this topic of baptism. After all, theologians have been debating this issue for hundreds of years; however even though we do not have all the answers, we know that God does. The problem that most people encounter as they approach a topic as hotly debated as baptism is that they have difficulty comprehending the simplicity of baptism because of the preconceived ideas which skew their thinking. We would like you to put aside your bias and let the Holy Spirit guide your thinking regarding the role of baptism in your relationship with God.

Because most people come from some type of church background, they may have many different preconceived ideas regarding baptism. As we look at the scripture and read what it says regarding baptism, we believe that you will see that some of things you were taught may not actually be in the Bible.

What is baptism?

Author and Pastor, Max Lucado, puts it like this: *“The human mind explaining baptism is like a harmonica interpreting Beethoven: the music is too majestic for the instrument. No scholar or saint can fully appreciate what this moment means in heaven. Any words on baptism, including these, must be seen as human efforts to understand a holy and mysterious event. Our danger is to swing to one of two extremes: we make baptism either too important or too unimportant. Either we deify it or we trivialize it. One can see baptism as the essence of the gospel or as irrelevant to the gospel. Both sides are equally perilous. One person says, “I am saved because I was baptized.” The other says, “I am saved so I don’t need to be baptized.” The challenge is to let the pendulum stop somewhere between the two viewpoints. This is done by placing it where it should be: at the foot of the cross. Baptism is like a precious jewel, set apart by itself, it is nice and appealing but has nothing within it to compel. But place baptism against the backdrop of our sin and turn on the light of the cross, and the jewel explodes with significance.*

Baptism at once reveals the beauty of the cross and the darkness of sin. As a stone has many facets, baptism has many sides: cleansing, burial, resurrection, the death of the old, and the birth of the new. Just as the stone has no light within it, baptism has no inherent power. But just as the stone refracts the light into many colors, so baptism reveals the many facets of God's grace."

The process of baptism is very simple, but the results are very profound. Something happens during baptism that remains a mystery; it is much like what happens during a wedding ceremony as two people become one. No one sees it happen and no one can really explain how it happens, we just believe it does through faith. Something very spiritual and mysterious happens to a person during the act of baptism as well, and it cannot be fully explained, but through faith, we believe what God's Word says regarding this holy act.

The process of baptism should begin with a confession of your faith in Jesus Christ. Next, you stand, sit, or kneel in some water. Another Christian then lowers you completely under the water while stating that you are being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19:

*"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."*²

You are then brought back up out of the water. You could also literally call this "immersion."

Because some denominations sprinkle water on people instead of immersing them, the obvious question is whether this is OK. Since the only consistent answers should come from the Bible, we recommend using it to find your answers. It is interesting that nowhere in the Bible does anything but "immersion" take place. That is, baptism is always by immersion in the New Testament writings.

This makes sense if you realize that "baptize" is a transliteration of the original Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizo). In turn, baptizo comes from the root word βαπτω (bapto), a term used in the first century for immersing a garment first into bleach and then into dye, both cleansing and changing the color of the cloth. (Note its similarity to baptism's cleansing of sin and becoming a new person through Christ.) Stated another way, when you process cloth to change its color, you are said to "baptize" it. If sprinkling of any kind was to be practiced, it would seem that a different Greek word would have been used, but it was not.

At Life Bridge Christian Church we desire to remain faithful to the Bible and to the practices of the early church, so unless there is absolutely no means of immersion available, we will always baptize by immersion.

Some things you may have heard regarding baptism:

- **“Baptism is just an outward sign of an inward grace, so it can be done anytime in the future.”**

As you will see looking at the scriptures that talk about baptism, it is much more than simply a sign of something that has already taken place in your life; but rather there is something significant that takes place in the life of the person being baptized. We will look at verses which demonstrate that baptism was an immediate response to the gospel.

- **“You need to ‘grow in Christ’ (become good enough) before you are ready to be baptized.”**

Again, as you will see, people in the book of Acts were baptized as soon as possible. We must be careful not to place conditions on people which prevent them from being baptized; however we should make sure that they are entering to baptism for the correct reasons. The only requirement that we have at Life Bridge Christian Church regarding baptism is that the person must have the ability to understand the commitment they are entering into with Christ through baptism, much as we expect a man and a woman to understand the commitment they are making to each other in marriage. If we force people to be mature followers of Christ prior to baptism they may never get there.

- **“To join our church, you have to be baptized into our church.”**

As you will see, baptism was never intended to be a means of initiation into a specific denomination, in fact in the first century there were no denominations. When someone submits themselves to baptism, they are joined with Christ and become part of the Body of Christ. After all, there is only one Church. So, it doesn't matter where you were baptized. If you have confessed your sin, repented and believed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as part of the baptism process, we believe you were baptized into Christ and you are welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ at Life Bridge Christian Church.

- **Baptism is not a requirement in our salvation process because it is something we do, and the Bible says we are saved by grace and not by works.”**

Baptism is clearly not something we can do to ourselves; but rather it is something that we submit ourselves to through obedience, so that God can do something in us. In fact, the person being baptized is always a participant and the actual act of baptism is always performed by someone else. We see no instance in the New Testament of someone baptizing themselves.

Let's look at some verses about when people were baptized:

Acts 8:36-38

As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?"³⁶ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Acts 9:17-19

¹⁷ So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

Acts 2:41

⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

Acts 8:12-13

¹² But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized.¹

Acts 16:14-15

One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.¹⁵ She was baptized along with other members of her household.

Acts 16:29-34

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

Acts 18:8

Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.

In each one of the above verses we see that the immediate response to the acceptance of the gospel was baptism. They did not wait to be baptized at a more convenient time. In fact, in Acts 16:29-33, we see the jailor and his family were baptized in the middle of the night. If the response to the gospel was baptism, then we must assume that the necessity of baptism must have been part of the gospel message.

I think based on these verses it is pretty clear that baptism is not optional in the process of restoration with God and must be part of the gospel message.

The essence of the gospel message is found in Romans 3:23-25:

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.

People are saved (forgiven of their sin) and enter into a relationship with God by believing that Jesus is the Christ (the Savior) and that His death was the only possible atonement for their sin, They must acknowledge and take responsibility for their sin and repent by turning away from sin and drawing closer to God. They must put their faith for salvation in the sacrifice of Christ alone and then through obedience be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What takes place during baptism?

Acts 2:38 – 41 (NLT)

38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." 40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" 41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

These verses record Peter on the day of Pentecost as he responds to the Jews who have been convicted of their sin. After being convicted they immediately wanted to know how they could be forgiven. In his response, Peter clearly ties repentance and baptism together as the means of forgiveness of their sin and for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

One of the clearest passages that ties baptism to the salvation process is Acts 22:16. In this verse the apostle Paul is re-telling what Ananias said to him in response to God's command to "go to Damascus and you will be told everything you are to do". This is what Paul was told to do by Ananias:

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name". NIV

As we can clearly see here, baptism was not merely an optional act, but rather a part of the process of "calling on His name". In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2:21, Peter referred to a prophecy from the book of Joel which said:

"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." NIV

Many evangelicals have an issue with the idea that baptism has anything to do with the salvation process. Their argument is that we are saved by grace through faith alone and all one must do is have faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to be saved. They say that if baptism is a requirement of our salvation then we are saved by our own works. Many people think that just believing that Christ died for their sins grants them forgiveness and places them in a relationship with God; however, we don't seem to see that in scripture. It is true that we are saved by our faith; however, it is also true that we are saved by repentance, and there is clear evidence in scripture that we are saved by baptism, as well. It is not a spiritual buffet where we get to choose one or the other. It is a process of believing that you have sinned, are incapable of doing anything to atone for your sin, and that the death Jesus Christ provides the only atonement for your sin. Then, by faith, you accept that truth and confess your sin, repent or turn away from your sin, and are baptized into Christ through obedience. We cannot take just one verse that says we are saved by faith and base a doctrine on that verse alone, especially if there is another verse that declares repentance and baptism are part of the process as well.

We must never choose one verse over another based on our preconceived doctrine and then ignore other verses which add to the initial verse. We must bring them both together and accept the full meaning of the scripture.

Here is an illustration that may help you understand how baptism doesn't have anything to do with our actions, but rather the grace and gift of God:

If you were dropped in the middle of the Pacific Ocean without any means of flotation, you would never make it to shore no matter how well you could swim. That is kind of where you and I find ourselves one day – we realize that we have separated ourselves from God because of our sin and that no matter how hard we try we will never be able to fix it on our own. Imagine that as you are swimming and trying to stay afloat, a man in a boat spots you and, out of his love and concern for you, pulls up close to you and offers to help. The man on the boat is your only hope. He throws out a rope and asks you if you want it. He says that in order to be saved you must grab onto the rope and he will pull you in to safety. You could believe all you wanted that the rope would save you, but until you grabbed on and allowed yourself to be pulled in you wouldn't be saved. After you reached the boat would you brag about how well you hung on to the rope and how well you skimmed across the water as what saved you? No way! You would realize that it was only the grace of the man on the boat and his providing the rope that saved you. Yet, without you doing your part you would still be drowning.

Try as you might, you will not see in the New Testament where the idea of faith, repentance, and baptism are separated. They are a package deal. Looking at what the Bible actually says, it becomes difficult to understand all the confusion on this issue. If the Bible says that we are to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins, then why can't we simply do what it says and know that we have done everything God has asked us to do for His salvation to be complete? But the question keeps coming up – are you telling me that I wasn't saved until I was baptized? What we're saying is "If you haven't

been baptized by immersion, why not?" Why try to split hairs and debate over the point in the salvation process that your sins are actually forgiven. If you just follow the Biblical pattern you don't have to worry about it.

So important was this step that, as far as we know, every single convert in the New Testament was baptized. With the exception of the thief on the cross, there is no example of an unbaptized believer. The act of baptism alone does not save anyone; however, salvation and baptism are always tied together in the New Testament. The question that arises is "Are we saved by faith or are we saved through baptism?" The answer is yes to both, because we believe you can't separate the two. Faith without baptism is really no faith at all. James writes in his epistle that "faith without works is dead". As well, baptism without faith is just getting wet. Salvation is a process that begins with faith, which leads to confession and repentance and is consummated through baptism.

1 Peter 3:21

1 And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this verse Paul makes it clear that baptism in water is included in the salvation process. Baptism is not an outward cleaning, but saves us through an inward cleaning. It is an appeal to God for a good conscience and asks God to take away the guilt of our past sin. Baptism is a physical act that allows us to realize the cleansing that has taken place.

As you will see, the following passages clearly indicate the importance of baptism in the transformation process of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not optional, but rather a requirement in being reborn as a new person in Christ. It seems apparent from scripture that we are not to choose between faith or baptism as a means of salvation, but rather that they are both equally important in being born again.

Col 2:11-12

11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. 12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.*

Rom 6:1-4

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? 3 Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Gal 3:26-27

*26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on the character of Christ, like putting on new clothes.**

This word picture that Paul paints shows us that the mode of baptism (immersion) pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In the same way that He went through these things, our old nature is to “die” and we are to be “buried with Him through baptism into death” and raised to “walk in newness of life” (live like Jesus). So we do not just try to be a better person; we bury the “old person” in the water and become a “new person” through our acceptance of Christ. It is like a new birth and a new beginning for us. It is the start of a new life!

Galatians 3:26 – 27 (NLT)

26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.

Here we are told that baptism is where we receive a new identity. It is where we become united with Christ! Again we see faith and baptism tied together.

When should someone be baptized?

A natural question would be, “When someone should be baptized?” More specifically, you may ask whether infants or young children should be baptized. This question has been a source of division in the church for hundreds of years, and both sides of the argument use scripture to defend their position. The real issue that needs to be considered is why an infant would need to be baptized in the first place?

As we look into early church writings, it appears that at some point during the second or third century the practice of baptizing infants and young children was initiated. Around 400 AD, Augustine introduced the doctrine of “original sin” which provided a valid reason for the necessity of infant baptism. This doctrine states that every person who is born inherits the sin of Adam at birth and is therefore separated from God from the beginning of their life. It seems as though this doctrine was introduced into the church primarily to provide a reason for the practice of baptizing infants. Since it is risky to immerse an infant, the church decided to sprinkle them with water instead. Thus, both baptizing infants and baptizing by sprinkling appear to be human traditions rather than a scriptural mandate. However, there is evidence in some first century writings that if no other means of water was available for baptism, sprinkling was used in extreme cases, but this was never the norm.

As we have stated, baptism is considered to be a part of the salvation process throughout the New Testament. Because of that, the question that needs to be answered is “Does God apply special grace to those who are incapable of making a decision regarding repentance and being baptized”. We believe the answer to this question is yes. Even the Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged recently that it seems possible that God does

extend grace to infants and children, and children who die before being baptized will most likely be saved.

If we look in the Bible, we see that children are never seen to “accept Christ.” So, does the Bible say anything regarding an “age of accountability” or an age at which God knows that people are fully able to understand and be able to be held accountable for their sin? There are a several passages that seem to support this idea:

In Deuteronomy 1:37-40 God says this to the Israelites:

*Because of you the LORD became angry with me also and said, "You shall not enter it, either. But your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it. Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it. **And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad — they will enter the land.** I will give it to them and they will take possession of it. But as for you, turn around and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea."*

Also, in Exodus 30, beginning in verse 11, we read:

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the LORD. **All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD.** The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, making atonement for your lives."*

And in Numbers 14:29-30 God says:

*In this desert your bodies will fall — **every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.***

As we can see from these verses, it appears as though God did not hold those under twenty years old accountable for the sin of Israel. He also didn't require those under twenty to pay atonement for their lives. If God viewed only adults accountable in the Old Testament, why wouldn't He do the same now? Thus, it seems to be that only those who can truly understand the concept of separation from God, because of sin, are at the age when acceptance of Christ is possible.

We realize that each person matures at a different rate and that many children are able to comprehend the significance of their need for salvation and baptism much earlier than twenty years old; however, only God knows when that actually takes place and He will convict their heart when they are ready. We also realize that there are some adults who are mentally incapable of understanding their position with God and believe that He will show special grace on them as well.

We do, however, believe that when an infant comes into a believing family, it is a proper thing to dedicate that life to the Lord. During a dedication, the parents and church make a covenant to raise that child in the ways of the Lord and teach that child what they need to know to lead them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The dedication of a child can be done during any corporate gathering of the fellowship.

If you were baptized as an infant, you may be questioning whether you should be baptized as an adult. First, we want you to know that the intention of your parents was for you to be in a right relationship with God. They did what they were taught was correct and it was a significant act of faith on their part. Rejoice in the fact that you had parents who were concerned about your spiritual well-being. We believe that your baptism (christening) as an infant was a dedication of you to the Lord and was a significant step in your parent's commitment to raise you into faith in Christ. However, as you have seen what the scripture says regarding baptism, it is pretty clear that faith and repentance should precede baptism. This is only a decision you can make. Please spend time praying, searching the scriptures, and asking God what you should do. We know He will reveal the truth to you regarding the next step you need to take in your journey with Him. Please make this issue a priority in your prayer time.

What do I need to do before being baptized?

The only things that we believe the Bible says are prerequisites to baptism are:

1. Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus as atonement for your sin.
2. A clear understanding of the cost of following Jesus.
3. True Repentance of sin.
4. Confession of your faith.

To help you understand the significance of the covenant you will be entering into and what each of the above prerequisites mean, we suggest that you go through a short study called "This Is Eternal Life" before making the decision of giving your life to Christ and demonstrating your commitment through baptism.

A baptism can be arranged just about any time that is convenient for you – either during the worship assembly on Sunday morning or any other time during the week.

Baptisms may be performed by a pastor, an elder, or some other believer that you prefer to do the baptism. It is always special when someone has the person who led them to Christ or their Life Group leader do the baptism.

What Now?

The only question left to ask is, "What will I do now?" The question of why you should be baptized has hopefully been answered, but you must now ask yourself "Why wouldn't I be baptized?" It is clear that it is something God expects everyone to do who desires to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Maybe you were sprinkled as an infant, or maybe you accepted Christ as your savior and have not yet been baptized because you were told it wasn't necessary for salvation. Wherever you find yourself, be assured that baptism is a step you should take to be in obedience to God.

If you have more questions or wish to be baptized, please talk to an Elder, your Life Group Leader, or the Pastor. We will make arrangements for your baptism as soon as possible. Contact the church office at (494-4042), for more information or baptism arrangements.