



Our Beliefs About Baptism

A Sunnybrook Position Paper

As you read this short explanation, please take the time to read through each of the Bible verses as they appear. This will help you understand the basis of our beliefs and enable you to form your own judgment based on Scripture, rather than relying solely on what we or others claim.

As a church, it is our duty, given by Jesus, to make more followers of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore, we faithfully preach the good news of Jesus and the Kingdom of God to people. When people respond to that good news by placing their trust and allegiance in Jesus as the only one who can deal with their sins and restore their broken relationship with the Father, it is the Church's job to help usher that new believer into the family and Kingdom of God. One crucial way the Bible commands and expects the Church to usher these new believers into the family and the Kingdom is through the beautiful and mysterious gift of baptism. Baptism is submersion or immersion into water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In baptism, the believer is united to and participates in Jesus's death and resurrection. Thus, the individual dies to their old life of sin as they go under the water and rise out of the water as a new person whose sins are forgiven, a new person within whom the Spirit of God dwells (Acts 2:38). The following further explains our understanding of what the Bible teaches about baptism.

Baptism is Connected to Immersion and Death

It is worth taking a moment to define the meaning of the word baptism. We must ask what the biblical authors meant and what the original audiences would have heard when this word was used. The transliteration of the Greek word for baptize is *baptizo* (verb) and *baptismos* (noun). In ancient Greek, *baptizo/baptismos* had connections not only with water but also with death. These words were used in connection with the sinking of a ship, the drowning of an enemy, and, in its most basic meaning, immersion into water. Therefore, the authors and the original audiences understood baptism as an immersion into water in connection with death.

Baptism is the Commanded and Normative Next Step for a Believer

(Matt 28:18-20, Acts 2:36-38, Acts 8:12, 35-39, 9:17-18, 10:47-48, 16:13-15, 30-34, 18:8, 18:24-19:6, 22:16)

According to the New Testament, when someone responds to the message of the good news of Jesus's saving work and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God with faith and repentance (the Spirit-driven desire to turn from their old life of sin and rebellion and turn to follow Jesus in a new life), the prescribed and expected response is immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, immersion is the *commanded* and *normative* next step after trusting Jesus's work to make peace with God and giving our total allegiance to follow the person of Jesus.

Not only is baptism commanded by God, but it is also a beautiful and mysterious gift from God that publicly and formally marks the forgiveness of our sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the initiation into the Church of God. As you survey faith, baptism, and the Holy Spirit throughout the book of Acts, you will notice that the order of these events is less clear than we would like to make them (Acts 2:38, 10:44-48). Yet, the elements of belief, repentance, reception of the Holy Spirit, baptism into Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins are all involved in the process of a person going from a life outside of Christ to a life in Christ.

Some will ask, "So, does someone have to be baptized? What about the thief on the cross or someone putting faith in Jesus with their final breath?" First, God cannot be fooled and will always make the right judgments about people. If someone puts their faith in Jesus in an extreme circumstance and God rewards their faith with his forgiveness and the blessing of life with him forever, who are we to disagree? Yet, this is the exception and not the rule. Most people are not in this extreme circumstance. Therefore, it is our responsibility to obey God's clear and normative command to be baptized into Jesus. Second, it is vital to take a moment and consider the fact that some would rather disobey a clear command of God than be accused of legalism or works-based salvation. It is an unnecessary and dangerous dichotomy to pit the

commands of God against our theology of God and the salvation he alone can offer. When our theology leads us to question or outright disobey a command of Jesus, we likely need to reevaluate our theology and allow the Word of God to form our thoughts on this subject rather than our favorite theologian or preacher.

Baptism Unites the Believer with the Saving Work of Jesus

(Titus 3:3-7, Gal 3:26-27, Col 2:6-15, Rom 6:3-11, Heb 10:21-23, 1 Peter 3:21)

Good works done by us in righteousness do not save us. Baptism does not save a person. Faith is not the act that saves a person. It is God alone who saves us. The object, means, and agent of our salvation is Jesus.

God created us, breathed life into us, reached out to initiate a covenantal relationship, died on a cross in our place, was raised from the dead, and holds all things together. It is God who will restore all things. The Spirit of God empowers those who speak the gospel. The Spirit convicts and opens the individual's heart to respond to the gospel in faith and with the desire to repent. The Spirit comes upon the believer in baptism and revives the spiritually dead individual with new life. God alone, out of his own free, perfect, self-giving, and loving will, saves us in and through the work of Jesus and by regenerating our dead souls via the Holy Spirit.

Outside of the person and work of Jesus, baptism is just an empty exercise, a pointless bath for the removal of dirt. Through faith in the person and work of Jesus, baptism is our connection to and participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It marks our death to a life of sin, the removal of sin, and being set free from slavery to sin. Baptism marks our resurrection into a new, Spirit-filled life in Christ to God the Father. Our baptism unites us to the saving work of Jesus because we are putting on Jesus in our baptism. Our old self dies, and God no longer sees our sin; instead, God sees Jesus and his work.

Baptism is an Inauguration into a New Life, a New Identity, and a New Ministry

(Mt 3:13-17, Mk 1:9-10, Lk 3:21-22, Jn 1:11-13, 29-34, Col 2:12-14, 1 Cor 12:12-13, Eph 4:1-16)

Each of the four Gospel narratives records Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist. Within those narratives, we see the same three elements: Jesus being anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus's identity being affirmed or proclaimed, and the inauguration of Jesus's earthly ministry. Jesus's

baptism marked a significant change in his life and human history. The God of the universe had taken on flesh and come to earth to be the King humanity needed, but never expected.

As the kings of the Old Testament were anointed with oil as a sign of God's blessing to rule (1 Sam 10:1ff), so also Jesus was anointed with the Spirit to rule and serve with power in God's name. Just as God's anointed were proclaimed king by a prophet at a large gathering of the people (1 Sam 10:17ff), so Jesus was proclaimed and affirmed not just by a prophet (John the Baptist) but also by God the Father as his true Son. Just as the anointed and proclaimed kings then went to fulfill their duties after their inaugurations (1 Sam 11:1ff), Jesus also began to do the work of his ministry after his baptism.

This pattern holds for the followers of Jesus today. At baptism, the believer is anointed with and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to live as spiritually powerful followers of Jesus on the earth. At baptism, the believer is given a new identity as God's child and co-heir with Christ. At baptism, the believer is sent out into a new ministry life with some gift(s) of the Holy Spirit to build up the Church and make disciples. Baptism is our inauguration into the life of Christ as we are anointed, affirmed, and sent out.

Conclusion

In light of the Bible's teachings on baptism, Sunnybrook immerses believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism marks their union with Jesus as they participate in his death and resurrection. It is a beautiful and mysterious gift from God that publicly and formally marks the forgiveness of our sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the initiation into the Church of God. Baptism is the starting line of a new life, a new identity, and a new ministry for this new brother or sister in Christ.