

Why Baptism?

Depending on your background, you could have one of many different views about baptism. Maybe your parents baptized you during your infancy to ensure you would go to heaven in case the worst should happen. Some of you were baptized during your pre-teen or early teen years as a rite of passage enabling you to become part of the church. Still, there is one more group of people that you might belong to...the group that has never experienced baptism of any sort. Have you ever wondered if you've missed out on anything?

If you've ever had questions about baptism, then this information is for you! It doesn't matter if you've picked up this information as a visitor to CedarCreek or if you have been a regular attender for years—it's no accident that this pamphlet has dropped into your hands.

At CedarCreek Church, we believe that baptism should follow a person's decision to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, a person has to be old enough to hear, understand and respond to the gospel message.

It is important to realize that baptism is not a substitute for, or equivalent to, the act of salvation. Salvation is an act of God's grace. We obtain salvation through faith by believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he was crucified as payment for our sinfulness. God raised Christ from the dead on the third day. It is by God's grace that we receive salvation and there is nothing we can do to earn it for ourselves.

Baptism is the public expression of a believer's faith. At CedarCreek, we like to say that baptism is a way of "going public" with a believer's new life in Christ.

Depending on your background, you might have some difficulty with the idea that baptism comes after a person's declaration of faith rather than baptism during infancy or as a requirement for church membership. Rather than be offended or possibly overcome with an emotional reaction, take some time to study this pamphlet (or bring it with you to an upcoming baptism seminar at one of our CedarCreek campuses). In the pages that follow, you will be reading what the Bible has to say about baptism and the New Testament pattern of "belief-then-baptism" that becomes very clear in scripture.

Baptism is the public expression of a believer's faith. At CedarCreek, we like to say that baptism is a way of "going public" with a believer's new life in Christ. It is an important step of discipleship that is intended to be shared and celebrated with other Christ-followers.

Again, the purpose of this pamphlet is to walk you through the scriptures and help you understand what the Bible says about baptism. We have regularly scheduled baptism services several times a year. To participate in baptism, all you need to do is review the information in this study on your own or bring it with you to an upcoming baptism information session.

Lesson #1: The Important Step Before Baptism...Salvation

Big Point: It is important for Christ-followers to make the connection between a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and baptism. In today's study, we will look at Bible verses that outline the most important step before baptism—understanding what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

READ...What does the Bible say?

Romans 3:23 (New Living Translation)

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

THINK...Find the answers

Most of us consider ourselves "good people," so when we hear that we are sinful, some of us are offended. What does Romans 3:23 say about all of us (including those who consider themselves "good people")?

READ...What does the Bible say?

Ephesians 2:4-9 (New Living Translation)

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by **God's grace** that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

THINK...Find the answers

You might have a variety of opinions about who God is or what you believe about Him. What do you learn about God's character when you read Ephesians 2:4?

How did God demonstrate grace toward us? Underline the portion of scripture in Ephesians 2:4-9 that tells us we can do nothing to earn our salvation.

Romans 6:23

(New Living Translation)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin = Breaking God's rules. Sin is what separates us from God. We are unable to make ourselves right with God on our own.

The only way for us to have a relationship with God is to be perfect. However, not one of us is capable of attaining perfection (because of sin in our life). We all fall short of God's standard, that is why God chose to take the first step toward us and offered Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for our sins. This sacrifice is *God's gift of grace* that enables us imperfect beings to become perfect in His eyes. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is like a robe we accept and wear so that God may see us as perfect beings, even though under the robe we are still human beings and make mistakes daily.

Many people think that God won't accept them because of the mistakes they've made in life. After reading Romans 5:7-9, what would you say to someone who believes they've made too many mistakes or done too many bad things to be forgiven by God? Underline the verse that supports your answer.

Verse 8 sums up the gospel message God wants all of us to respond to. Put verse 8 into your own words:

Romans 5:7-9

(New Living Translation)

⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

- Do you understand that everyone has sinned and we cannot earn our way into God's good favor? Y N If no, what question(s) do you have?
- Do you understand that we are saved by God's favor (grace)—something we don't deserve? Y N If not, what question(s) do you have?
- **Do you accept that you have sinned in God's eyes and Jesus Christ was crucified as payment for your sins and through His sacrifice you have been made right with God? Y N**
- **Why do you think you need God's grace?**

Any other questions you have can be written in the space below:

A little baptism humor... A little son of a Baptist minister was in church one morning when he saw for the first time the rite of baptism by immersion. He was greatly interested in it, and the next morning he proceeded to baptize his three cats in the bathtub.

The first kitten bore it very well, and so did the younger cat, but the older family cat rebelled. It struggled, clawed and tore at him, and got away.

With considerable effort he caught it again and proceeded with the ceremony. But she acted worse than ever, clawing at him, and scratching his hands and face. Finally, after barely getting her splattered with water, he dropped her on the floor in disgust and said: "Fine, be an Atheist."

Lesson #2: Jesus commands us to be baptized!

Big Point: Once a person makes the decision to come to faith in Jesus Christ, the first thing a new Christian should do is be baptized!

A wedding ring is an outward sign that a person is married. A military uniform is an outward sign that a person is involved in a particular branch of the military. Similarly, water baptism is a symbol designed by God to identify a person as a disciple of Jesus Christ. However, we use the word “symbol” with caution. To say that it is “just a symbol” takes away from the depth and beauty of water baptism. Baptism is a symbol, but it is so much more than that. (from “Why Water Baptism” by James Boyd)

READ...What does the Bible say?

Matthew 28:19-20 (New Living Translation)

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. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

THINK...Find the answers

Read Matthew 28:19-20. In this passage of scripture, Jesus is speaking to disciples—both then and now—giving final instructions about what should happen between the time He ascends into heaven and returns again. What were Jesus' instructions?

Hopefully, you answered that Jesus commanded Christians to go make disciples, and then, Christians are instructed to baptize those disciples. Read the three verses below. What is the pattern that emerges when it comes to relationship between being saved and baptized?

Acts 2:41 (New Living Translation)

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

Acts 10:47-48 (New Living Translation)

⁴⁷ “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” ⁴⁸ So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Acts 16:32-33 (New Living Translation)

³² And they (Paul and Silas) 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 (jailer) and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

Baptism is a transliteration of a Greek word. The reality is that it means “to immerse” and therefore the physical act of baptism by water involves being dunked in water.

Why is it important for us to understand the New Testament pattern of “belief-then-baptism”? If we understand what baptism means for the believer, then why would getting baptized before coming to faith in Christ be ineffective?

Baptism isn't just a polite suggestion—Jesus commands it in Matthew 28:19-20. Therefore, if you say that you are a follower of Christ, then you should be baptized. Furthermore, the verses that you read seem to point to the pattern that there was only a small gap in time between coming to faith in Christ and the act of baptism.

Read Matthew 7:24-27. What do we learn about Christ-followers who are wise and those who are unwise?

Matthew 7:24-27

(New Living Translation)

²⁴ “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. ²⁵ Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. ²⁶ But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ²⁷ When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

There are a lot of people who are planning to get baptized, but are delaying it for one reason or another. If Christ commands us to do something, are there any legitimate reasons for failing to immediately act on his commands?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

If you say you are a Christ-follower and have yet to be baptized, are you ready to comply with Christ's command to be baptized at the next opportunity? Y N

Please list any reasons that you may have for putting off baptism:

“Baptism is a very special way of God communicating His love to us. When we receive God's saving grace, it is no accident that He calls us to identify with Him in a way that makes it real to us. Are you struggling with guilt over your past? It may be because you haven't given the person you once were a proper burial. Water baptism is a very powerful reminder of God's wonderful grace. The person we were before is dead forever and we are raised with Jesus as a totally new creation.” (James Boyd)

Lesson #3: Baptism as an act of worship

Big Point: *Whether you realize it or not, we were created for God's fame. And the act of baptism is an amazing way to tell God, and those watching, how important God is to you—that you are willing to give up trying and say that “Without Christ, I am hopeless.” Baptism is a wonderful act of worship to God.*

“Most Westerners take baptism for granted, but for many in the world the act requires immense courage. In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment. For Soviet or Chinese or Eastern Bloc believers, it was like signing their own death warrant.” (“Why Baptism” by James Boyd)

READ...What does the Bible say?

Isaiah 43:7 (New Living Translation)

⁷ “Bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them.”

THINK...Find the answers

Read Isaiah 43:7. Why could baptism be considered an act of worship?

READ...What does the Bible say?

Mark 1:9-10 (New Living Translation)

⁹ One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove.

THINK...Find the answers

What example does Jesus' getting baptized set for us?

What is the significance of going down into the water?

What is the significance of coming up out of the water?

NOTES:

PERSONAL RESPONSE

We've covered a lot of information while exploring the topic of baptism. If you are a Christ-follower and you have yet to be baptized, in the space below write out a paragraph explaining why you should be baptized.

“What if I'm still not ready?”

Sometimes, people are unwilling or reluctant to get baptized because there might be unfinished business in their hearts. It is important for you to evaluate whether or not any issues are hindering your desire to obey Christ's command to be baptized.

Is there anything on your heart or mind you want to address that might be getting in the way of your desire to be baptized? Y N

If there is something hindering you, we would encourage you to contact a trusted Christian friend or a CedarCreek staff member as soon as possible.

CedarCreek Statement of Faith regarding Salvation and Baptism:**Salvation:**

The Salvation of mankind is, then, wholly a work of God's free grace, not the result, in whole or in part, of human works or goodness, and must be personally appropriated by repentance and faith. When God has begun a saving work in the heart of any person, He gives assurance in His Word that He will continue performing it until the day of its full consummation. (John 3:16, Romans 10:9)

Baptism:

We believe that Baptism by immersion, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is commanded by God; that it is subsequent to conversion, that it is not a saving ordinance, but an obedient outward expression of an inward work of the Spirit of God. (Matthew 3:13-17).

Lesson #4: “I was baptized as an infant...”

Big Point: *The topic of infant baptism is controversial. Some of you have lived a lifetime under the impression that your infant baptism made you right with God and you are going to heaven because you've been baptized. It may be disheartening to see information that is contradictory to what you've always believed.*

Tradition doesn't always synch up with what's reflected in the Bible. In the New Testament, faith always preceded baptism. Since a baby has no ability to make a decision to place his/her faith in Christ, infant baptism is not a Biblical mandate. The Bible teaches that children who are unable to comprehend the Gospel would go to heaven because of God's love and grace, not on the basis of a religious ritual like baptism.

Since the purpose of baptism is to publicly profess your personal commitment to Christ, it is best if a child is mature enough to place his/her faith in Christ and understand the true meaning of baptism.

For parents with infants and young children, we provide a special worship service time when parents may dedicate their children to God. This dedication is a covenant by the parents to raise their child in the ways of the Lord until the child is old enough to make his or her own personal commitment. Baby dedication happens at CedarCreek Church twice a year—once around Thanksgiving Weekend and again on, or after, Mother's Day weekend.

“If I was baptized as an infant, do I need to be baptized a second time?”

It is recommended that you be baptized again if you have never been baptized by immersion since you became a follower of Jesus Christ. If you were baptized as an infant, believer's baptism doesn't devalue your prior experience, but simply reflects your desire to be obedient to God's Word and Christ's example.

If you were baptized into a cult or non-Christian religion, it is also recommended that you be baptized again.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

If you were baptized as an infant, what do you think now?

“I am having trouble explaining my desire to be baptized to my parents...”

If you were baptized as an infant in a Christian church, you ought to thank your parents for bringing you up in a Christian tradition. If anything ought to bring joy to the hearts of parents, it should be their child saying, *“Mom and Dad, I have come to know the Lord as my personal Savior and now, having found the Lord as my Savior, I need to proclaim my new faith by being baptized as a believer, just as the Bible teaches. I want you to come and celebrate with me to see that what you started many years ago has now grown to maturity.”*

So, if you were baptized before you came to faith in Christ, you really were “dedicated to the Lord,” not baptized in the Biblical sense. You need to do what the Bible says—once the Gospel has come to you and you have found Jesus Christ as Savior, you need to be baptized “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Final Thoughts...

The idea of baptism is so full of symbolism and poetry that even non-believers pause when they hear of someone's conscious choice for it. The reality of baptism goes even deeper, beyond anything external. It's obedience to God's word, yes, but it's also one of the great celebrations in your Christian walk. Once a heart has been opened to the wonders of Jesus' love, it naturally wants to shout it out! Baptism lets your heart speak for you, and opens the door for explaining the change that people (hopefully) see in your behavior and countenance.

When you choose to be baptized, you have an opportunity to physically experience the cleansing power of our Lord's love, and to freely share your beliefs with those who are important to you. It is certain to be one of the most precious memories of your life. It's our prayer that whenever, wherever you might choose baptism, you would fully engage in it...and cherish it.

Administrative details about getting baptized at CedarCreek Church...

Pre-Baptism:

1. The next baptism service is: _____ Campus: Perrysburg Toledo Whitehouse
2. (If I haven't already) I am planning to attend the next baptism seminar: _____
3. Once you have the date of the next baptism service, **INVITE** your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors—anyone whom you would like to celebrate with you!
4. **DO NOT** wear make-up or hair products that might come off in the tub.
5. Write out and mail, or email, your Spiritual Journey story and who is baptizing you to lauriw@cedarcreek.tv. An example of a spiritual journey is posted below. See instructions on how to submit your story on the back page.

Day of Baptism:

1. Arrive at the campus where you are being baptized at by the assigned time.
2. If you haven't turned in your Spiritual Journey story (see page 11), please bring it with you.
3. Come in baptism clothing—tee shirt and shorts (dark colors, please).
4. **BRING WITH YOU:** Towel, change of clothes, flip flops/sandals, and whoever is going to baptize you should bring the same items.
5. Make sure you make your plans to celebrate afterwards!

Example of Spiritual Journey Story:

"My life as a child was typical. I grew up in a small farm community. Was baptized as a child and confirmed as a youth. I accepted Jesus Christ into my life but didn't understand the whole picture. I did not know what He could do for me. I tried to do it all on my own.

As an adult I moved to the city and went to a lot of different churches. I would sit there, hear the word and walk out still feeling empty, numb, incomplete. There was this space in my heart that needed filled.

One Sunday morning, a couple of years ago, my wife said, "Get up! We're going to Cedar Creek Church." I didn't know what to expect, seeing I had been disappointed so many times in the past. Much to my surprise the "Creek" was an awesome experience. The people were even more wonderful. I couldn't wait to get back the following week. There was something to be said about this church. The next week is when it happened. My eyes opened wide and my heart found a new love in Jesus Christ. As I heard the message, tears of joy ran down my cheeks. God loves and accepts me for who I am. This is what I have been missing in my life for all these years and I have my wife to thank. Life will never be the same. Every time I hear the song by Jeremy Camp, I'll Take You Back, it reminds me of that second visit to the Creek, and that I am blessed with God's grace.

The reason I would like to be baptized is easy. I want the world to know I've accepted Christ into my life and what better way to celebrate! " ~B.F.

Here's how to submit your Spiritual Journey story in preparation for your upcoming baptism:

1. You can submit your story electronically by sending it in the body of an email to lauriw@CedarCreek.tv; or
2. You can write out your story on the previous page and detach page 11 and turn it into the Welcome Center/Connecting Point at your campus; or
3. You can mail your story to: CedarCreek Church, 29129 Lime City Road, Perysburg, Ohio 43551 Attn: Lauri White

If you are going to be baptized, but you did not attend a baptism class, please submit a clear, good quality headshot (sent via email is preferred) of yourself to accompany your spiritual journey story. Send the photo to lauriw@cedarcreek.tv.

Should you have difficulties with writing out your spiritual journey, or circumstances prevent you from being able to write out your paragraph, please contact us and let us know so we can accommodate you.



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