

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

The Austin Stone Community Church believes that Jesus commanded believers to be baptized in order to publicly show the work of salvation that Christ has accomplished in their hearts. The act of baptism does not save; instead, baptism is an outward display that salvation has already taken place.

“...ALL OF US WHO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? 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.”

ROMANS 6:3-4

“HAVING BEEN BURIED WITH HIM [CHRIST] IN BAPTISM, IN WHICH YOU WERE ALSO RAISED WITH HIM THROUGH FAITH IN THE POWERFUL WORKING OF GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.”

COLOSSIANS 2:12

Every time a person enters into a new life with Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that all of heaven rejoices.¹ Baptism is an outward proclamation of an inward reality that God has created new life within that person. Baptism is the new believer's testimony to the public of their belonging to Jesus. As they're immersed beneath the waters they're proclaiming that their old self, enslaved to unbelief and sin, has died. And as they're raised up out of the waters they're proclaiming that their new self, freed from sin and death, has been raised in the resurrection of Jesus and that now they belong to Jesus.

WHY DO WE BAPTIZE?

“THEN JESUS CAME FROM GALILEE TO THE JORDAN TO JOHN, TO BE BAPTIZED BY HIM. JOHN WOULD HAVE PREVENTED HIM, SAYING, ‘I NEED TO BE BAPTIZED BY YOU, AND DO YOU COME TO ME?’ BUT JESUS ANSWERED HIM, ‘LET IT BE SO NOW, FOR THUS IT IS FITTING FOR US TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ THEN HE CONSENTED.”

MATTHEW 3:13, 16-17

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE.”

MATTHEW 28:19-20

“...REPENT, AND EACH OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS...”

ACTS 2:38

¹ Luke 15:7

We baptize because Jesus modeled it himself and made it part of His ministry and part of our mission. Simply put, we baptize because Jesus commanded us to; but there is purpose and wisdom in that command. Baptism provides a decisive, public way of taking a stand that Jesus has saved you, that you're crazy about Him, and that you're going to follow Him all the days of your life.

"Sadly, the church has substituted all sorts of things for baptism: "Stand up if you have decided to follow Jesus." "Come down the aisle and meet me here in front." "Pray this prayer with me." "Sign this pledge card." Or perhaps worst of all: "Every head bowed and every eye closed. If you have accepted Jesus as your savior, just look up at me. I'll see that and know that you are going to spend eternity in heaven."²

We're probably all familiar with these statements. They're sometimes called "invitations" or "altar calls". But when you look for these in the Bible, we don't see anything that looks like this. What we do see as a clear example of a decisive, public way of proclaiming that you are now a Christian is baptism.

Essentially you are publicly proclaiming three things in Baptism:

1. To God: Thank You for saving me! I'm Yours. Help me to live a life that shows Jesus to the world.
2. To Believers: Celebrate with me! Jesus has saved me! Remember when He saved you? Encourage me, help me and keep me accountable to following Jesus.
3. To Unbelievers: I want you to know the Jesus that I know. If you see any change in my life, if you see anything good in my life, it's not me; it's Him. He wants you to know Him, as well.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM LOOK LIKE?

"AND ALL THE COUNTRY OF JUDEA WAS GOING OUT TO HIM, AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM; AND THEY WERE BEING BAPTIZED BY HIM IN THE JORDAN RIVER, CONFESSING THEIR SINS."

MARK 1:5

"IMMEDIATELY COMING UP OUT OF THE WATER, HE SAW THE HEAVENS OPENING, AND THE SPIRIT LIKE A DOVE DESCENDING UPON HIM"

MARK 1:10

"JOHN ALSO WAS BAPTIZING IN AENON NEAR SALIM, BECAUSE THERE WAS MUCH WATER THERE; AND PEOPLE WERE COMING AND WERE BEING BAPTIZED"

JOHN 3:23

² Vintage Church by Driscoll & Breshears: pg. 119

We believe that a physical submersion into the water is the best way to show the death and burial of the old self and that a physical coming up out of the water best represents the new self being raised from the dead.

“All agree that water is the element of baptism. But the debate ensues regarding how water should be applied. Some prefer to sprinkle with water in light of a handful of biblical texts that mention being sprinkled with clean water.³ Others prefer pouring, to symbolize the Spirit poured out in new-covenant blessing.⁴ Still others prefer immerse in water. We believe that the Bible clearly teaches baptism by immersion. It is the only mode associated with baptism in the Bible and the only mode that expresses the meaning of baptism as shown in passages such as Romans 6:1-10...”⁵

The word *baptism* in the Greek means “dip or immerse.” Going “into the water”⁶ and “coming up out of the water”⁷ is the common biblical language associated with baptism. Baptism by immersion was the universal practice of the early church.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

“AND HE CAME INTO ALL THE DISTRICT AROUND THE JORDAN, PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS”

LUKE 3:3

“AS THEY WENT ALONG THE ROAD THEY CAME TO SOME WATER; AND THE EUNUCH SAID, “LOOK! WATER! WHAT PREVENTS ME FROM BEING BAPTIZED?” AND PHILIP SAID, “IF YOU BELIEVE WITH ALL YOUR HEART, YOU MAY.” AND HE ANSWERED AND SAID, “I BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD.” AND HE ORDERED THE CHARIOT TO STOP; AND THEY BOTH WENT DOWN INTO THE WATER, PHILIP AS WELL AS THE EUNUCH, AND HE BAPTIZED HIM.”

ACTS 8:36-38

“FOR ALL OF YOU WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST.”

GALATIANS 3:27

Baptism is an outward proclamation of faith, and is therefore only for believers. Our understanding of the Bible is that every baptism in the New Testament was preceded by confession of sin and repentance,

³ Ezek. 36:25; Titus 3:5-6; Heb. 9:13-14, 19; 10:22.

⁴ Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 10:45; Rom. 5:5.

⁵ Vintage Church by Driscoll & Breshears: pg.119-120.

⁶ Acts 8:37-38

⁷ Mark 1:10

which is something that neither an unbeliever nor infant can do. Because baptism represents a union with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, we believe in baptism of believers only.

In light of this, we encourage everyone that was “baptized” as a baby or those that believe they were baptized before they were actually Christian to be “re-baptized”. For those that have a biblical conviction that infant baptism is biblical and valid, we would encourage you to seek out an elder with whom to dialogue and share your convictions. We are also happy to provide resources for anyone who would like to study this topic more in-depth.

DOES BAPTISM SAVE YOU?

“FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES, IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD; NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST. FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND SO THAT WE WOULD WALK IN THEM.”

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

We are saved solely by God’s grace applied to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Nothing we do can save us. Salvation is not a result of our works. We are, however, called to do good works and obey the commands of Jesus, baptism being one of them. So like all the other “good works,” we baptize and are baptized, not in order to be saved, but because we *are* saved.

Just because a Christian is not yet baptized doesn’t mean they aren’t a Christian. Baptism is an outward demonstration of what has already occurred on the inside. Similarly, if my wife is not wearing her wedding ring, she’s still married. The ring is simply an outward display that she’s married. Nevertheless, I’m glad that she wears her wedding ring! We believe that even though baptism doesn’t save you, God is pleased when His child proclaims to the world that Jesus has saved them.

Further Resources:

The Evangelical Doctrine of Baptism by John Stott:

http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_112_1_Stott.pdf