



BAPTISM 101

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

When a man and woman get married in our culture, they exchange rings as symbols of the reality that they have become husband and wife. The wedding ring isn't what makes them married – that happens when they say their "I Do's". In fact, they don't even need to exchange rings in order to be married. Yet, rings are a useful symbol because those gold bands on the third finger of the left hand tell the world that they are husband and wife. A wedding ring is an outward symbol of the inward reality that they belong to each other. Baptism is like a wedding ring.

Being baptized is not how a person becomes a Christian – you became a Christian the moment you placed your faith in Jesus Christ. If you do not get baptized, you are still a Christian because your salvation does not depend on works (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet, because Jesus taught that his followers should get baptized, you ought to obey Him, just like you are called to obey everything else He taught. Baptism is an outward symbol of the inward reality that you are a "believer in" and "follower of" Jesus Christ.

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

We're all on a spiritual journey in life, and we're all at different places on that journey. Depending on where you are on your spiritual journey, some of you will be ready for baptism while others may not be. How do you know if you're ready? This baptism event is called a "Believer's Baptism" so it is appropriate for people who are "believers in" and "followers of" Jesus Christ. If you believe God the Father loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins and if you commit to pursuing full-devotion to Jesus in all areas of your life, then you are ready to be baptized. If you're not there yet, then baptism is not an appropriate step for you to take at this point on your spiritual journey. And that is OK!

WHY IS BAPTISM IMPORTANT?

Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He gave one last command known as the "Great Commission". He said, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,*

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
Those were His marching orders for His original followers and they are His marching orders for us today.

Think about it. Of all the things Jesus could have said before leaving the earth, He said those who make a choice to believe and follow Him should be baptized. Baptism is a BIG DEAL! For the past 2,000 years baptism has been the way Christians have publicly declared their love for Jesus and their commitment to follow Him all the days of their lives.

DOES BAPTISM TAKE AWAY SIN?

There is a lot of confusion when it comes to baptism – what it does, what it doesn't do. Some people come to Bridge thinking they must get baptized in order to get their sins forgiven by God. If you believe this to be true, consider these words from the Apostle Paul. *“I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name...For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Corinthians 1:14-15,17).*

The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest evangelists to have ever walked the earth. In his own words, he said he was not sent by Jesus to baptize people, but to preach the gospel. He spent his life sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others all over the known world at that time. But he only baptized a few people. If there was even a remote possibility that you needed to get baptized to get your sins forgiven, Paul would have done it just to be safe. But he did not.

IF I'M NOT BAPTIZED, CAN I STILL GO TO HEAVEN?

Some people come to Bridge thinking they must get baptized in order to qualify for heaven. If you believe this to be true, consider the story of the crucifixion in the Bible when Jesus was being crucified between two thieves. One of the thieves continued to mock Jesus while the other said to Him, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).* This criminal was placing his faith in Jesus when he was only hours away from death. Jesus didn't say, “Thanks for placing your faith in me. It's too bad you won't get to heaven because you have never been baptized.” Instead, the gospel of Luke records this: *“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise’” (Luke 23:43).* Baptism was not necessary for the thief to get to heaven and it's not necessary for you to get to heaven either. Remember, your salvation is based on placing your faith in Jesus, not by any works (e.g. getting baptized, going to church, giving money to the poor – see Ephesians 2:8-9).

HOW DOES BRIDGE CHURCH BAPTIZE BELIEVERS?

Different churches baptize people in different ways. Some sprinkle water onto people. Others pour it over a person's head. These are great ways to baptize! At Bridge, we practice baptism by what we call "immersion" which means your entire body goes under the water.

The reason we do this is the Greek word for baptism is *baptize*, which literally means, "to dip or immerse". Back 2,000 years ago it was common to use the word "baptize" when you wanted to dye a cloth, transforming it from white to purple. In order to do this, you didn't sprinkle purple dye onto the cloth. Nor did you pour dye over it. Instead, you got a container filled with purple dye and "baptize" the cloth, full immersed the cloth in it.

So, baptism by immersion seems to best capture the meaning of the word and appears to be depicted in the New Testament. For example, in the book of Acts it says, "*And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him*" (Acts 8:38). And yet, we need to acknowledge that in the early 2nd century, only one generation removed from the original apostles, there is evidence that Christians were baptized by ways other than immersion. These various ways to baptize have continued today.

The typical way we baptize at Bridge is by immersion, by going totally under the water. Yet, some people cannot physically be baptized in this manner (e.g. broken leg, water phobia, other medical conditions). In these cases we will baptize by sprinkling. Please know that this is NOT a second rate baptism, it's just a different way to do it. In the end, God doesn't care about the amount of water used. Instead, He cares about your heart.

WHO CAN BAPTIZE ME?

Back in the days when the New Testament was written, there weren't any seminaries. Nor was anybody ordained. Back then Christians simply baptized other Christians. You didn't need to be a pastor or a priest to baptize someone back then and you don't need to be one now either.

At the upcoming baptism event, several members of our pastoral staff will be the ones baptizing people. If you prefer, your spouse, friend, parent, or growth group leader can baptize you. Anyone who is actively pursuing full devotion to Jesus Christ may baptize you. It is our hope you will select a baptizer you know and have a personal relationship with, since it makes your baptism that much more special and memorable.

Please note: Due to the varying schedules and commitments, we often need to make last minute changes to our baptizing staff. Therefore, it isn't always possible to assign you to be baptized by a particular pastor. If you feel you need to discuss this situation with our staff, please feel free to contact the church office.