

Because the Vineyard is a non-denominational church I often get asked a number of questions about baptism. The truth is that because every Vineyard is autonomous I can't answer for every Vineyard Church, only the one I pastor. What I can tell you is that every Vineyard pastor signs a statement of faith that says they believe in water baptism. So what do I believe about baptism?

Well, I believe that the precedent for baptism is our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Mark 1.9 we read of Jesus being baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist. Then again we read in the Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20 that they were to make disciples and baptize them. So as I understand it, anyone who would be a disciples of Jesus would be baptized. As the church was established in Acts from chapter 2 to chapter 22 those who became disciples of Jesus were being baptized as part of their response to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God; the stated reason for this response seems to multifold. For instance the Apostle Paul said that our baptism was partaking in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ." Colossians 2.12

"By our baptism then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... so also we may live a new life!" Romans 6.4

Other verses closely link baptism with salvation, washing away our sins, and becoming a new creature in Christ:

"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..." 1 Peter 3.21

"And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2.38

Looking at each of these verses individually it could be easy to conclude that either one gets baptized because you have already become a disciple of Jesus or in order to be saved. The fact is that baptism in the New Testament has a very close relationship with salvation. Which has generally created a concern among evangelicals because of our commitment to salvation through Christ apart from any works. The fear of most evangelicals is that too close of an association between baptism and salvation could lead people to believe that the water itself saves a person from sin, thus giving rise to the concept of "holy water." On the other hand, the



dissociation of baptism and salvation has actually led to more of works centered concept of baptism becoming nothing more than a ceremony that must be performed. Why? No one really articulates anything other than obedience, which is good enough, but could lead people to conclude that baptism is still a “necessary” obedience, thus works that must be done in order to stay saved. What is at stake in such a debate is the question, is salvation by grace or by works. This is a false dichotomy!

If we buy into this idea of grace and works being at odds with one another it's a quick step toward saying that repentance and prayer are also a works required for salvation (Which I have heard taught). The work of salvation was done on the cross by Jesus Christ, and not by any one of us. That being said, our repentance, our prayers, and our baptism have done nothing to save to us; only Jesus can do that!

I know, I know, what you want to know is, “Do I think that a person needs to be baptized to be saved?” What I want to know is why are we so interested in splitting hairs? If you and I are seeking to be obedient to Christ why would one refuse to be baptized, since it is indeed Jesus Christ’s explicit command to be baptized? And if I am baptized in some ritual, without any faith in Jesus Christ, what could I possibly hope to gain from Christ apart from faith in his saving grace and his completed work? I can’t help but conclude that dissecting this any further comes from an agenda that is either to exclude those who baptize with a view toward salvation or to exclude those who are baptized out of response to salvation. Funny how both extremes still revolve around salvation, no matter how hard you try to disassociate baptism from salvation.

So then, why do I think a person ought to be baptized? A person should be baptized because Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. If Jesus Christ is Lord then I must obey, and if he is Savior then I must be buried with him and raised to a new life. For that same reason, that is why I teach baptism by immersion. Let me explain.

First, because I believe that Jesus Christ was baptized that way.

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water."
Matthew 3.16

Second, because every example in the New Testament seems to follow this same pattern of immersion.

"...then both Philip and the man went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water..." Acts 8.38-39



Thirdly, because we get our word baptism from the Greek word that means to immerse, while the Greek word for sprinkle sounds like *ran-teed-so* and the Greek word for pouring sounds like *kee-oh*, but the Greek word from which we get our word baptism sounds like *bap-teed-so* meaning to sink or dip.

Lastly, coming full circle I believe that immersion best symbolizes burial and resurrection, and I am in pretty good company. Look at these two quotes:

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church: *"I would have the candidates for baptism completely immersed in the water as the word says and the sacrament signifies."* - The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 3-23. A.D. 1520

John Calvin, founder of the Reformed Church: *"The word 'baptize' signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church."* - Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol.2. A.D. 1536

For these reasons, I baptize those who respond to Christ's invitation by immersion. This is not to say that I reject those who have been baptized differently. If you were baptized before you were old enough to decide, or baptized by sprinkling, or pouring, that is honestly between you and God. I know from the testimony of history that Christianity is full of disciples who were sprinkled as infants and were used in a mighty way by God. There is also the thief on the cross who was never baptized (Luke 23.43) yet was promised by our Lord Jesus Christ that he would be with the Lord in paradise. With that in mind, I practice to the best of my understanding, immersion of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ to save them, and I accept every follower of Christ on his or her word who says that he/she has trusted Christ for their salvation regardless of how the person was baptized and when.

That naturally leads to some follow up questions like, "When should a person be baptized?" Well, the repeated example in the New Testament is when you believe.

"Those who believed ... were baptized ... that day! Acts 2.41

"Then Philip began with the scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' So they went down into the water and Philip baptized him." Acts 8.35-38



There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you can and should be baptized.

Another concern is whether you and your family can be baptized together? Yes! If each family member understands fully the purpose of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation, and each one has made Jesus the Lord of their life. We encourage family members to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment. I do ask that young children who wish to be baptized meet with me or one of our pastors for a pre-baptism conversation. However, it is important to remember that baptism is a personal statement of faith and commitment. It is not a family tradition. It is usually not wise to delay your baptism while waiting on other family member to accept Christ, particularly children. This puts an undue pressure on them, and delays your obedience.

A functional question I get asked is, "What should I wear when I am baptized?" I prefer that women should wear dark shorts and a dark top rather than a swimsuit, and that men should wear dark shorts (which could be swim trunks) and a t-shirt. And that you bring a change of clothes, a towel, and a plastic bag for your wet clothes. I will provide a place to change your clothes. The reason I say dark clothing and not swim suits is simply that over the years I have learned/seen more in the process of baptism than I ever wanted to know or see. So honestly, to keep from exposing yourself to me and others, please follow these guidelines.

One of the most fearful concerns that people have is, "Will I have to say anything?" I will ask you only one question, "Who do you believe that Jesus Christ is?" You need to make a statement something like, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, my Savior and my Lord." then upon your confession I will baptize you by the authority of Jesus Christ into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to wash you clean and raise you to new life.

Afterwards I want to make sure you get some prayer. Lots of wonderful things happen to people after they get baptized. As well, we remember that Jesus was tested by Satan after his baptism. So our prayer is for God to stir up the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to cover you with his protection.

Now if you have any special needs, I will do a private baptism in special circumstances. Regardless, If you have other question I would be happy to answer them. Just drop me a line or leave me a comment and I will do my best.

Ready? Give us a call and let us know, 352-587-2425 or connect with us online at myvineyard.church

