

Baptism

at The Parkway Church

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5600 Virginia Pkwy
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And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 28:18-20

"The ordinance of baptism is the immersion in water of a confessing believer into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to show forth, in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior. The one time act of being immersed in water as a believer represents our death to sin and resurrection to a new life—as well as our lifelong union with Christ and each other. As such, it is a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper."

The Parkway Church Statement of Faith

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What is Baptism?

Baptism is one of the two ordinances prescribed by our Lord, Jesus Christ, as visible symbols of invisible grace (the other being “communion” or what is often called “The Lord’s Supper”). These ordinances function as discernible and tangible representations of both the invisible realities of the gospel and the Spirit’s application of this gospel to our lives. Much like a wife’s wedding ring serves as a visible representation of the covenant her husband has made to her, so too the ordinances of baptism and communion serve as visible representations of the covenant Christ has made to His Bride.

Both baptism and communion provide believers with the opportunity to remember God’s goodness and grace as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ; specifically, these ordinances vividly illustrate Christ’s death and resurrection, including the believer’s participation in His death and resurrection through being united to Him in faith. In baptism, specifically, as we enter into the water or watch another do so, we are reminded that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead, and that *we too* have died to the old self in order to live for Christ.

Notice that these ordinances are informed by a vast depth of theology. As it is obvious that what someone believes about marriage would affect how they officiate a wedding, so it is also true that what a person believes about baptism necessarily affects how they will perform the ordinance. Who should be baptized? When should they be baptized? How should they be baptized? All of these questions are answered as we reflect upon what baptism means.

As baptism is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person’s union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection, it signifies a number of significant realities:

1. Christ’s death and resurrection
2. The disciple’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection
3. Death to sin and the new life in which a disciple walks
4. Cleansing and washing away of sin and release from its mastery

Rather than reducing baptism to the lowest common denominator, we should instead celebrate the intricate and multi-faceted beauty of this reminder of God’s grace.

Is Baptism Merely a Symbol?

In the history of the Church, there have been various views on the degree and type of grace communicated in the ordinances or sacraments. This comes up in both discussions on baptism and in regards to communion. On one side of the spectrum is the Roman Catholic belief that the sacraments provide justifying grace. In other words, Christians actually become *more justified* as they partake of the elements. In regards to communion, the elements physically transform from bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). In regards to baptism, original sin is washed away and the baptismal waters are regenerative (that is, individuals are “born again” through the act of baptism). Though the Reformers disagreed with the Roman Catholic view that the ordinances were means of justification, they didn’t exactly agree on an alternative view for either communion or baptism.

Some of the followers of the early Reformers held to a strictly “memorial view” of baptism, in which baptism is nothing more than a mere symbol. While this view has permeated the American church (particularly those with Baptist convictions), it was a minority view within the Reformation itself and seems to be an overreaction and overcorrection to the Roman Catholic view.

That being said, baptism, like communion, is certainly a symbol; but, it’s not *merely* a symbol. It is instead in some mysterious sense a “means of grace,” in which God sanctifies and encourages His people. Something mysterious and gracious happens in that water both for the person being baptized and for those who bear witness to the event. As we partake of the act or bear witness to it, our hearts are encouraged and our spirits nourished. Having said this, it is important to bear in mind a few helpful truths regarding what baptism is not and does not do:

1. **Baptism does not save.** Though grace is mysteriously mediated through the ordinance, it is not saving grace but rather sanctifying grace. In other words, we are more conformed to the image of Christ as we obey Him in the call to be baptized. This should be obvious as any act of obedience is a means of grace for our sanctification.
2. **Baptism is not “necessary” for salvation.** Without in any way diminishing the duty and delight of baptism for a believer, we must also warn against thinking which suggests that salvation is dependent upon baptism. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

{For more thoughts on why baptism does not save and is not strictly necessary for salvation, see Appendix D: Does Baptism Save?}

Can a Person be Saved Without Being Baptized?

If baptism doesn't save and isn't necessary for salvation, then does that mean it is unnecessary or unimportant? Not at all! While a person can be saved without being baptized--for instance, someone converted just prior to death (see Luke 23:39-43)--anyone who willingly refuses or avoids the ordinance understands neither baptism nor salvation. It is not merely a sacred duty, but should also be a deep delight and joy for those who understand the relationship between faith and obedience.

Why Should One Be Baptized?

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 28:18-20)

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41)

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

"Why" is always an important question to ask when it comes to motivations for obedience. When looking for biblical reasons to be baptized, a few rise to the surface:

1. To obey the command of Christ

2. To signify that a person is a disciple of Christ
3. To follow the example of Christ

Of all of these, the most important and influential is the command of Christ. Christ expects and demands that those who would love and trust Him would obey His word and that includes submission to the responsibility of baptism. That said, baptism is not merely a responsibility, but also a privilege. We have the opportunity to evidence our trust in and love for our King through obedience to his command to practice this ordinance. If we think of baptism as a mere burden, we have not properly understood the joy of following Christ in the call to be baptized. We should have a similar response as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36) who, when he believed the gospel, proclaimed, "What prevents me from being baptized?" When we believe the gospel, out of joy we should eagerly anticipate our participation in the ordinance which signifies our belief.

That said, sometimes anticipation is not a person's first response to the command to be baptized. Oftentimes there are mixed feelings. Some of that might be simple ignorance as to the beauty of obedience in this area while some might be related to fear. What if I'm ridiculed by friends or family members? What if there is some deeper form of persecution (especially in cultures more antagonistic to the gospel) such as the loss of job, imprisonment or even death?

Without ignoring or dismissing those concerns, the eternal reward of obedience to Christ is always worth any temporal costs.

In short, the desire to be baptized should be motivated by a longing to glorify God in faithful obedience. Any other motivations (like getting baptized to complete the membership process of a particular local church, or to please a friend or family member, etc.) should not be the primary or ultimate reason for seeking to be baptized.

Who Should be Baptized?

Throughout history, the Church has answered this question in two very different ways. Those two positions are called: paedobaptism and credobaptism. Credobaptism maintains that only those who give credible profession of faith should be baptized. On the other hand, paedobaptism (the Greek *paidion* means child or infant) maintains that the infant children of believers should also receive the sign of the covenant by being baptized. For

most of church history and in most branches and denominations of Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.), paedobaptism has been practiced.

While tradition and history are important, they are not our ultimate authority and so our view of baptism must proceed from Scripture. In the light of Scripture, it seems as though credobaptism (from *credo* meaning faith or belief) is the best representation of the meaning of baptism. In other words, only those who have been regenerated and trust Christ as Lord and Savior should be baptized. This view is also known as “believer’s” or “confessor’s” baptism.

Given our theological convictions, we only baptize those who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Throughout Scripture baptism is explicitly and implicitly tethered to repentance, receiving the Word, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. For example, consider the following passages:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41)

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

Do you not know that 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)

There is no compelling evidence to suggest that nonbelievers were baptized and any alleged implicit evidence seems to be based on speculation and misinterpretation.

{For a more comprehensive overview of the differences and theological rationale for rejecting paedobaptism, check out Appendix C in this material.}

Should a Person be Re-baptized?

Whereas communion is a regular ongoing activity (we practice weekly communion for example), baptism is a one-time event. Therefore, each and every Christian should only be baptized once.

So a Christian should never be “re-baptized.” That said, this can be misleading in that answering this question presupposes that we properly define baptism. If baptism by definition is restricted to believers then those who were sprinkled, effused, or immersed before conversion haven’t actually been baptized. In other words, if you were sprinkled, effused, or immersed as a baby or at some other time before genuine faith in Christ then you don’t need to be “re-baptized,” you need to be “baptized” for the first time since your previous experience was something other than baptism.

The question is therefore, “were you truly trusting Christ when you were “baptized?” If so, then you shouldn’t be re-baptized. If not, then you should.

There will always be seasons of growth and greater periods of maturity in the life of those who have trusted in the gospel. Believers must not be rebaptized each time they experience greater joy and sanctification. However, if you believe that your original experience was prior to truly trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior, you should pursue obedience in this area by being baptized now. If you are unsure if you were saved or not prior to being baptized, talk to a staff member or elder to help ask questions and process together.

When Should a Person be Baptized?

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

In general, a person should be baptized as soon as possible after he or she trusts Christ (but that doesn’t mean that you should stop reading this paper and go jump in a pool). Although it is pretty common in our culture to indefinitely delay baptism, the Scriptures do not speak of such a delay in which a regenerate believer refrains from obedience to the ordinance. Instead, throughout Scripture baptism is somewhat immediate. This pattern should be emulated unless there are convincing reasons to delay baptism (more on that below).

Improper Motivations for Delayed Baptism:

Fear

One of the most common reasons for delaying is fear; but such anxiety should not hinder our obedience. It is important to know that any fear which motivates us to disobey what Christ has commanded is sin, and thus should not serve as an authority in the decision to be baptized. Confronting sin is an essential aspect of discipleship, and it is a practice that will mark the life of every believer. What better way to begin this ongoing process of sanctification by confronting the fear of man and submitting to the Word of God? While there is no expectation that a believer will fully conquer fear, there is a definite expectation that all believers will confront fear and not allow it to rob them of joy and grace.

Not being “good enough”

There will never be a time where a person will be “good enough” for baptism. Our right to enter those waters is grounded upon Christ’s righteousness, not our own. In fact, the entire reason that we need salvation and baptism is that we are not good enough. To wait until you are good enough to be baptized completely inverts the gospel and the meaning of the ordinance. If we have been united to Him, we should confidently draw near in obedience to His command and example.

A Good Motivation for Temporarily Delaying Baptism:

At The Parkway Church, we ask those who wish to be baptized to delay only so that we can hear their testimony and discuss the meaning of baptism. Given the potential for someone to misunderstand the gospel or misunderstand the meaning of baptism, this delay helps us to lovingly disciple those who wish to be baptized. In most cases, the time between someone requesting baptism and our accommodating the request is about a week or two. Occasionally, we will ask a person to wait a little longer if there is reasonable doubt about their understanding of the gospel or their love for Christ.

How Should a Person be Baptized?

Though other denominations and theological traditions baptize by pouring or sprinkling, The Parkway Church practices baptism by *immersion*. We do so in

light of the following considerations:

1. The Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizo*) literally means to *plunge, submerge, or immerse.*

Our English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek *baptizo*. Unlike a translation of a term (e.g. *plunge, submerge, immerse*), a transliteration doesn't tell you what a word means, but rather simply reproduces the pronunciation of a word from one language to another (e.g. *baptizo* is transliterated as *baptize*). Another example would be the word *Christ*, which is a transliteration of the Greek word, *christos*, which means *anointed*.

This is important because when we read the word "baptize" or "baptism" in Scripture, we are really just reading a Greek word without ever stopping and asking what that word actually means. *Baptizo* was used in Greek literature to describe the act of immersing something in water or another liquid (like changing the color of a garment by dipping it into dye). It later became a technical term that referred specifically to the Christian ordinance of baptism, but was never really translated in order to protect the emerging tradition of sprinkling.

If we were to translate *baptizo*, then much confusion regarding the practice would be cleared up. For instance, consider the following passages with the term translated rather than transliterated.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, submerging 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 28:18-20)

So those who received his word were plunged, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41)

And now why do you wait? Rise and be immersed and wash away your sins, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

2. The representation of union in Christ's death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion.

Whether buried below or above ground, the symbolism of burial is still that of being placed under something. Likewise, resurrection is accomplished by coming out of something (whether grave or tomb). Immersion best symbolizes this reality by actually placing the believer under the water and bringing them out.

In addition, it is interesting to note the use of water to symbolize judgment in the Scriptures (the flood of Genesis 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exodus 14, for example). Thus, by passing through the waters of baptism, the believer expresses trust that God's judgment has been satisfied by Christ. Or to say it another way, as the believer goes down into the waters of God's judgment, he trusts that he will emerge (as did the people of Israel) unharmed, having been rescued from his enemy.

having been buried with him 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)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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)

3. The surrounding context of baptisms in the Scriptures suggests baptism by immersion.

When we read the various descriptions of baptism in Scripture, there seem to be clear evidences of being submerged under water that don't seem to make sense if what is practiced is merely sprinkling or effusion (pouring). One would not need to go down into or come up out of the water if all that is practiced is pouring or sprinkling. In addition, when Scripture references plentiful water, such is an unnecessary condition in the practice of non-immersive modes of baptism. Immersion requires a substantial amount of water whereas sprinkling or pouring requires merely a few ounces or cups of water.

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him... (Matthew 3:16)

And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins...And

when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (Mark 1:5, 10)

John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized... (John 3:23)

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:38-39)

Where Should a Person be Baptized?

Although there are no prescriptions in the Scriptures as to location, we prefer to practice the ordinance within the context of the local church in order to allow the congregation to celebrate together in a person's act of obedience and submission.

That said, we do not want to prescribe what the Scriptures do not, and thus we do allow for baptism to occur outside the weekly gathering. While there are some advantages to being baptized in the context of the local church, to do so is not a command of Scripture (see the example of Ethiopian eunuch among other instances from Acts). For those wishing to be baptized at The Parkway Church or by Parkway staff or elders, we will set aside a weekend to perform the ceremony immediately after our worship service.

Who Can Perform Baptism?

The Bible gives no prescription for the requirements to perform baptism. Contrary to some traditions, there seems to be no biblical reason to restrict the duty to those who have been ordained to vocational ministry. Therefore, theologically, it seems as though any believer (who has themselves been baptized) can baptize another believer. That said, when it comes to baptisms that are performed within the context of our corporate gatherings (as part of a Sunday worship service), we require the person who baptizes to be a member of our church (whether an elder, staff member, deacon, or lay member). In addition, a staff member or elder will be present to oversee the ceremony.

Appendix A: Baptism Process at The Parkway Church

Prior to the Baptism:

We ask those wishing to be baptized to meet with a staff member to provide an opportunity for us to explain the theology of baptism and hear them articulate their understanding of the gospel and their conversion experience. Assuming that there are no questions or concerns, we will then schedule a baptism for an upcoming weekend.

Baptism Services:

We baptize as part of a Sunday worship service. On the morning of, the baptismal candidate will meet with a staff member in order to discuss last minute logistics which basically consist of the following:

1. Near the end of the service, the baptismal candidate will leave the sanctuary in order to change clothes. While he or she is doing so, an elder will briefly explain the purpose of baptism for the congregation during the closing commission. At that time, the congregation will be dismissed from the sanctuary and will re-gather in the foyer around the baptistery.
2. After the candidate has changed clothes, a few of the elders will meet with him or her in order to pray with and for them while the congregation is re-gathering in the foyer.
3. Once the congregation is re-gathered, we will begin the ceremony by giving an opportunity for the candidate or person administering the ordinance to read a previously prepared and approved testimony (candidates are not required to share a testimony, but it is an option should they desire).
4. Before immersing the candidate, a pastor or staff member will ask them three traditional baptismal questions:

Do you believe and confess that Jesus died for your sins, rose from the grave, and is coming again?

Do you believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior?

Do you desire and promise to submit your life fully to the kingdom of God and the authority of His word?

5. The person administering the ordinance will then say: Therefore, it is my honor to baptize you, my (brother or sister) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Helpful Hints:

- Please wear dark shorts and a dark shirt of substantial length as to maintain modesty.
- Bring a change of clothes, towel, and bag to hold your wet clothes after you change.
- Invite family and friends to join you and ask one of them to take pictures of the ceremony for you.
- Be in prayer in the days leading up to baptism. The enemy is on the prowl and seeking opportunities to deceive and discourage you, but greater is He Who is in you.

Appendix B: Baptism and Membership

Throughout church history, baptism has been seen as an entrance point into the universal and local church for at least three reasons:

1. The mission of the church according to Christ's great commission (Matthew 28) is to make disciples, and the means for doing so includes baptizing and teaching to obey all of Christ's commands (including the command to be baptized). Therefore, a local church cannot carry out its responsibility to make disciples without baptism.
2. One of the primary purposes of membership is for a local church to affirm the confession and testimony of a member. But if a person has not yet been baptized, they have not yet participated in the appointed means of publicly signifying their testimony and faith. Therefore, a church cannot publicly affirm a person's confession if that person hasn't yet publicly confessed.
3. Refusing to be baptized is sinful. Since the church has been called to discipline members who persist in ongoing unrepentant sin (including through the ultimate step of excommunication), allowing someone to join the church while persisting in the ongoing unrepentant sin of refusing to be baptized would be inconsistent.

In light of this reasoning, baptism is a necessary prerequisite for membership at The Parkway Church. Anyone wishing to join the church must be or have previously been immersed following conversion. Should a person feel as though their circumstances provide an exception to this general rule (for instance, if they have a disability making immersion impractical), they are encouraged to talk to an elder or staff member for counsel.

Appendix C: Credobaptism vs. Paedobaptism

As discussed in the section on "Who Should be Baptized?" The Parkway Church only baptizes those who profess to be believers in the person and work of Jesus Christ (called credobaptism or "believer's baptism"). However, not all denominations and traditions follow this practice. In fact, most Christians in most branches and denominations throughout Church history have practiced what is known as infant baptism (called paedobaptism). This includes Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Anglicanism and a number of mainline protestant denominations. While the outward practice of the form looks similar, the underlying theologies of each are quite distinct. In particular, there are two main forms of paedobaptism: those who view baptism as regenerative (Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, for instance) and those who view baptism as a non-regenerative sign for the believing community and their children (Presbyterianism and Methodism, for example).

Where Does Infant Baptism Come From?

There is no biblical evidence of the practice of infant baptism in the early church. However, it seems that the practice originated somewhat early in church history. This appears to be due to a combination of theology and circumstance.

The theological conviction was a growing view of original sin. Throughout the first few centuries of the church, theologians became more and more convinced that all humans are born with the stain and guilt of sin, with the ultimate crescendo in Augustine's rebuke of Pelagius in the 5th century. And with this came the historical circumstance of a high infant mortality rate in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Given the reality of both original sin and infant mortality, the church began to mistakenly apply the sign to infants thinking that it was better to be safe than sorry. Basically, if all people are born sinners, and the penalty of sin is eternal condemnation, then infants that died before they could repent and believe were at risk of enduring this condemnation (or so they thought). Fearing for their children's eternal status, believers baptized their infants and crossed their fingers--hoping to wash away their infants' sin through baptism, so that they might avoid the eternal penalty for original sin. This is also when baptism transitioned from immersion to sprinkling or effusion (as there was a corresponding desire to not immerse infants).

Though we can sympathize with these parents, we believe that while God can absolutely save a child who dies in infancy, He does so by grace alone and not by the virtue or act of baptism. Neither the doctrine of original sin nor the tragic circumstance of infant mortality should lead the church to alter the meaning and significance of baptism.

Does Baptism Regenerate?

According to some traditions, infants are baptized so that they might be regenerated or "born again." As the child is unable to exercise saving faith, the faith of the church is effective to remove original sin and bestow saving grace.

However, the faith of another person will not substitute for a person's own response to the gospel, and the baptismal waters hold no magical powers of regeneration. While God's grace is certainly present in the waters, it is the grace of sanctification, not regeneration or justification.

There is nothing in Scripture that suggests that regeneration takes place through baptism. Instead, Scripture clearly teaches that it is those who are already regenerated who are to be baptized (see passages noted under "Who Should be Baptized?" above).

Is Baptism a Non-Regenerating Sign for Believers AND Their Children?

Although some forms of paedobaptism teach that baptism is the means by which faith and regeneration take place, others do not (Presbyterian and Reformed, for instance). In these traditions, faith alone is the instrument in justification, and therefore saving grace is not bestowed in the waters; but, these traditions will argue that there is still a mandate in Scripture for believers to baptize their children.

This view is founded upon three main arguments:

1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant.
2. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant as circumcision was the sign of the Old.
3. There is essential continuity between the Old and New Covenants.

Within the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, Israel was commanded to circumcise their sons on the eighth day as a sign and seal of their being included within God's covenant with the nation. Since baptism is analogous to

circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12), these forms of protestant paedobaptism thus teach that the sign and seal should be applied to children of New Covenant believers, as well. As Acts 2:39 states, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off."

Response:

Much could be said in response to our brothers and sisters in the faith who hold this view of baptism. For a more comprehensive treatment, please consider our Theological Equipping Class from May 20, 2018 titled *Paedobaptism vs. Credobaptism and the Sign of the New Covenant*.

Here is a short summary of the arguments advanced in that resource:

1. The covenant community of Israel was primarily entered into physically (by birth) whereas the New Covenant community of the Church is entered into spiritually (by rebirth - being "born again"). Whereas paedobaptism prescribes baptism for those in physical infancy, credobaptism (believer's baptism) insists upon the baptism of those in *spiritual* infancy, having been born again through the Holy Spirit. So, the question to ask is "how does one enter into the covenant community?" In the Mosaic Covenant, one enters through physical birth, and thus physical infants are circumcised. In the New Covenant, one enters through rebirth, and thus regenerate believers should be baptized.
2. The Old Covenant community was a mixed community composed of both believers and unbelievers (Romans 2:29, 9:6). On the other hand, the New Covenant community is composed only of believers. In fact, in reading the Old Testament prophecies about a New Covenant, that is one of the foundational distinctives of this new covenant. According to Jeremiah 31:34, the newness of the new covenant consists in the fact that all who are in the covenant community are believers (unlike in the Abrahamic and Mosaic communities).
3. Though there is a great degree of continuity between the covenants, there is also substantial discontinuity. The Mosaic Covenant consisted of shadows which pointed to the substance fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). We need to be careful about directly applying elements of the Mosaic Covenant without recognizing the essential distinctions. In fact, there is explicit evidence of a change in the application of the sign of covenant membership between the covenants. Whereas in the Mosaic covenant, the sign of circumcision was to be applied only to boys, baptism is intended for both male and female.

- Those who desire to maintain continuity between the covenants would have to at least recognize that there is discontinuity at this point, possibly suggesting elements of discontinuity elsewhere as well.
4. The nature of the signs themselves differ. For instance, circumcision signified that an eventual savior would arise from Israel and bring about salvation and the kingdom. In fact, the very reason that circumcision involved male genitalia was to signify that it would be an *offspring* or *seed* of Israel who would fulfill this hope and anticipation. Thus the meaning of circumcision was true regardless of whether or not an Israelite boy believed the promises. On the other hand, baptism symbolizes not just that Christ would come, but that He has already come, and that He has died and risen again and that forgiveness of sins is given to those He has redeemed to Himself. Unlike circumcision, the meaning, promises, and symbolism of baptism (forgiveness, reconciliation, resurrection to life) are only true for those who have actually believed. In other words, the promise of circumcision (the Messiah is coming to bring about the kingdom) was true whether an individual Israelite believed it or not, whereas the promise of baptism (forgiveness of sins, etc.) is only received through faith. Thus it would be inappropriate to apply the sign to any who do not believe, including infants.
 5. Passages such as Acts 2:39 (*the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off*) do not actually affirm the paedobaptist position when studied in context for a couple of reasons. First, the "promise" which is affirmed is the promise of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4 and 2:33), and it is specifically applied to "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." To apply this passage to infant baptism would imply that all infants receive the promise of the Holy Spirit and are united to Christ. Although some traditions would indeed hold to that, most Protestant forms of paedobaptism would vehemently disagree with the idea that all baptized infants possess the Spirit or are "in Christ." Second, the fact that the promise is for "your children" should no more lead us to think that all children are covenant community members as the fact that the promise is for "all who are far off" should lead us to conclude that all people everywhere are community members. The passage teaches that the Holy Spirit will be given to all whom Christ calls to Himself, not that we should baptize our children.
 6. Lastly, one of the arguments in favor of the paedobaptist position is that it has a rich historical heritage. For some 1500 years, it was the universal practice of the church. In response a couple of points deserve mention.

First, longevity is not an ultimate measure of truth. While tradition is helpful, it is Scripture which is our ultimate authority. Indulgences, the veneration of Mary, and transubstantiation also have somewhat lengthy traditions and yet we willingly reject those positions. We should be willing to do the same with some received traditions on baptism. Second, although similar in form, Roman Catholic and most Reformed views of paedobaptism are very different in actual meaning. Interestingly, it is not the Protestant view of paedobaptism which has historical roots, but rather the Roman Catholic view. So if tradition and age are to be taken into account, then the only option is the Roman Catholic view of baptism as being regenerative and sacramental. The particular Protestant view of paedobaptism in which it is a non-regenerative sign and seal for the infants of believers comes about only during the Reformation, during which time there was also a rediscovery of the credobaptist position. That means that Protestant paedobaptism and Protestant credobaptism are roughly the same age, so neither should claim traditional superiority and must instead look to Scripture for authority.

For these reasons, the baptism of believers (rather than unbelieving infants) seems to be the biblical model. This position is confirmed by the various descriptions of the baptisms we encounter in the early Church as recorded in Acts.

Acts 2:

In chapter 2, we find Peter preaching the word in the midst of the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The crowd cries out in conviction, "Brothers, what shall we do?" to which Peter responds, "repent and be baptized." In verse 41, we read that those who were baptized were "those who received his word." So it seems that baptism is explicitly related to repentance and a reception of the word of God.

Acts 8:

There are two accounts of baptism in chapter 8. The first occurs in response to the preaching of Philip (one of the 7 men selected in Acts 6 to assist the apostles) in Samaria. In verse 12, we read that many were baptized "when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."

The second account again involves the ministry of Philip as he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. After hearing the preaching of Christ from Isaiah 53, the eunuch requests baptism, and Philip obliges. The text itself does not specify the conditions for such baptism; although, some manuscripts record the eunuch stating, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Acts 9:

Chapter 9 contains the baptism of Paul immediately after his experience on the Damascus road. Within the context, we read that Ananias was specifically sent to minister to Paul that he might receive sight (having been blinded by the vision of Christ in 9:3-9) and "be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 10:

The 10th chapter includes the baptism of Cornelius and, presumably, his household. After Peter preached the gospel to those who were gathered, "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word." Peter describes this as having "received the Holy Spirit." When Peter recounts the experience to the church in Jerusalem, their interpretation of the event is that it evidenced that "God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Acts 16:

Like chapter 8, this chapter also includes two distinct accounts of baptisms. The first involves Lydia and her household. Though nothing is specifically stated about the condition of her household (see below "What About Household Baptisms?"), Lydia's baptism is related to the reality that "the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul," and her subsequent appeal is based upon her perceived faithfulness (10:15).

The second account in chapter 16 involves the jailer and his household, who heard the "word of the Lord" that was preached to them by Paul and Silas (vs. 32). As in the case of Lydia, no explicit mention is made as to the spiritual condition of the jailer's household, but his own is specifically included as vs. 34 indicates that they rejoiced "that he had believed in God."

Acts 19:

The final account of baptism in the book of Acts is found in chapter 19. In this context, Paul discovers some "disciples" who had been baptized into John's

baptism of repentance but had not yet received the Holy Spirit. In response, Paul baptizes them, lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit.

From this brief look at the recorded baptism in the book of Acts, we find that in almost every instance there is explicit mention of faith, repentance, or some other such evidence of regeneration on the part of the one being baptized. The only possible exceptions would include those few instances of “household baptisms” to which we now turn.

What about household baptisms?

Though there are only two *explicit* mentions of the baptism of entire households in the book of Acts (both in Acts 16 as mentioned above), the narrative of Cornelius’ conversion probably implies the same. Proponents of infant baptism believe that these 3 events can be used as implicit justification for infant baptism. Basically (the argument goes), if households were baptized, and if those households included infants, then we have biblical evidence of the practice of paedobaptism.

So what are we to make of these claims? Do these instances of household baptisms provide biblical support for paedobaptism? Here are a few thoughts:

1. It must be noted that the entire argument is founded upon the presumed presence of infants within the household. The text itself does not necessitate such a reading. There is no convincing evidence of infants in the households (though to be fair, there is no explicit statement otherwise either). Thus, this is at best an argument from silence.
2. The texts in question have hints which suggest that all who were baptized had been converted. For instance, Acts 10 explicitly states that Cornelius “feared God with all his household.” In other words, all in his household were described as fearing God. Those who were baptized were those who “feared God.” Additionally, in the case of the baptism of the jailer’s household in Acts 16, we find another clue suggesting that only believers were baptized.

“Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up

into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.” (Acts 16:30–34)

Notice that in Acts 16:31, Paul or Silas says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” This cannot mean that if the jailer believed, then everyone in his household would be granted saving faith. The appropriate interpretation of this text is that those in the household who believed would be saved (like the jailer, for example); *and* when we see the jailer and “all his family” getting baptized (verse 33), we can deduce that those who were baptized were those who believed (excluding un-believing and un-rejoicing infants). Also, note that the word is spoken to his entire household (verse 32), and his entire household rejoiced together (verse 34).

3. Lastly, consider the relationship between 1 Corinthians 1:16, which states that Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas” and 1 Corinthians 16:15, which declares that “the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they devoted themselves to the service of the saints.” So it is true that Paul baptized this “household,” but that “household” is explicitly said to consist of devoted *converts*.

Summary:

While the timing and mode of baptism are not absolutely essential to the Christian faith, they are nonetheless important theological convictions that we hold firmly. We love and respect our brothers and sisters who practice infant baptism, but we believe and subsequently teach believer's baptism as the true biblical form.

Appendix D: Does Baptism Save?

Certain churches and theological traditions (Churches of Christ and Roman Catholicism, for example) teach that baptism saves and/or that it is necessary for salvation. For a thorough assessment of that view, check out our blog, "Does Baptism Save You?" on the Parkway website. Here is a summary of the response to this question.

The short answer is that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from any works (including baptism). This is absolutely clear in Scripture:

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Romans 4:3-5)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:23-26)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:8-9)

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Philippians 3:8-9)

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith - just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? (Galatians 3:5-6)

who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began... (2 Timothy 1:9)

Not only does the Bible explicitly teach that we are saved by faith alone and apart from any works, but we also have passages that explicitly say that people receive the Spirit, are justified, regenerated, etc. *before* their baptism (Acts 10:47 for instance). With this in mind, it is strange to argue that baptism is necessary for salvation when we encounter individuals in Scripture being saved before being baptized.

What about passages that seem to say that baptism "saves?"

So, salvation is by grace alone and through faith alone, but what about the passages that seem to say that baptism saves you? There are actually five passages in particular that are sometimes used to argue that baptism is necessary for regeneration. Let's examine each one:

1. *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* (Mark 16:16)

First, this passage is not actually in the Bible. Yes, you read that right. What we mean is that the long ending of Mark 16 isn't in our oldest and best manuscripts. Mark 16 actually ends at verse 8. Remember, "the Bible" isn't what you *think* the Bible is in your English translation. Rather the wording of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts is "the Bible" and your English Bible is inspired to the degree that it accurately reflects the best manuscripts we have. Your English translators will typically put the long ending of Mark in big brackets to show that this passage's authenticity has a dubious status.

Second, let's notice what the text actually says. It says that anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved (which everyone agrees with), and it says that those who don't believe will be condemned. *Notice that the issue of someone who believes, but hasn't gotten around to baptism yet isn't addressed at all.* If the author wanted to say that baptism was necessary for salvation he would

have said "...but whoever *is not baptized* will be condemned." Notice the phrase "is not baptized" is not there in the text. It is a logical fallacy (called "denying the antecedent") to add more than is actually in the text. For example, the phrase, "if it's raining outside, the grass will be wet," doesn't mean, "if it's not raining outside, the grass won't be wet" (because the grass could be wet because of some other reason, like the sprinklers or the dew that morning). Likewise, you can't take a text that says, "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved," and turn it around to say, "whoever believes, but hasn't been baptized yet, will not be saved." The passage simply doesn't comment on the fate of a person who does believe and gets hit by a bus before being baptized.

2. *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (John 3:5)

What does it mean to be "born of water?" What does the "water" refer to? Well, it can't refer to natural birth (amniotic fluid being the "water") for a couple of reasons. First, we don't have any Greek manuscripts referring to natural birth as someone being "born of water." That is more of a modern, scientific idea. Second, if "water" refers to natural birth, it would mean that babies that die in the womb cannot be saved because they haven't been physically born. So, does the phrase "born of water" instead refer to baptism?

Nope. It actually refers to the prophetic hope of being sprinkled/washed clean by the Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25-27, which says:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

What Jesus is saying is that if one wants to be saved, they have to experience the new birth mentioned in Ezekiel where God cleanses and regenerates.

This interpretation is appropriate for the following reasons:

1. Ezekiel represents a singular act of conversion described as involving *both* being born again of the Spirit *and* having your heart washed with the Spirit like water.
2. Jesus corrects Nicodemus for not knowing about this passage that he, as “a teacher of Israel,” should know. This makes sense if Jesus is referencing a passage in the Old Testament that Nicodemus should have known. It makes no sense for Jesus to rebuke Nicodemus for not knowing about Christian baptism.
3. “Water” in the book of John is a constant metaphor for the Holy Spirit (for example, Jesus tells the woman at the well that God will give her “living water”).
4. Jesus plays on words several times in this passage (for example, he uses the same Greek word for “wind” and “Spirit” in his conversation with Nicodemus), so it is conceivable that he is using additional *non-literal* imagery here when talking about water.
5. The Greek word “kai” doesn’t just mean “and.” It also can mean “also,” “even,” “namely,” or a few other things. The phrase could be saying, “born of water, namely, the Spirit” (the Spirit, who is the one who truly cleanses).
6. The idea of the Spirit cleansing (like water) was also a popular theme in Judaism. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QS 4:20-21 says, “Then God will purify the deeds of man by his truth and he will cleanse the frame of man. He will eradicate the perverse spirit from within his flesh, and cleanse him by the Holy Spirit from all his wicked deeds.”
7. This phrase is probably a hendiadys. A hendiadys is where two words describe the same thing. For example, if a man says, “I enjoy my wife’s love and affection,” that doesn’t mean that he’s talking about two separate things. He’s using two different words (“love” and “affection”) to talk about one thing, which is his wife’s compassion for me. Love and affection is a hendiadys. Or if you hear someone say, “It was a great day despite the rain and weather,” the “rain” and “weather” aren’t two separate things but one reality: rainy weather. In the same way, the Spirit and water are probably supposed to be referring to the same reality: new life.
8. There are many people who are saved/forgiven in the gospels who don’t get baptized. But this would be impossible if Jesus is saying (at the beginning of his ministry, mind you) that you must be baptized to be saved. This statement would come before the woman who cries at his feet, the criminal on the cross, etc. To say it another way, if Jesus is saying baptism is necessary for salvation, then everyone who lives after he says

that statement has to be baptized. Yet, many are saved, after he says that statement, without being baptized.

So, rather than arguing that baptism is necessary for salvation, Jesus is asking Nicodemus in John 3:5, "how do you, Nicodemus, a teacher of the law, not realize that one must receive the kind of birth that Ezekiel prophesied about? You need your heart sprinkled clean (water) and you need your heart changed (Spirit)."

3. 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)

On first read, this is the most difficult text. On the surface it literally says, "baptism...saves you." There you go, checkmate! Or maybe not. A closer look is necessary.

Notice what this passage says actually saves. Not the act of the washing itself (the removal of dirt), but rather the meaning of the act (the appeal to God and the link to the resurrection of Christ).

Within the context of 1 Peter 3, the apostle is drawing parallels from the gospel and linking it back to the story of Noah which is why water is even mentioned at all. As Noah went through, but was preserved in the midst of God's judgment (symbolized by water), so believer's are preserved in the midst of God's judgment. Whereas Noah and his family were preserved by virtue of their physical location in the ark, believers are preserved through the waters of judgment by virtue of their spiritual location in Christ. And as it was faith that placed Noah in the ark, so it is faith that places us in Christ.

With that in mind, you can now follow the train of thought and understand why Peter would be so adamant that it is not the physical act of baptism ("not as a removal of dirt from the body") but the faith of the person that saves (the "appeal to God for a good conscience"). To try to take this passage, pull it out of its symbolic context, and ignore everything else the New Testament says about justification is a serious misinterpretation of this text.

4. 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)

First, notice that the text does not say that those who believe and are not baptized are not saved (again, the logical fallacy of “denying the antecedent” occurs for those who think baptism saves). The texts do not say “if one isn’t baptized then they cannot have the Spirit.” They simply comment on the fact that one should believe and be baptized.

The second and most important thing to note is that the word “baptism” in these verses serves as a metonymy (more about that in the following section).

The Metonymy of “baptism”

What is a “metonymy?” A metonymy is where one thing is represented by something that is closely related to it. If you say, “the White House said...” then you have used a metonymy. The White House can’t say anything. It is a building. The “White House” is a way to refer to the president or one of his associates. Or if you use the old adage that, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” you have used two metonymies. The word “pen” refers to ideas and the word “sword” refers to physical force. Notice how one word can be used to refer to or represent something else.

That is how baptism is used multiple times in the New Testament. It’s not that doing a water ritual is what reconciles. It is faith alone in Christ alone which reconciles. But the word “baptism” is used to represent the event of someone becoming a believer.

Any time the Bible says baptism saves it is using the term baptism as a metonymy. Baptism doesn’t really save someone anymore than the building known as the “white house” really talks. It’s a figurative way of referring to someone trusting Christ.

Baptism doesn’t save you, but it is a way to refer to what actually does save you –which is the grace of God in Christ through faith. If you’re not convinced, let us remind you that the Bible also says that a woman is “saved” through childbearing (1 Tim 2:15). Should we then ignore everything the Bible says about being saved by grace, through faith, and not by works, and instead just tell women that they must bear a child in order to be saved? Of course not We should realize that “childbearing” (like baptism) is a metonymy for a bigger reality--i.e. being a godly woman.

So, going back to the Acts 2 passage mentioned above, “repent and be baptized” simply means “be converted.” In this passage and others like it baptism is functioning as a metonymy that refers to trusting in Christ. So it isn’t baptism which saves, but rather what baptism symbolizes, union with Christ by grace through faith.

Conclusion

Baptism is super important. It is commanded of every Christian. If you have not been biblically baptized, you are walking in sin. Baptism is not optional. If someone just refused to be baptized we would be forced to call their salvation into question--not because baptism saves you--but because they are saying that they “love Christ” while refusing to obey him.

We must always guard the sacred doctrine of justification by faith alone. Believers are commanded to be baptized. But God elects, God calls, God regenerates, God justifies, God sanctifies, God resurrects. God, and God alone saves you, and your response to that grace is not the same thing as the grace itself.

Appendix E: Recommended Resources:

Theological Equipping Classes (available on our church website)

- Paedobaptism vs. Credobaptism and the Sign of the New Covenant (May 20, 2018)
- Baptism: Meaning and History (May 5, 2019)
- Baptism: Mode and Candidates (May 12, 2019)

For a lengthier treatment of the subject of baptism from a shared perspective, consider: *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* - edited by Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright

