

**IRONWOODCHURCH**

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*Baptism Packet*

# Baptism Information

Thanks for your interest in being baptized. Baptism is a tremendous blessing and an important first step of obedience for new followers of Jesus.

Here is the typical process to be baptized at Ironwood Church:

1. Please read the information in this packet carefully. If the person considering baptism is a child, be sure to read the section entitled “Childhood Baptism at Ironwood Church.”
2. If, after reading this packet, you:
  - a. WANT to be baptized, please fill out the form located at <https://redemptionaz.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/221/responses/new>.
  - b. ARE UNSURE about being baptized and would like to discuss your situation with somebody, please contact us at (480) 553-8295.
3. Soon after completing the online form (2a), you will get a call from a pastor or elder. This phone call is to answer any questions you may have, address any potential concerns we may have, and to prepare you for what to expect at your baptism. This call is NOT an oral theological exam, so don't be nervous. If the person requesting baptism is a child, we will likely request to meet with the child in person.
4. Baptism. Invite as many family and friends as you can—people are often very open to coming. If you want to share your story with the church family, we'll give you that opportunity. If you'd prefer not to share, that's OK too.

Please contact us at (480) 553-8295 if you have questions or concerns that we can help work through with you.

# Biblical Overview of Baptism

Dr. Wayne A. Grudem<sup>1</sup>

*Who should be baptized? How should it be done? What does it mean?*

## Explanation and Scriptural Basis

Before beginning our discussion of baptism we must recognize that there has been historically, and is today, a strong difference of viewpoint among evangelical Christians regarding this subject. The position advocated in this book is that baptism is not a “major” doctrine that should be the basis of division among genuine Christians, but it is nonetheless a matter of importance for ordinary church life, and it is appropriate that we give it full consideration.

The position advocated in this chapter is “Baptistic”—namely, that baptism is appropriately administered only to those who give a believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

### A. The Mode and Meaning of Baptism

The practice of baptism in the New Testament was carried out in one way: the person being baptized was immersed or put completely under the water and then brought back up again. Baptism by immersion is therefore the “mode” of baptism or the way in which baptism was carried out in the New Testament. This is evident for the following reasons:

(1) The Greek word (*baptizo*) means “to plunge, dip, immerse” something in water. This is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible.

(2) The sense “immerse” is appropriate and probably required for the word in several New Testament passages. In Mark 1:5, people were baptized by John “in the river Jordan” (the Greek text has “in,” and not “beside” or “by” or “near” the river). Mark also tells us that when Jesus had been baptized “he came up out of the water” (Mark 1:10). The Greek text specifies that he came “out of” the water, not that he came away from it. The fact that John and Jesus went into the river and came up out of it strongly suggests immersion, since sprinkling or pouring of water could much more readily have been done standing beside the river, particularly because multitudes of people were coming for baptism. John’s gospel tells us, further, that John the Baptist “was

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<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Page 982. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994.

baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23). Again, it would not take “much water” to baptize people by sprinkling, but it would take much water to baptize by immersion.

When Philip had shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch, “as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?”” (Acts 8:36). Apparently neither of them thought that sprinkling or pouring a handful of water from the container of drinking water that would have been carried in the chariot was enough to constitute baptism. Rather, they waited until there was a body of water near the road. Then “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 caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38–39). As in the case of Jesus, this baptism occurred when Philip and the eunuch went down into a body of water, and after the baptism they came up out of that body of water. Once again baptism by immersion is the only satisfactory explanation of this narrative.

(3) The symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection seems to require baptism by immersion. Paul says,

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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Similarly, Paul tells the Colossians, “You were buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12).

Now this truth is clearly symbolized in baptism by immersion. When the candidate for baptism goes down into the water it is a picture of going down into the grave and being buried. Coming up out of the water is then a picture of being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. Baptism thus very clearly pictures death to one’s old way of life and rising to a new kind of life in Christ. But baptism by sprinkling or pouring simply misses this symbolism.

Sometimes it is objected that the essential thing symbolized in baptism is not death and resurrection with Christ but purification and cleansing from sins. Certainly it is true that water is an evident symbol of washing and cleansing, and the waters of baptism do symbolize washing and purification from sins as well as death and resurrection with Christ. Titus 3:5 speaks of “the washing of regeneration” and, even though the word baptism is not used in this text, it is certainly true that there is a cleansing

from sin that occurs at the time of conversion. Ananias told Saul, “Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

But to say that washing away of sins is the only thing (or even the most essential thing) pictured in baptism does not faithfully represent New Testament teaching. Both washing and death and resurrection with Christ are symbolized in baptism, but Romans 6:1–11 and Colossians 2:11–12 place a clear emphasis on dying and rising with Christ. Even the washing is much more effectively symbolized by immersion than by sprinkling or pouring, and death and resurrection with Christ are symbolized only by immersion, not at all by sprinkling or pouring.

What then is the positive meaning of baptism? In all the discussion over the mode of baptism and the disputes over its meaning, it is easy for Christians to lose sight of the significance and beauty of baptism and to disregard the tremendous blessing that accompanies this ceremony. The amazing truths of passing through the waters of judgment safely, of dying and rising with Christ, and of having our sins washed away, are truths of momentous and eternal proportion and ought to be an occasion for giving great glory and praise to God. If churches would teach these truths more clearly, baptisms would be the occasion of much more blessing in the church.

### **C. The Effect of Baptism**

We have argued above that baptism symbolizes regeneration or spiritual rebirth. But does it only symbolize? Or is there some way in which it is also a “means of grace,” that is, a means that the Holy Spirit uses to bring blessing to people? We have already discussed this question in the previous chapter, so here it only is necessary to say that when baptism is properly carried out then of course it brings some spiritual benefit to believers as well. There is the blessing of God’s favor that comes with all obedience, as well as the joy that comes through public profession of one’s faith, and the reassurance of having a clear physical picture of dying and rising with Christ and of washing away sins. Certainly the Lord gave us baptism to strengthen and encourage our faith—and it should do so for everyone who is baptized and for every believer who witnesses a baptism.

### **D. The Necessity of Baptism**

While we recognize that Jesus commanded baptism (Matt. 28:19), as did the apostles (Acts 2:38), we should not say that baptism is necessary for salvation. This question was discussed to some extent above under the response to the Roman Catholic view of baptism. To say that baptism or any other action is necessary for salvation is to say that we are not justified by faith alone, but by faith plus a certain “work,” the work of baptism. The apostle Paul would have opposed the idea that baptism is

necessary for salvation just as strongly as he opposed the similar idea that circumcision was necessary for salvation (see Gal. 5:1–12).

Those who argue that baptism is necessary for salvation often point to Mark 16:16: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” But the very evident answer to this is simply to say that the verse says nothing about those who believe and are not baptized. The verse is simply talking about general cases without making a pedantic qualification for the unusual case of someone who believes and is not baptized. But certainly the verse should not be pressed into service and made to speak of something it is not talking about.

More to the point is Jesus’ statement to the dying thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The thief could not be baptized before he died on the cross, but he was certainly saved that day. Moreover, the force of this point cannot be evaded by arguing that the thief was saved under the old covenant (under which baptism was not necessary to salvation), because the new covenant took effect at the death of Jesus (see Heb. 9:17), and Jesus died before either of the two thieves who were crucified with him (see John 19:32–33).

Another reason why baptism is not necessary for salvation is that our justification from sins takes place at the point of saving faith, not at the point of water baptism, which usually occurs later. But if a person is already justified and has sins forgiven eternally at the point of saving faith, then baptism is not necessary for forgiveness of sins, or for the bestowal of new spiritual life.

Baptism, then, is not necessary for salvation. But it is necessary if we are to be obedient to Christ, for he commanded baptism for all who believe in him.

# Childhood Baptism at Ironwood Church

At Ironwood Church, we firmly believe in believer's baptism,<sup>2</sup> and we affirm the general pattern in scripture that baptism is to follow soon after regeneration (Holy Spirit-wrought new birth). Biblical regeneration (true conversion) is marked by both repentance (turning away from one's sin) and faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. There are several instances in the Bible in which people hear and understand the gospel message, repent of their sins (under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit), and immediately are baptized.<sup>3</sup> Though these New Testament baptisms seem to have occurred soon after the initial conversion, all of the individuals we read of are adults that come from a non-Christian context. Conversely, this paper seeks address an issue about which the Scriptures are unclear: the baptism of children who are raised in a Christian context.

A troubling trend in the American Church has developed in recent years, specifically, the rising number of children walking away from the faith of their childhood as they mature into adults. A USA Today study found that 70% of Protestants who grew up in the church quit attending church by age 23.<sup>4</sup> The Barna Research Group reported that 6 out of 10 twenty-somethings who were involved in a church during their teen years have failed to stay connected to the church.<sup>5</sup> According to another study, of children who grow up in the Christian church at large, nearly 90% walked away from their faith as they grew into adulthood, many of whom were baptized in their youth.<sup>6</sup> Simple logic seems to suggest that a great number of children baptized over the past few decades had not experienced true conversion at the time of their baptism.

Given the seemingly low "staying power" or permanency of many of these early professions, one might question how young a child can be and still make a truly independent, self-defining decision – such as a life-long commitment to follow Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Many parents would affirm that children do not truly begin to see themselves as autonomous self-determining beings until the adolescent and teenage years (ages 12-18). It is at this time when most kids begin to ask, and gain the cognitive ability to

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<sup>2</sup> The process by which a person is baptized into a local community of faith based on their personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. To be contrasted with infant baptism or paedobaptism.

<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38), Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33), Peter's general charge (Acts 2:38)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20070807/d\\_churchdropout07.art.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20070807/d_churchdropout07.art.htm)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years>

<sup>6</sup> Mondaymorninginsight.com, August 8, 2006. Cites Southern Baptist Convention's Council on Family Life report.

<sup>7</sup> We certainly encourage children of all ages to run to Jesus early and often in their lives. We believe that God loves and welcomes children, and we believe that children should be taught the gospel. Often times, however, the true fruit of spiritual life is proven as kids become more independent, having to make their own choices (and be responsible for those choices) when multiple options or worldviews are presented to them.

discern, questions like “Who am I?” and “What do I believe?” Of course, most children who are raised in the Christian context have been taught the answers to these questions from a very young age. But adolescence is the time of life when they are actually presented with opportunities to confirm or deny in practice what they were taught.

We believe baptism should follow true personal conversion. This evaluation must take place prior to baptism. Everyone baptized at Ironwood Church must be interviewed (on their own) by a pastor and show that they understand the gospel, have repented of their sins, and have trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Since young children are still maturing and developing a sense of who they are and what they believe independent of their parents, we feel that it is potentially harmful to move too quickly in formally evaluating the legitimacy of their conversion and consequent readiness for baptism. On one hand, this evaluation is always taking place by loving parents who want to disciple their kids in the truth. But baptism forces a formality and finality to the evaluation process that may not yet be appropriate. This is because the natural discipleship process for children is for them to gradually gain greater ownership of their faith over time.<sup>8</sup> They begin believing in their parents’ faith, and, as they grow and become more independent and self-aware, they take on greater (or lesser) personal ownership of that faith. To force a “premature” personal confession is, we feel, just that – premature.

Kids will confess their sincere belief at many times as they progress down the road of personal conversion. Sincerity, however, is not the issue we are trying to discern. The necessary precursor for baptism is conversion. As children grow, their confessions will be more substantive because they gain understanding about what it means to be a mature independent person; someone who is able to make decisions (and be responsible for the consequences) outside the protections and limits provided by their parents.<sup>9</sup>

We do believe it is possible for a young child to experience true conversion. We encourage children to trust in Jesus and have a relationship with him as early as possible. At the same time, parents should understand and pray that their child is in the

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<sup>8</sup> We encourage parents to think more in terms of the process of leading your children to Jesus, and less in terms of a specific moment of decision or conversion. Our kids’ decisions will be shaped and bolstered over time. Emphasizing a specific moment in time can overshadow the process of discipleship or provide false assurance. A Christian’s faith is in Jesus himself, not in a momentary decision.

<sup>9</sup> We are not intending to claim that one’s faith should be held in isolation from other brothers and sisters in Christ. Certainly we are created to exist in community - mutually strengthening and caring for one another. However, kids must grow to a point of personal uniqueness or independence from their parents. We all remain interdependent upon one another, but conversion is personal. Mature conversion must be characterized by the sole embrace of Christ by the person in question. No one else can hold the object of one’s faith for him or her. No one else will stand before the judgment seat of Christ with the individual on the last day. They will stand alone. Thus, they must be able to stand alone in the waters of baptism.



process of developing a full and personal faith. A young child's capacity for making and understanding lifelong commitments will inevitably grow as they do. It is a blessing for a child to grow up in a Christian home. Under our authority and care, we should help prepare our kids for many important decisions. Most important of all is the decision our kids make to follow Jesus faithfully for the rest of their lives.

As we evaluate a candidate's readiness for baptism, we don't want to "lower" the standard of true conversion (repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior) for kids. However, we also don't want to hold our kids to a standard they are not prepared (or even expected) to meet. Kids grow over time into independent disciples of Christ and should not feel premature pressure to hold their faith independent of their parents at a young age.

In order for a person to be ready to participate in baptism, we believe the following should be true<sup>10</sup>:

1. The person being baptized must be mature enough to understand (not just recite) the spiritual realities of baptism. Baptism is a symbol or picture of repentance, cleansing from sin, a full commitment to die to one's self, and a new resurrected life in Christ.
2. The person being baptized must understand the personal responsibility that comes with publicly declaring his or her new covenant with God before the assembly. The covenant of faith is just that – a covenant (or contract) between God and His people. It should be noted that baptism, like a marriage ceremony, is a public ceremony commemorating a life-long commitment.<sup>11</sup>
3. The person being baptized is personally identifying with Christ and his people. Baptism represents personal inclusion into the community of faith. This personal identification requires a mature self-identity. One must know who one is before one can identify with another person or people.
4. Finally, baptism is clearly viewed by the apostle Paul as a moment to remember. Its function is to remind believers of their union with Christ.<sup>12</sup> In order for a person to experience this "benefit" of baptism, they must judge themselves mature enough to have made this decision when they look back on their baptism at an older age. One must have confidence in the credibility of his or her own profession.

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<sup>10</sup> These are general guidelines for typically developing persons. We feel that exceptions may be appropriate in certain cases of mental or developmental impairment.

<sup>11</sup> In every other area of life, our kids have extremely limited authority and responsibility when it comes to making decisions or entering into contracts. For example, most young children are not even ready to take on the responsibility of determining their own diet.

<sup>12</sup> See Romans 6:1-4, Colossians 2:11-12, and Titus 3:4-7

For all of the reasons outlined above, we feel it is wise to wait until kids are mature, can take personal responsibility to make lasting decisions, understand who they are independent of their parents, and have strong credibility to which an appeal can be made in the future. It is difficult for us to believe this is possible before the age of 12. And, in many instances, kids may not be ready until much older.

To be clear: we are not saying kids cannot be converted until they meet these criteria (maturity, responsibility, self-identity, credibility), but we do believe it is difficult to judge true conversion before these criteria are present. Additionally, we feel that to subject a child to the process of being judged before they possess these character traits can be potentially harmful—and quite discouraging—for them, since it forces a premature standard that they are not ready to meet. Finally, the significance and power of baptism may be greatly diminished if it is pursued before these character qualities are present. For these reasons, we strongly encourage parents to wait to have their child baptized until they see that their child meets the above-listed criteria.