

The Position of Cuyahoga Valley Church concerning Baptism



Before stating the position of our church concerning baptism, we would like to state that the ultimate goal of our ministry is to express love to God and love to all His people. That is why we have chosen "Love Worth Sharing" as our theme. We are mindful of Jesus' words in John 13:34, 35,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We also remember Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 where He asks the Father to grant unity among His followers so that the world might believe. It seems clear to us that the aim of all Christians should be to promote love and unity between all who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We seek to express our position concerning baptism, therefore, with the hope that our love for others will be seen and with the desire to promote understanding among believers rather than to create division.

We feel that our unity as believers should be based on absolute truth as revealed in the Bible, not on fallible reason, convenience, or tradition. God has spoken through His Word. It is final and absolute because He is final and absolute. The following paragraphs express in outline form what we believe the Bible teaches concerning baptism.

The meaning of the word:

Before one can adequately understand the Biblical teaching of baptism, he must understand the meaning of the word. It is unfortunate that the word was transliterated from the Greek into the English rather than translated. Without question the Greek word, baptizo, means to immerse, dip, or plunge. This can be seen in every major Greek lexicon. It is also significant that many who have practiced sprinkling admit that baptizo signifies to immerse. The early church, which certainly knew the meaning of the word, practiced immersion. We believe, therefore, that the definition of the word demands that water baptism by immersion be recognized as the proper mode.

The symbolism:

That immersion is the proper mode of baptism can also be seen because of the symbolism involved. Water is used by all who baptize because it pictures cleansing from sin and moral purification (Acts 2:38, 22:16). Only immersion, however, symbolizes the basis for our cleansing and purification. When one goes under the water and is raised up, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are clearly pictured along with the fact that the believer has died to sin and been raised to a new life (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-5). Water baptism by immersion is a beautiful worship experience reminding the believer that his sins have been cleansed because of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior and encouraging him to daily die to self and live the new life.

The New Testament circumstances:

The circumstances surrounding baptism in the New Testament also indicate that immersion is the proper mode. John 3:23 tells us that John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon because there was *"much water there."* Now it should be clear that the *"much water"* would not be necessary if sprinkling was the common practice. Mark 1:10 indicates that after John baptized Jesus, our Lord *"came up out of the water."* It seems reasonable to think that the practice of immersion, not sprinkling, necessitated our Lord's going down into the water. This can also be seen in Acts 8:38-39 where Philip and the eunuch *"both went down into the water."* After the eunuch was baptized, they *"came up out of the water."* There certainly seems to be little reason for Philip and the eunuch to enter the water if sprinkling was an acceptable practice in the early church. Baptism by immersion is clearly implied when one considers New Testament data.

Believer's baptism:

Water baptism by immersion is only one aspect of our belief system concerning this important issue. We also believe that the New Testament teaches that only believers are to be baptized. This, of course, precludes infant baptism (sometimes called "christening"). The New Testament teaches the following facts. One must be a disciple prior to baptism (Matthew 28:18-20). Faith comes before baptism (Mark 16:15-16). One must believe prior to his baptism (Acts 16:31ff.; 8:12; 18:8). One must confess Christ before baptism (Acts 8:38-39). Repentance precedes baptism (Acts 2:38). Receiving the Word is before baptism (Acts 2:41). One must receive the Holy Spirit before he is baptized (Acts 10:47). Clearly, no infant can experience these works of grace (like repentance and faith) which should precede baptism. Therefore, the New Testament does not teach infant baptism. Only believers who have experienced regeneration should be baptized.

Not necessary for salvation:

While we consider baptism as important, we do not feel that it is necessary for salvation. In I Corinthians 1:14-17, the apostle Paul made this statement: *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel."* He also wrote that while in Corinth he only baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanus. It seems clear that Paul himself would have baptized more people had it been necessary for their salvation. Many passages in the New Testament clearly state that our salvation is not dependent on any deed that we perform (like baptism) but comes only by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Galatians 2:16-21). Baptism is the believer's step of obedience and is an outward sign of an inward reality that has taken place in his life. Baptism does not help to save; it shows that one has already been saved.

Reasons to be baptized:

Why, then, should a person be baptized by immersion as a believer if it does not save? One, it is an act of obedience because Christ has commanded us to declare our faith in Him by being baptized (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12, 10:48). Two, it shows the disciple that he belongs to Christ and reminds him of what the Savior has done for him when He died and rose from the grave. Three, it demonstrates to believers that God has cleansed them from their sins through Jesus Christ (Acts 22:16; Colossians 2:11-14). Four, it teaches the believer that he has died to sin and has been raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Five, it demonstrates that a believer who dies will one day be raised from his grave at the coming of the Lord. Six, it is an act after which the believer should join himself to a particular church of Jesus Christ enabling him to faithfully walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord (Acts 2:41-42; 5:13-14; 9:26; I Peter 2:5; Luke 1:6). As we are spiritually baptized into the body of Christ (the Church), so we are outwardly declaring through water baptism that we are joined to that Body (the Church) and are uniting ourselves with the visible expression of it (the local Church). See I Corinthians 12:13.

Baptism is an obedience issue:

By now, it should be evident that we think that New Testament baptism is the immersion of believers only in water. Nothing else ought to be substituted. Why do we feel so strongly about this issue? We desire to be as strictly obedient to the Word of God as possible. Jesus said, *"If you love me you will keep my commandments,"* John 14:15. If we were to accept other baptismal practices while believing that the Bible teaches believer's baptism by immersion, we would violate our own consciences and would not be expressing love to our Lord through our obedience.

We realize that many sincere Christians who love God and experience His blessing do not view this issue as we do. We want to cooperate with these brothers and sisters in Christ and trust that they will feel genuine love from us. This has been written to encourage some to embrace our view concerning baptism and to promote understanding among those who reject our view. We certainly do not want to be perceived as a ministry seeking to produce division in the Kingdom of God. We simply want to be known as a ministry striving to be as obedient to the Word of God as possible while, at the same time, seeking to love others who may differ.

What about being Baptized twice?

Our church recommends that you be baptized again if you have not been baptized by immersion since you became a believer. It does not devalue a prior experience but simply reflects your desire to be baptized in the same way Jesus was baptized. If you were baptized by immersion in another church since you received Christ, it is not necessary for you to be baptized again.

Can my family be Baptized together?

Yes! If each family member fully understands the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation, we encourage families to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment.

Will I have to say anything?

We ask each person being baptized to share briefly how Christ has changed their life. In short, tell your own story in such a way that anyone in the congregation will be drawn to have a life-changing experience with Christ.

"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9