

A large, light teal watermark graphic of a water drop is centered on the page. It contains several overlapping circles and a smaller water drop shape at the bottom. The background is a textured, light blue-grey surface. On the left side, there is a vertical decorative border with an intricate, reddish-brown floral and scrollwork pattern.

WATERMARK
CUYAHOGA VALLEY CHURCH

BY RICK DUNCAN



FORWARD

I'll never forget the day I was baptized. Although I had been a follower of Christ for several years, I had procrastinated in “going public” with my faith and expressing my new life in Christ through the public testimony of baptism. Although I had regretted waiting as long as I did, that feeling was quickly eclipsed by the joy, gratitude and sense of obedience I felt coming out of the water. It was a defining milestone in my story as a follower of Christ.

In my conversations about baptism over the years, I have encountered many people who feel curious and confused. Maybe that is you today. This booklet will help provide answers to some of the most common questions about baptism, maybe questions that even you have had. It is our hope that this little read will help inform you, encourage you, and motivate you about “going public” with your faith in Jesus Christ. Enjoy!

- Chad Allen -

This booklet has been written by Rick Duncan, Founding Pastor at Cuyahoga Valley Church. For more information about Rick and his family, please refer to the “About the Author” section at the end of this booklet.

The text is an adaptation of a message given by Rick at CVC on Sunday, March 9, 2008. In putting this message into booklet form, our goal is to help you better understand the role of baptism in your own life as you grow in your new life in Christ.

Comments are always welcome. If you would like to discuss this text further with one of the pastors at Cuyahoga Valley Church, simply email us at cvcadmin@cvconline.org, or call the church offices at **440.746.0404** during regular business hours.

watermark

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INTRODUCTION: A WATERMARK

Baptism is a kind of marker – a watermark, if you will. Baptism is the mark of a new life in Christ. Jesus commanded us to be baptized as an outward symbol of an inward commitment. It lets others know that we have left the old life behind and we have entered into new life in Christ.

Followers of Jesus believe that baptism is important. But people have lots of questions about baptism. Why do churches baptize differently? Why do some churches immerse people and others sprinkle or pour? Is one way right and the other ways wrong? Do you have to be baptized in order to go to heaven? What does the Bible have to say about infant baptism? Baptism can be a very emotional, explosive, and even divisive topic.

Baptism. It can be a very emotional, explosive, even divisive topic.

I remember returning to NE Ohio on plane after a trip to Dallas. I met a young man from Mentor, Ohio. We started talking about his family. He and his wife had a brand new baby. This young man opened up and shared with me a problem he was having with his in-laws. He and his wife didn't go to church, but her mom and dad were putting all kinds of pressure on this couple to get their new baby baptized. They were saying, "If something bad were to happen to this baby – if he got sick and died – and he hasn't been baptized, then the original sin hasn't been washed away and he's going to go to hell! We have to make sure that the baby is headed to heaven. You simply must have our grandson baptized as soon as possible!" Now, my new friend didn't believe what they believe about baptism, but he was going to have their baby baptized anyway just to get his in-laws off his back.

Was he right? Was he wrong? Does it matter?

People ask all kinds of questions about baptism.

Some of us think baptism is just weird. Why do people even do it? Why do churches do this differently?

Some people practice what's called "sprinkling." Just a few drops will do. Some pour. Some immerse. Is one way right and the others wrong? How much water is enough water?

Some believe that baptism and salvation are interdependent. Do you have to be baptized to go to heaven? Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Some churches baptize babies. Some wait until people are older. Why? What does the Bible say about that?

We get so many questions about baptism that we decided to tackle this topic in this little book.

I'm guessing that what you think about baptism was shaped by the way you were raised. You might be confused about baptism because of your background or the church in which you grew up.

Baptism is a kind of marker – a watermark, if you will. Baptism is the mark of a life committed to Christ. Jesus commanded us to be baptized as an outward symbol of an inward commitment. It lets the world know that we have left the old life behind and we have entered into a new life with Jesus. And every time we see a baptism, we'll remember the day we publicly promised that we would live for Jesus.

A STORY ABOUT BAPTISM

In the Bible is a book called Acts. It's the story about the acts – the works – that God did through His people to start the very first churches. One of the spiritual leaders was a man named Philip. He wasn't a pastor, but he had a passion for Christ and a desire to tell others about Jesus.

In Acts 8, we find a story about a man who Philip helped to receive the watermark of baptism.

A MISSION FOR PHILIP

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.

Now, Philip is tuned into God. So, God sends an angel to say where He wants Philip to go, but He doesn't tell him why. He just says, "Go. Go and hang out in the desert." It's about 50 miles from Jerusalem to Gaza.

27 And he rose and went.

Philip is walking by faith, not sight. He doesn't argue. He doesn't say, "Well, I'll go if You tell me what's up." He just goes. And he's waiting and possibly thinking, "OK, Lord. I'm standing here at the side of the road all alone in the middle of a desert. It's hot. I'm thirsty. Anybody got some Gatorade? What's up, God? Why am I here?"

AN ETHIOPIAN SEEKER

God has a mission for Philip because God is after one man.

And there was an Ethiopian...

"Ethiopian" is from two Greek words, *aethin* ("to burn") and *ips* ("face"). Literally, it means a "burnt-face." This was a black man - a prominent black man. (In those days, the Ethiopians lived in what is now Nubia in Northern Sudan.)

... a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

A eunuch was someone who had had surgery to keep him from being sexually active. In those days, kings castrated certain servants so they

could trust the man around their queens. I know that this sounds extreme, but don't think that this man is a loser. This guy is no low-level servant.

He's a high-ranking government official. He's serving Candace which is a title for the queen mother there in Ethiopia. So, this is a statesman who is good at business. He's trusted. He's in charge of the queen's money.

Question: what's an Ethiopian doing in Israel?

He had come to Jerusalem to worship.

He's traveled about 1,000 miles to seek God at the Jewish Temple. He's exploring the faith.

Why? Well, remember that he's the minister of finance which means it's likely that he had done business with Jewish merchants. Perhaps they had told him about their God – the Lord - and he's curious.

He's a "who's who" in Ethiopia. He's got clout. He's got money. He's one of the most trusted men in the whole nation, but there's a hunger in his heart and a searching in his soul. So, he goes to Jerusalem to seek God.

It's interesting that in Deuteronomy 23, the Bible says that eunuchs were excluded from religious privileges in Israel. But this man wants to know God. So, he goes to the "church" of the day. He hears the spiritual leaders teach, and he buys a Bible.

Now, he's heading back to Ethiopia. Empty. The dos and the don'ts of the Jewish faith didn't satisfy. Man-centered religion always leaves people feeling empty. He's still searching to fill the God-shaped vacuum in his heart.

28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Now, this is probably not a one-man chariot like you see in the movies. Somebody else is driving. The guy is being chauffeured. He's seated and he's reading. It's not the "*Jerusalem Times*". He's reading a Bible he picked up in the foyer at "church".

There was a spiritual leader named Isaiah who wrote a book in the Bible, and that's what this man is reading out loud. Maybe he's thinking, "I'm not really getting all this. I want my driver to hear, too. Maybe he can make sense out of this for me." Scholars tell us that reading aloud was a common practice in the ancient world. This guy is looking for spiritual insight.

A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

Now Philip finally finds out why God has sent him to the desert. He sees a very wealthy man riding in a chariot. "Who is he? What's his name? What's he doing here?"

30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet...

The chariot is moving along. So, Philip starts to run. He gets close, and then he hears something familiar. He says to himself, "That guy is reading the Bible!"

God is already at work in this man's life.

At just the right time, in just the right place, when a man is searching for the answers to life's questions, God sends His messenger. And this seeker from Africa finds out that if you seek God, you will find Him.

The Lord sees this Ethiopian means business with God. So, He sends His man, Philip, to help.

... and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Philip doesn't preach. He asks an honest question. “Do you get it? I know you're reading Isaiah. Do you understand?” No lecture, just a question. It's a pretty good approach. “Do you understand what you are reading?”

31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The Ethiopian says, “Stop the car! There's just something about the Bible that has my attention. Big time. But I need a teacher. Can you walk me through this? Come up here and sit down with me.”

God puts people together. He not only cares about the cities of the world, He also cares about that one solitary seeker. Out of all the millions of people on the earth, He knows if you are seeking Him. He knows your name. He knows all about you. He'll move His people around to make sure somebody who knows Him can help you. When God sends somebody, invite them into your life. This man did.

UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

It's Isaiah 53:7, and it's a passage about Jesus. When Jesus was on trial for His life, He didn't defend Himself to the Jewish leaders or the Roman authorities. The passage keeps on describing Jesus. It's the next verse, Isaiah 53:8.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The man was reading about the death of Jesus on the cross.

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

Just a few weeks earlier, Jesus had died on the cross right there in Jerusalem, but it's likely that this eunuch wasn't there. Maybe he'd heard a bit of the buzz about Jesus in Jerusalem when he came to the city, but he was still mostly in the dark. So, he doesn't connect the dots from Isaiah 53 to Jesus.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip says, "Sir, you just missed it. Earlier this year, there was a holy man named Jesus who was unjustly arrested, tried, and crucified. He could have defended Himself, but He didn't. In fact, He wanted to go to the cross."

"Why would anyone want to die on a cross?"

"I'm sure you know that in Jerusalem innocent lambs are sacrificed to pay for the sins of the people. Well, Jesus is the Lamb of God. He takes away the sin of the world. All the sinning I've done and all the sinning you've done was paid for by Jesus. In fact, look at Isaiah 53:6. What does it say?"

"It says, 'The Lord Has laid on Him the sins of us all.'"

"That means you, too. You don't have to suffer punishment for your sins because Jesus died in your place. He shed His blood for you."

"I can't believe they would do that to Jesus."

“Wait. The story’s not over. We took Him off the cross and laid Him in a tomb. Three days later, He arose. There are 500 people in Jerusalem right now that you could go talk to if you don’t believe me. He said that He’s coming back some day to take all who believe to heaven forever. And you know what? He’s sent me here to tell you all this.”

“What should I do?”

“Repent. Stop your sinning. Believe in Jesus. Make Him your rabbi – your teacher. People who are doing this are being baptized in His name. It’s a fresh start. They get a new identity. They have a new allegiance.”

This government official is taking it all in. He’s processing. He’s probably thinking something like this: “What are the odds that a man who knows all about Isaiah 53 is just waiting for me to drive by in the middle of a desert... right when I’m *reading* Isaiah 53? I think God is answering my prayers right now. I believe this guy has been sent by God.”

He finds out that light obeyed brings more light. If you want to know God, He will show up. He will teach you the truth. Anytime anyone opens his heart, God will fill it.

WATER FOR A BAPTISM

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

This Ethiopian was obviously exploring the Jewish faith. So, he probably knew that when a Gentile converted to Judaism, water baptism was expected. It was called a “Mikveh.” It was a ritual bath where you would immerse yourself to be cleansed ceremonially so you could worship the Lord. It was especially important for people like this Ethiopian who weren’t Jewish. It was the symbol for a new allegiance to the God of the Jews, and the Jewish religious leaders likely told this man, “You can’t be baptized as a Jew because eunuchs aren’t acceptable to God.”

But what Philip was talking about wasn't religion. Philip was talking something more than rules and regulations. He was talking about a relationship with God that was open to Jews and Gentiles. The man wonders, "Is it possible for me to be baptized as a follower of Jesus? Will I be acceptable to Him?"

The road they were on to Gaza crosses several river beds. In Israel, they are called wadis. Tradition tells us that this was Wadi el-Hesi, which is northeast of Gaza. When the man sees the water, he wants to know, "Can I get baptized in Jesus' name?"

Philip must have been convinced that the faith of this man was real. How did he know? Many versions of the Bible have a verse that doesn't appear in the most ancient Greek manuscripts.

37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Many scholars say that these words were added later because this was what the early Christians would say when they were baptized. The leader doing the baptizing would say something like, "Do you believe with all your heart?" And the people being baptized would say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

And maybe something like this happened between Philip and the Ethiopian.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

A CHANGED LIFE

So, Philip, as a recognized and empowered leader of the church in Jerusalem, baptizes the Ethiopian right there in front of his entourage.

39 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 8:26-39 (ESV)

This man had a long trip ahead of him, but he wasn't the same. His life was changed, and he was rejoicing all the way home.

I've been in the water many, many times with people being baptized. I can honestly tell you that something special happens there. After baptism, people aren't the same anymore if they are really seeking to please the Lord, if they really engage their hearts. I've seen tears of joy on the faces of people being baptized. I've seen a former college wrestler raise his arms in victory after his baptism. I've felt the embrace of gratitude from the people being baptized because they knew that what we were doing was making Jesus smile. Something amazing happens when people go through the waters of baptism.

I just want to make three observations about baptism from this story.

1.

WATER BAPTISM

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

Why water? Well, I'm hoping this is fairly obvious. Water is a symbol for cleansing. We wash in water.

When you're baptized, the washing in the water symbolizes that your sins have been washed away. There's a washing away of your old identity.

The waters of baptism picture cleansing from sin and moral purification (Acts 2:38, 22:16).

2.

BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

Notice the prerequisite for baptism in this story. It's belief. The Ethiopian asks, "What prevents me from being baptized?"

37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Belief in Jesus comes before baptism. As you read the New Testament, you'll see that over and over and over, when a person put their faith in Christ, then they were baptized. Just before he headed to Gaza, Philip shared the good news with a group of people from Samaria.

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 (ESV)

Once again, belief in Jesus comes before baptism. In the Bible, a commitment to Christ takes place before baptism. Conversion happens first and baptism follows.

- Becoming a disciple precedes baptism (Matthew 28:18-20).
- Repentance precedes baptism (Acts 2:38).
- Receiving the Word precedes baptism (Acts 2:41).
- Receiving the Holy Spirit precedes baptism (Acts 10:47).
- Believing in Jesus precedes baptism (Acts 16:31-33).

NOT FOR BABIES

Think with me. If baptism is for believers, then baptism is not for babies.

Some Christians who believe in infant baptism look to passages about household baptisms in the Bible to justify their point. One passage talks about the conversion of a prison guard. After he believed in Jesus, "he was baptized at once, he and all his family" (Acts 16:33, ESV). Infant

baptism advocates say that this may imply that infants were baptized that day.

Whoa. Not so fast. I have a question: How old were those people in that family? It's a bit bold in my view to speculate that a baby was involved. My whole family has been baptized, but the last time I looked, no one in my household is still a baby.

There's just no evidence in the Bible anywhere that infants were baptized.

I know that lots of churches encourage parents to have their infants baptized. Many outstanding Christians practice infant baptism. I think the intentions are good, but there is no place where the Bible clearly teaches infant baptism. When it comes to infant baptism, there are no examples in the Bible - not one.

I'm using the words "infant baptism," but the practice is not in the Bible. There are certain churches that call sprinkling babies "baptism," but there's really no such thing as baby baptism. As you read your New Testament, you'll see that it's not there. There is not even a hint of such a thing.

This raises a question. Why is it that in many religious traditions baptism happens right at the beginning of a person's life? How did that get started?

If you were raised in certain denominations, a tradition of baptizing babies was established that your parents perhaps followed. They didn't follow that tradition because the Bible taught it, they just did what the leaders of the church said to do.

In a lot of religious traditions, people treat the Bible with respect. They believe it's true - but they never really read it. They aren't encouraged to read the Bible, so, they just do what the leaders say to do without seeing what the Bible has to say. When you don't read the Bible for yourself, you'll just do what the church tells you to do.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

At CVC, we believe that the Bible is our authority, and we want to do what the Bible says to do. It's that simple.

Baptism is for people who have individually made a decision to connect to Christ. Anyone who is old enough to start following Jesus is old enough to be baptized. That's why we don't baptize babies. That's why we offer a baptism class so we can make sure that people understand the decision they are making.

The Bible doesn't teach that baptism washes away original sin. Baptism doesn't mean that you're born again. Let this be very clear: Baptism is *not* necessary for salvation.

Baptism is a symbol of salvation like a wedding ring is a symbol of marriage. Think about it. If you were to give a wedding ring to a baby, would that make the baby married? Of course not! Marriage is a commitment that a man and a woman make to one another. Wedding rings belong only on the fingers of people who've made that commitment. In a similar way, baptism is only for people who have committed themselves to Jesus. It's not for infants.

I know some parents are antsy about this. They think, "If I could get my kid into the water, then I can rest easy about their eternal destiny." However, what is important is that your child is able to look back and say, "I trusted Christ. Then I was baptized. That's the moment in time when I went public about my relationship to Jesus."

If you were baptized as a baby, I'm sure it was meaningful for your parents. I don't question that. The tragedy is that it can give a false sense of security to parents and children.

It may sound like we're attacking other traditions, but please understand that is not our style at CVC.

Whether you get baptized or how you get baptized is not essential for your salvation. So, don't let anyone call into question your relationship to Jesus based on your baptism.

3.

IMMERSION BAPTISM

Baptism by immersion seems to best explain what happened on that day with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

38 ... they both went down into the water... 39 ... they came up out of the water...

I have a few questions. If sprinkling or pouring was the appropriate way to baptize, then why did they go down into the *wadi* (bed or valley of a stream)? Why didn't Philip just dip a cup into the water and fling a few drops onto the Ethiopian?

Answer? The Ethiopian was "dunked" by Philip. Baptism by immersion is clearly implied in this story and in others.

And let's think about this word "baptize." In the Greek language it's *baptizo*. Now, what does the word mean?

THE MEANING OF "BAPTIZO"

I happen to have the most extensive Greek Dictionary available. An old retired Naval officer who ran the Fellowship of Christian Athletes national golf ministry gave this set to me over 25 years ago before I went to seminary, and I was "the man" at seminary because I owned the 10 volume Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. I didn't have to go to the library to do my Greek word studies. We called it "Kittle" for short.

Well, if you look up the word "baptize" in "Kittle," you'll find that it is really just a common, ordinary word. It's not really a religious word. It

means to dip, to immerse, and to plunge. Look in any reputable Greek dictionary. They all say the same thing.

If a ship sunk, it was baptized into the sea. If cloth was dyed, it was baptized into the dye. If a cucumber was turned into a pickle, it was baptized into spices and vinegar. (So, the next time you eat a dill pickle, you can let everyone know that you're eating a cucumber that's been baptized.) The word *baptizo* was not really a religious word. Originally, there was no theological meaning. Everyone knew that the word simply meant to dip, to immerse, and to plunge.

So, βαπτίζω (*baptizo*) does not mean “sprinkle” or “pour.” If sprinkling was the New Testament way to baptize, then the word used would have been *rhantizo*. If pouring was the New Testament way to baptize, then the word would have been *katacheo*. But *baptizo* was used. It means “to immerse.” When instituting baptism, God chose to use a word that never means “sprinkle” or “pour.”

TRANSLITERATION VS. TRANSLATION

The confusion with the meaning of the word happened when people transliterated the word instead of translating the word. They took the Greek word (*baptizo*), and made it an English word (*baptize*). That's called transliteration. What you have is a word that has not been translated. Why did the translators choose to do that? Since the word means “immerse,” why not translate it that way?

Could it be that the translators of the Bible in the seventeenth century were not free to render *baptizo* as “immerse” because the state church that authorized their efforts practiced sprinkling? Translating the word may have caused the people in the churches to start asking questions, “Why don't we immerse? Why do we pour or sprinkle?”

Now, 400 years later, modern translators still transliterate the word. Maybe they don't translate the word for the sake of tradition. Maybe they don't translate the word so they won't alienate potential readers or

threaten the popularity of their translation. What church which believes in sprinkling would promote the use of an English translation that reads, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)? But the Bible could say, “Philip *immersed* the Ethiopian” because that’s what the word literally means. That’s a translation.

Many church leaders who sprinkle admit that *baptizo* means “to immerse,” and it’s certain that the ancient New Testament church, which certainly knew the meaning of the word, practiced immersion.

WHAT BAPTISM BY IMMERSION PICTURES

Think about the symbolism of baptism. Immersion symbolizes what saves us. When we go under the water and then are lifted up, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are clearly pictured. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. That’s why we are saved, and baptism by immersion pictures it perfectly. Immersion also pictures our own death to sin and our own new life in Christ (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-5).

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 (ESV)

We are united with Christ in his death. We were buried with Him and raised again. Immersion symbolizes this beautifully. Pouring or sprinkling doesn’t picture our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Whether you’re submerged forward or backward isn’t an issue in the Bible, but we typically tip people backward because it pictures a burial. When you are “buried” in baptism, you are submerged backwards underwater for just a second and then you are brought back up, representing the resurrection. Water baptism by immersion is a beautiful worship experience. It reminds you that your sins have been cleansed

because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It encourages you to daily die to self and to live the new life in Christ.

IS BAPTISM NECESSARY?

Is baptism necessary for people to go to heaven? No - the Bible doesn't teach that.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, a criminal was crucified next to Him. The thief recognized who Jesus is. Even that late in his life, even after a life of crime, the thief made a request to Jesus, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said, "Where I'm going, you're going." Wait! What about baptism? There was no chance for this man to be baptized. There was no chance for this man to do anything good - yet he was in.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. When we trust in Him, we're saved.

*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 (ESV)*

Baptism has never saved anyone. It can't. It's an external work, and works don't save. Saving grace only comes when we repent of our sin and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, believing on His name (John 1:12).

Keep in mind that baptism is only a *symbol*. It's a symbol of an important reality. I sometimes use my wedding ring to illustrate what I mean when I say that baptism is a symbol.

Wearing my wedding ring doesn't make me a married man. On a gorgeous October day in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, I said, "I do" to Maryanne

and she said “I do” to me. We made promises to one another in front of God, family, and friends, and we’ve been living together as husband and wife ever since. That’s what makes us married. It is the commitment - not the ring.

Still, I wear my wedding ring proudly. It’s not the reality, but it’s an important symbol of our marriage. The purity of the gold is to remind me to keep our love pure. The circular shape is to remind me that our love is to be unending. When I look at the ring on my finger, it reminds me that I’m a married man. When others see it, it’s to remind them that I’m a married man. So, it’s a very significant symbol. However, the symbol is not what makes us married. The commitments that Maryanne and I made to each other are what make us married.

Suppose that on the day we shared our wedding vows, Maryanne never gave me a ring. Would we still be married? Yes. Suppose I lost the ring? Would we still be married? Yes. If I took my wedding ring off for some reason, would Maryanne and I still be married? Yes. The reality of our wedding is what is most important, not the symbol.

The reality of our relationship with Christ is rooted in the work of Christ on the cross and our response to His sacrifice. Jesus already said “I do” to us when He gave His life for us. When a person has said “I do” to Jesus by repenting of sin and trusting Christ as Lord and Savior, then the relationship with Christ is secure.

It’s a reality.

Baptism symbolizes that reality. When a person has a relationship with Jesus, baptism is not necessary for his or her salvation any more than a ring isn’t necessary for marriage. If a follower of Christ has not yet followed the Lord in believer’s baptism, he or she is still forgiven and on the way to heaven. Baptism does not save. Baptism does not make anyone a Christian. However, it does have a profound figurative meaning after a person has received Christ as Savior.

BAPTISM MATTERS

Why, then, should you be baptized by immersion as a believer if it does not save – if it's a mere symbol?

1. Baptism is an important step of obedience. Ideally, it should be one of your first steps of obedience as a believer. Remember, Jesus has commanded baptism in Matthew 28:19. Every follower of Christ should want to obey every command of Christ.
2. Baptism follows the example of Jesus (Mark 1:19).
3. Baptism by immersion beautifully symbolizes what Jesus did to save you when He died and rose from the grave.
4. Baptism in water illustrates that God has cleansed you from your sins (Acts 22:16; Colossians 2:11-14).
5. Baptism by immersion brilliantly pictures the truth that you have died to sin and that you have been raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).
6. Baptism dramatically points to your hope beyond the grave – that even though you may die, you will one day be raised from the grave at the coming of the Lord.
7. Baptism unites you to believers all around the world. You are spiritually baptized into the Church at your conversion. Baptism is an outward declaration that you are joined to the worldwide Church and that you are uniting yourself with the visible expression of it, a local church (I Corinthians 12:13).

Don't use the excuse, "Well, I'm still going to heaven even if I'm not baptized." Yes, the thief on the cross did, but he never had the chance to be baptized.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

If you are a follower of Jesus, you should want to obey Him in this simple, yet profound act. Some Christians go on and on for years without being baptized. They say, "It's no big deal." But if our Lord and Savior, Jesus, asks us to do it, doesn't that make it a big deal?

Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Well, baptizing His followers is one of His commands. Just do it. You’ll be glad you did.

You might be praying about God’s will for your life. You don’t know what God wants you to do. Maybe God wants you to start here. Be baptized. When you obey the Lord in this simple, profound act, you will find yourself growing closer to Jesus and He will shed more light for your next steps. He said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 41:21). Light obeyed brings more light. This is yet another reason we encourage immersion baptism as a church.

WHAT IS STOPPING YOU?

Some of you might be thinking, “OK. I see your point. Maybe you’re right. Maybe what happened to me as a baby wasn’t really biblical. But I’m still not particularly inspired to get baptized. Why should I do it? It seems like a hassle.”

I think the number one answer is this: Jesus commands it. Jesus commands us as a church to baptize His followers. And we just say, “Yes, sir.” Throughout the centuries, His churches have followed His instruction.

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.

Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

Baptism is a public declaration that makes it clear where a person stands when it comes to Jesus. Baptism is a public declaration of a new association. It shows everyone that you have a new loyalty, a new identity. In baptism you are saying, “I’m not ashamed to publicly identify with the person and the teachings of Jesus. I’m making a decision to go

public with my faith. I'm drawing a line in the sand. I follow Jesus. I'm following His commands and His example." Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality.

MARYANNE'S STORY

My wife, Maryanne, grew up in a religious tradition that baptized babies. They called it "christening." It was something parents made sure happened for their babies to make them part of the religion and to ensure they were going to heaven.

It wasn't until she was fifteen that Maryanne came to know Christ in a personal way. She was a growing Christian. She was active in campus organizations, Youth for Christ in high school and Campus Crusade for Christ in college.

Maryanne was encouraged to be "re-baptized" as a believer, but for a long time, she didn't do it. Why not? She said, "I didn't want to offend my mom."

Then, in her 20's, Maryanne decided to go ahead and be baptized as an adult follower of Jesus. I asked her why she decided to be re-baptized. Very simply, she said, "I wanted to obey Jesus."

CONNECTING WITH OTHER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

There are two things we do that connect us with all the other followers of Jesus all around the world: communion and baptism. Down through the centuries, Christians have gathered together to see new believers washed, buried, and raised in the name of Jesus. When you are baptized, you are joining in with millions of other believers all around the world.

Some of them take great risks to be baptized. When they follow Christ, they risk losing family, friends, jobs, culture, even their lives. When you get baptized, you are connecting with all those precious people. You're

saying, “Just like them, I am associating with Jesus as my Savior.”

UNASHAMED

This is a big deal. You don't want to miss out on this. This is not about joining the church. This is about you saying, “Jesus, I'm in, and I am not ashamed to be Your follower.” If you haven't been baptized and if you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you should ask what the Ethiopian asked Philip, “What prevents me from being baptized?”

Have you have received Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? If your answer is yes, then have you been baptized by immersion since you believed? If not, then what is holding you back?

Jesus said, “*So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 10:32-33, *ESV*). Baptism is one very special and practical way for you to acknowledge in front of your circle of influence that you know Jesus and are following Jesus.

Something special happens every time a believer is watermarked by baptism. Christ is honored. Other followers of Jesus are encouraged. A watching world is challenged. And the person being baptized takes a very important initial step of revolutionary obedience that sets in motion a chain reaction of other steps of obedience that result in a life of radical joy.

RADICAL OBEDIENCE

Don't go for comfort. Go for radical obedience. Be a revolutionary. If you call Jesus “Lord,” get watermarked. Start the revolution in your own world by starting one in your own life first. When you do, you'll hear in your heart the words that Jesus heard when He was baptized, “This is my beloved one, in whom I am well-pleased.”

You may have been christened, baptized as a child, but you know that that baptism had nothing to do with your faith. That was more about your parents than it was about you. Since then, you have come to faith in Christ. You've trusted Jesus. Now, He's your Lord and Savior. If that has happened to you and you haven't been baptized since entering into a personal relationship with Jesus, then it's time. It's time for you to be baptized.

SHARING YOUR STORY

Some of you might be thinking about how we do baptisms at CVC where we hear verbal or video testimonies from those being baptized, and you might be wondering, "What about this testimony thing? Do I have to do that?"

Well, we want to help you make your story public. People can see your face and hear your voice. It's one of the best ways to brag on what Jesus has done for you. It's a great way for you to go public.

However, the verbal or video testimony isn't necessary. Typically at CVC, we have a baptism outdoors once a year and we aren't able to have verbal or video testimonies then. Even if you don't want to do a verbal or video testimony and you want to get baptized in the building at CVC, that's okay too.

Whether you are being baptized outside or whether you just can't see yourself speaking in person or on camera, you can go to the baptism class. You can then share your story with the leader who teaches it and you can stand in the water with the person who is baptizing you. Just between the two of you, you can be asked, "Do you believe with all your heart that Jesus is your Savior and Lord?" and you can say, "Yes; I believe in Jesus." And then you can be baptized.

Once you have put your faith in Christ, then we want to help you follow His example and command and make your faith public.

Please understand, though, that we really do like to share the testimonies when we baptize at CVC. If you choose to be baptized with a verbal or a video testimony, you will get to share what Jesus has done for you with hundreds of people. It is such an encouragement to all believers, and we think that's awesome.

You may say, "Well, my story is not that special. It's just like everybody else's." Hundreds of people you'll never meet will be encouraged. They will hear your story and they will think, "God is still changing lives. There He goes again. Isn't God good? God is at work in the lives in people just like me." And who knows? Maybe your story will be the story that will inspire someone to walk across the line of faith into the arms of Jesus. You don't know how your story will impact others.

FOLLOWING CHRIST

After reading this booklet perhaps you've realized that you have not yet placed your faith in Christ. If the desire of your heart is to follow Christ and become baptized in Him, here is a prayer that you can pray:

Heavenly Father, I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son, and that He died on the cross to save me from my sin. I believe that He rose again to life, and that He invites me to live forever with Him in heaven as part of Your family. Because of what Jesus has done, I ask You to forgive me of my sin and give me eternal life. I invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust Jesus as my Savior and follow Him as my Lord. Help me to live in a way that pleases and honors You. Amen.

A STUDY ON BAPTISM

We encourage you to do your own study of the scriptures to come to conclusions about baptism. Simply read the verses listed below in their context then write the verse reference in the appropriate column. In this way, you can do your own study to determine for yourself if CVC's position – believer's baptism by immersion – is the position that best reflects the teaching of the Bible.

| | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Matthew 3:6</i> | <i>Mark 11:30</i> | <i>John 1:31</i> | <i>Acts 8:16</i> |
| <i>Matthew 3:7</i> | <i>Mark 16:16</i> | <i>John 1:33</i> | <i>Acts 8:36</i> |
| <i>Matthew 3:11</i> | <i>Luke 3:3</i> | <i>John 3:22</i> | <i>Acts 8:38</i> |
| <i>Matthew 3:13</i> | <i>Luke 3:7</i> | <i>John 3:23</i> | <i>Acts 10:37</i> |
| <i>Matthew 3:14</i> | <i>Luke 3:12</i> | <i>John 3:26</i> | <i>Acts 10:47</i> |
| <i>Matthew 3:16</i> | <i>Luke 3:16</i> | <i>John 4:1</i> | <i>Acts 13:24</i> |
| <i>Matthew 21:25</i> | <i>Luke 3:21</i> | <i>John 4:2</i> | <i>Acts 18:25</i> |
| <i>Matthew 28:19</i> | <i>Luke 7:29</i> | <i>John 10:40</i> | <i>Acts 9:3</i> |
| <i>Mark 1:4</i> | <i>Luke 7:30</i> | <i>Acts 1:5</i> | <i>Acts 19:4</i> |
| <i>Mark 1:5</i> | <i>Luke 12:50</i> | <i>Acts 1:22</i> | <i>Romans 6:4</i> |
| <i>Mark 1:8</i> | <i>Luke 20:4</i> | <i>Acts 2:38</i> | <i>1 Corinthians 1:16</i> |
| <i>Mark 1:9</i> | <i>John 1:25</i> | <i>Acts 2:41</i> | <i>1 Corinthians 1:17</i> |
| <i>Mark 10:38</i> | <i>John 1:26</i> | <i>Acts 8:12</i> | <i>Ephesians 4:5</i> |
| <i>Mark 10:39</i> | <i>John 1:28</i> | <i>Acts 8:13</i> | <i>Colossians 2:12</i> |
| | | | <i>1 Peter 3:21</i> |

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Duncan is currently serving on staff at Cuyahoga Valley Church (CVC) in Broadview Heights, Ohio where Chad Allen serves as Lead Pastor. Rick and his wife, Maryanne, along with one other couple started the church in 1987. Before becoming Founding Pastor of CVC, Rick served 4 years on staff of Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Jacksonville, Florida.



Rick graduated from Vanderbilt University with a BA in Religious Studies. He earned a Master of Divinity from Mid America Baptist Theological Seminary. Rick is passionate about presenting biblical truth in accurate, practical, and relevant ways so that more and more people can experience new life in Christ.



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