

**WATER BAPTISM: FIVE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS***Revised: 4-29-09*

Water baptism is one of the most well known practices of the Christian faith, yet it also is one of the most poorly understood. The following brief discussion presents the essence of our view of water baptism at Oakwood Community Church.

**1. What is the meaning of water baptism?**

Baptism indicates a person's response to God the Father's call to *once-for-all*, turn from the self-willed life to trust in Jesus for forgiveness and with His power, to live a new life that honors Him (Acts 2:37-41). Baptism is a special symbol (not the means) of the Spirit's moral cleansing (Acts 22:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Water baptism pictures an inward spiritual reality by means of a subsequent outward physical activity. In Romans 6:3-5, Paul says,

*<sup>3</sup>Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? <sup>4</sup>For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*

*<sup>5</sup>Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was. [NLT]*

When a person trusts Jesus as his/her Savior (Forgiver) and Lord (Leader), s/he also becomes an immediate participant in the death, burial, and resurrection life of the Lord. The old person we were, before trusting Christ – a person dominated by our propensity to sin – has died and we have been raised as a new person with a new life – a capacity for spiritual things and a permanent relationship to God as in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

*<sup>17</sup>What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! [NLT]*

The external act of water baptism pictures a spiritual baptism that occurred at the moment of salvation. At salvation, every believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit. This work of the Spirit joins the believer to the Body of Christ (His Church). Baptism is a symbol of the believer's entrance into the church and normally ought to be associated with the believer's active participation into the life of one of Christ's local churches. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Paul says,

*<sup>12</sup>The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup>Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit. [NLT]*

**2. In order to receive salvation, is it necessary both to believe in Jesus personally and to receive water baptism?**

Absolutely not! The New Testament clearly teaches in over 200 instances that salvation is based wholly in God's grace given to us on the basis of our personal faith in Jesus Christ apart from any other action. John 3:16 is typical in telling us what is essential to salvation:

*<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. [NLT]*

Therefore, water baptism does not contribute to personal salvation. As stated above, it represents what has already occurred at the moment of trusting in Jesus as Forgiver and Leader.

### 3. Then, why should a person receive water baptism?

#### a. Christ commands it.

Matthew 28:18-20 records the last appearance Jesus made to the eleven apostles after his resurrection,

*<sup>18</sup>Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." [NLT]*

While this command was addressed to the eleven apostles, it seems evident that Jesus intended that all who would subsequently believe in him should receive water baptism. Clearly, the apostles understood him that way because water baptism immediately became the public sign of every believer's entry into the Christian community. (See Acts 2:37-41; 8:12, 35-38; 10:47-48; 16:30-33)

#### b. Christ exemplified it.

Christ himself was baptized and gave the ceremony special significance because He engaged in it. One of the basic meanings of the Greek word "baptize" is identification or association. Christ's baptism was an identification of Himself as the Son of God and association of Himself with the message of John. As we follow the example of Christ in baptism, we identify ourselves with the One in whose name it is done (Colossians 2:12). First John 2:6 says,

*<sup>6</sup>Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did. [NLT]*

#### c. Christ is honored by it.

There are many illustrations in the book of Acts of Christ being honored by the firm testimony of belief and submission to Him through the practice of baptism. After Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 2, the three thousand Jews who believed were baptized as a symbol of their new commitment to Christ (Acts 2:41). This was no small thing in their case, since it meant ostracism from the Jewish community and possible disinheritance from their families. The practice truly signaled a new way of life for the converted Jew.

In the early church, the practice of water baptism and personal belief were so closely tied together that the biblical text does not always even specifically mention belief (Acts 8:12, for example). In that time, there often was no significant time separation between the moment of personal trust in Jesus and the public declaration of faith in the act of baptism. This illustrates that baptism is an important means of expressing one's personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

### 4. Should infants receive water baptism?

Oakwood affirms that many seek to honor Christ by baptizing their children. However, Oakwood does not practice infant baptism. Since water baptism pictures a spiritual relationship that begins at salvation, and since salvation occurs as a result of personal faith in Jesus Christ, we teach that a person should not receive water baptism until s/he is able to understand and personally respond to the Gospel in faith that acknowledges Jesus as both Forgiver and Leader. Christian parents have a natural desire for their children to receive salvation, but water baptism cannot bring about salvation.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Additional information on infant baptism is available upon request from the church office.

## **5. What is the proper method or mode of water baptism?**

In the New Testament and the early church, total immersion seems to have been the universal practice.<sup>2</sup> The primary meaning of the Greek word for *baptize* is to dip, plunge, submerge, and immerse in water. The meaning of this word is overwhelmingly in the single direction of immersion. At Oakwood we practice baptism by total immersion believing that this best symbolizes the meaning of baptism as identification with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). Oakwood's elders affirm that the meaning of baptism is *far* more important than the outward form. However, when reasonably possible, believer's ought to follow the mode of baptism which was practiced and taught in the New Testament.

In keeping with the practice of our association, the Evangelical Free Church of America, we do not require water baptism as a condition of church membership. Nevertheless, to obey Christ, we teach that all who attend or join this fellowship should be baptized (either as an infant or as a believing young person or adult and by the mode of sprinkling, pouring, or immersing). Furthermore, the elders teach and encourage, but do not require, every believer to give public expression of their personal faith in Jesus through the ordinance of water baptism by means of immersion. We encourage this for those who may have been baptized as an infant and have later come to personal faith in Jesus.

### **PROCEDURAL INFORMATION**

Baptism, it is a time of special meaning to each individual being baptized as well as for the Oakwood Church Family or Community Group and special guests who share this time of joy. We sincerely desire to help make this baptismal service a special, memorable spiritual experience. Sometimes tenseness and fear of the unknown can detract from this time of unique response to the Lord and so we share these things with you in an attempt to help you know exactly what we will be doing as well as some helpful ideas regarding your baptism.

#### **WHERE DO WE CONDUCT BAPTISMS?**

In short, like John the Baptist (Acts 3:23) we conduct baptisms wherever there is plenty of water to do so! That includes the ocean, a lake, a swimming pool, and in the winter, even a hot tub!

#### **HOW DO I SCHEDULE A BAPTISMAL?**

You may contact the Oakwood office and indicate your interest at [office@oakwood.com](mailto:office@oakwood.com) or 813/969-2303. Or you may directly ask an elder, pastor, or Community Group Leader. They in turn will request you to read this information, and review with you how a person obtains eternal life, and the meaning of baptism. They will then make arrangements with you for scheduling the joyful ceremony of baptism.

#### **WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?**

Oakwood allows believing parents to determine if their child is a genuine believer in Jesus and is old enough to grasp the truths of the gospel and the basic meaning of baptism. If you are unsure how to do this, a pastor,

---

<sup>2</sup> The Bible does not give any specific instructions about *how* to baptize. Some churches sprinkle some water on a person's head, others pour water over the head, and others totally immerse a believer under water. Even total immersion practices vary from dunking forward or backward and from one to three times. An early church instruction manual from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, called the *Didache*, contains these instructions regarding the mode of baptism: *Now concerning Baptism, thus baptize ye: having first uttered all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost in living water [i.e., in a stream, lake, or sea]; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou has not living water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou has neither, pour water upon the head thrice in the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost.*

elder, or Community Group Leader will be delighted to assist you. We have materials to teach baptism at three levels: children (ages 7-10), youth (ages 11-16), and adult.

Each child varies in spiritual and developmental maturity, but we encourage parents to guide their children to wait to be baptized until they are at least seven years old; it is common and healthy for some to wait until they are older. We want to encourage young children to grow in faith, yet we don't want to rush them into it until they are able to grasp it's meaning for them and they are sure it is their faith and not merely the faith of their parents who desire this for them.

### **DRESS FOR THE BAPTISMAL SERVICE**

Women: Wear shorts or slacks along with a dark top and normal undergarments. In the case of the baptismal service being held in conjunction with a beach or pool gathering, a swimsuit with cover-up would be appropriate.

Men: Wear shorts or a conservative swim suit and T-shirt.

Children (both boys & girls): You may wear what the adults wear, or a swim suit and a shirt or T-shirt.

### **WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU**

1. A complete change of clothing (if needed)
2. A comb, and a hair dryer (if needed)
3. A towel

### **PREPARATION TO MAKE**

1. Consider being prepared to share a brief testimony of your trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin. If this is something that would make you exceptionally uncomfortable you are not required to do this (this is particularly true for children). If you wish, the one baptizing you can briefly share on your behalf. It is, however, suggested for three reasons: 1) It will be an encouragement to those who observe, 2) It can be a means of strengthening your faith, 3) The baptism might be more meaningful to you.
2. Select a verse or short passage of Scripture which was instrumental in your coming to Christ, or which is especially meaningful to you now as you anticipate being baptized, or which you have chosen as a life verse, etc. Please tell the one baptizing you what it is in advance of the day of baptism and why.
3. Prayerfully consider who to especially invite to your baptism such as unsaved friends or relatives, and those to whom your baptism would be especially meaningful.
4. Pray that your baptism will glorify God and that it will be a meaningful event for you and the congregation.

### **BAPTISMAL QUESTION** (while in water, prior to immersion)

#### Question to adults:

Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin and acknowledge Him as the Lord and Master of your life? **(YES)**

#### Question to children:

Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin? **(YES)**

Do you want to try to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus? **(YES)**

#### Response of person performing the baptism:

Based upon the confession of your faith, and in loving obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You are then immersed with the assistance of the baptizer and brought back up out of the water. This concludes your baptism.

## **WHO MAY BAPTISE?**

Believer's baptism is one of the two ordinances commanded by Christ; the other one is The Lord's Supper. They are to be administered only by His Church. His universal church is embodied in local congregations, including Oakwood. We do not believe it is appropriate for individual believers to officiate either of these ordinances apart from the local church, nor apart from the participation or authorization of the local church's spiritually designated pastors or elders or those whom they authorize to do so as a ministry of the local church.

Oakwood's pastors and elder's often officiate and baptize. They also authorize others to officiate (lead) a baptismal ceremony, such as Community Group Leaders; when they do so, they are acting only as a part of the ministry of Oakwood and under Oakwood's pastors/elders oversight and authorization. Please ask for this authorization before proceeding. In turn, properly authorized leaders of a baptism ceremony may grant the joyful privilege to a believing parent, or to the person who was instrumental in leading that person to faith, to actually assist in immersing the one being baptized.