



## Position on Baptism

### Overview of Believer's Baptism

Believer's baptism (occasionally called credobaptism, from the Latin word *credo* meaning "belief") is the Christian practice of water baptism in obedience to Christ's command (Matthew 28:19), based in one's credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism also then signifies admission into the local church (Acts 10:47-48).

It may be contrasted to infant baptism (paedobaptism, from the Greek *paido* meaning "child"), in which infants or young children of believing parents are baptized as a sign of God's covenant of salvation available through the Gospel. Yet because infants cannot hear or believe the gospel message, neither can they repent or profess Christ as the Son of God. It is our belief that neither saving grace nor accompanying church membership can be imparted or transferred from one person to another (such as from parent to child) by sacraments such as baptism.

Believer's baptism itself has no saving effect, but is rather a matter of first obedience to Christ, symbolically representative of the inner conversion that has already taken place in the person being baptized.

### Practice of Believer's Baptism

Baptism is a one-time physical act in which the church immerses one in water who gives genuine evidence of regeneration and conversion to Christ. This serves as an outward, public testimony of God's work of conversion in one's life, symbolizing to the individual, the church, and the world his entrance into the family of God and the fellowship of the church (Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:47)

Baptism is directly connected with God's work of regeneration and the gospel ministry, yet baptism neither establishes nor guarantees salvation. But it is a command of Christ for every believer (Mt 28:18-20)

Since baptism is understood to be a first and initiatory act of discipleship in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:33), the New Testament examples suggest that baptism "was only administered to those who gave a believable profession of faith, ...and should be given only to those who *show evidence* of having begun the Christian life (Acts 2:41, 10:47-48)." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 970)

Because baptism represents a visible entrance into the full fellowship of the church, it should be performed within the public gathering of the church wherever possible, so the whole church can be witnesses of this event, rejoice with the one being baptized, and give a visible welcome to him. Though not required by Scripture, the church has historically considered it wise for the administration of baptism to be by church leadership to ensure those being baptized have a right understanding of its meaning, and to safeguard baptism from abuse.

Baptism itself conveys upon the individual and the church a special grace of encouraging all by:

- Being a visible demonstration of the real power of God in individual lives
- A reminder to all present of their own union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection
- By allowing tangible experiencing of what is by nature a spiritual reality
- Allowing the church to experience a special joy and fellowship along with the one being baptized
- Providing the normal grace attending all instances of Christian obedience

Since baptism itself is not a "first tier" doctrine within Scripture (not dealing with nature of God, Christ, Salvation, Scripture, etc.), it should not be one over which believers separate from one another (excepting those who view baptism as part of the means of one's salvation). However, because it is a major part of how a particular local church functions together, there should be an agreed position and practice within each local congregation.

### **Particulars for The Bible Church of Owasso**

- Necessary for membership
- Mode is immersion
- Administered by Elders of the church (usually in a Sunday service)
- Administered based upon recommendation by the board of elders after their discerning a credible profession of faith accompanied by initial evidence of faith and repentance (confessing Christ as Lord and turning from known sin into obedience), as discerned through a written testimony and personal conversation

### **Issues Relating to the Baptism of Children**

#### **Some General Statements**

1. It is the obvious command of Christ that the church should actively proclaim the gospel to all (including children of all ages).
2. Regeneration is a supernatural act of God that is tied to the understanding and reception of the gospel message preached, and therefore can occur at the earliest moment a child can understand the truths contained. Once born again, no matter how initially difficult to discern by others or even by oneself, this work cannot be undone, lost, or diminished.
3. Certainty of salvation is the special topic of the book of 1<sup>st</sup> John, in which assurance is not only given in terms of "sincerity of profession," but primarily in terms of evaluating that profession by one's consistent obedience to it. See also 2 Cor 13:5, where the standard of testing whether or not you were in the faith includes following "apostolic" teaching (v. 6).
4. "Household baptisms" in the NT (Acts 10:2,44-48; 16:33-34; 18:8) offer no conclusive evidence one way or the other about whether young children were included in these households, but it is certain that those who were baptized had the capability to hear, understand, and receive the message preached (Acts 2:41, 16:32). It is also possible within the language of "baptized, he and all his household" that there were some within that household who were too young to be expected to hear and receive, and therefore were not baptized with those who had heard and received. This would be similar to the way you might say, "our family went to a movie", even though the youngest child was left with Grandma....

5. We do not believe that the baptism of infants conveys some special grace upon them, nor do we believe that it predisposes them to a reception of the gospel later in life. In this, we do not believe that Scripture teaches that baptism is a replacement for OT circumcision as a sign of their entering into the “covenant family of God.” (i.e., we are “baptistic” – practicing believer’s baptism)
6. In answering the question of how old should children be before they are baptized, Wayne Grudem seems to sum up much sound pastoral wisdom when he replies, “...old enough to give a *believable* profession of faith.” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982)
7. Thus we would treat a young child as we would any other person who requests baptism, and base their admission to baptism upon their ability to answer open-ended questions that seek to determine 5 things...
  - Knowledge of the Gospel Truths (seen in the ability to clearly state them)
  - Heart Transformation (seen in expressed faith, joy, humility, love for the Lord, etc)
  - Verbal Profession of Jesus as Lord
  - Turning from Known Sin
  - Pursuing of Obedience to the Bible

## Children and Conversion

1. The Gospel should be taught to all, regardless of their ability to respond. From the earliest days of infancy throughout childhood, Gospel truths should be whispered at bedtime, Gospel songs should be played, Gospel verses should be memorized, Gospel stories should be told. All of this is just building a reservoir of truth in their mind, such that when their intellectual capability allows them to begin to reason and make independent decisions, they have a well-formed understanding of the biblical facts. And there should be an equal weight given to the 4 primary categories of Gospel truth: God, Man, Christ, Response.

A child who has grown up in the church should have well-grounded perception of God (His Holiness and Character), himself (his own sin & accountability before God, and inability to work his way out of his predicament on his own), the person and work of Jesus, and what it means to respond in repentance and faith.

It is not as if you wait and “spring” all these things on them on their 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. Like a plant – slowly cultivating all along.

2. Care should be taken to help children see the difference between being in a Christian family (or church), and being a Christian that has a personal accountability and response directly to God.
3. Adults should realize that young children are often very impressionable, and Solomon’s wisdom (Eccl 12:1) along with Jesus’ admonition (Mark 10:14) encourage us to seek early to show them the beauty of God’s grace and invite them to respond. Yet, we also must bear in mind that while a simple “childlike” response to the Gospel may be an expression of regeneration in the heart, it may also be merely an affirmative response to what is plainly important to an adult they trust.

#### 4. Responding to a Child's Profession of Faith

- Express Joy – your first response ought to be true excitement at this spiritual interest and responsiveness in child. Ask them to “tell me all about it.”
- Clarify – explain to them what is true of one who has decided to follow Jesus (Knowledge of Gospel, Heart Transformation, Verbal Profession, Repentance, Obedience), and say that you want to help them evaluate whether they have responded fully. If there is not clear evidence of these things yet, encourage them to pursue those things, and pray with them for God's help, and offer your own.
- Avoid giving your personal “assurance” that they are saved... Conversion is an invisible, spiritual work of God in their heart. Since you are likely seen by them as a “spiritual authority,” they will take it on your word that it is true. Better for them to evaluate for themselves, and if they are unsure, to pursue these things until they are. Tell them of the “security” of salvation and the sure hope a true believer has in heaven, but this is different than personally assuring them that they have in fact been converted. Until you (and they) see real fruit of these things in the child's life, your personal assurance can work mischief in their heart and actually “hinder” them from truly coming to Christ.

#### 5. Children and The Lord's Supper

The taking of Communion (Lord's Supper), like Baptism, was commanded by the Lord of all His disciples. Unlike Baptism, which is a one-time, initial sign, the Lord's Supper is taken regularly by the Church gathered. It is an ongoing sign of our unity in Him and a tangible remembrance of His bodily death for our sins, and our anticipation of His return.

As such, it is a sacred thing, participants being believers in active fellowship with Christ and His Church (note Paul's specific warning in 1 Cor 11, not to profane it by taking unworthily). Yet we must remember, that even in the early church, there were unbelievers often present in the church gatherings when this commemorative meal was served (1 Cor 14:23-25). Those unbelievers were not to participate... and the simple question would have been *“have you been baptized?”*

We practice “open communion” in that we do not restrict the taking of communion to official members of our local church only. Thus it is upon each person's conscience to determine their own fitness to participate in this memorial.

So when it comes to children, this sober responsibility to protect oneself from taking “unworthily” must be overseen by the Christian parent. And in very simple terms, the very first question as to whether or not their child should take the Lord's Supper is the same question that has been asked throughout the history of the church – *“have you been baptized?”* If Water Baptism is the initial ordinance of obedience and The Lord's Supper the ongoing ordinance of obedience, then it is only proper to be baptized first, and then regularly take the Lord's Supper with the Church.