



MAKING SENSE OF BAPTISM

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THE BASICS

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is an expression of one's trust in Jesus Christ and is always accompanied by faith. Baptism is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. In baptism we unite ourselves with Jesus (Romans 6). We bury our sinful lives in the water. We are entirely forgiven and sin's power over us is defeated. We rise to new life to be lived with Jesus in obedience to God. God places his Spirit within us. Our baptism is an opportunity to personalize this spiritual reality. The Bible has given us clear ways to demonstrate our belief, and baptism is one of them.

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

In the Bible, baptism was the consistent response for people who trusted in Jesus. When people accepted Christ as Savior in New Testament times, they believed in Him (Acts 16:31), repented of their sins (Acts 2:38), confessed Christ as Lord (Matthew 16:16-18), Romans 10:9-10) and were baptized (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:38-41, Acts 8:36-38). Our role as Christians is to teach others to do the same things the Apostles taught to the early church.



IS BAPTISM IMPORTANT FOR MY SALVATION?

Receiving Christ necessitates some response on our part, one that includes belief, repentance, confession and baptism. Each part is equally important – they are the ways we express our trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation. The actions, including baptism, do not save us – but each action is mentioned in Scripture as part of becoming a Christian. Any step taken is a response to salvation offered, not an effort at salvation earned.

DOES BAPTISM SAVE A PERSON?

The Bible teaches that Christ saves. Acts 4:12 states salvation is found “in no other” than Jesus. We encourage people to believe, repent, confess and be baptized. As mentioned before, the actions do not save us – but each action is mentioned in Scripture as part of becoming a Christian.

It’s not profitable or fruitful to argue at which point one is saved. We do not judge anyone who has followed a different pattern. Judgment belongs to God alone (Romans 14:4, 8-12). God has the right to save any heart, for He alone sees the heart. No one this side of heaven can fully understand the majesty and meaning of baptism. Watch out for the one who claims to have a corner on the issue, especially if that person is in your mirror!



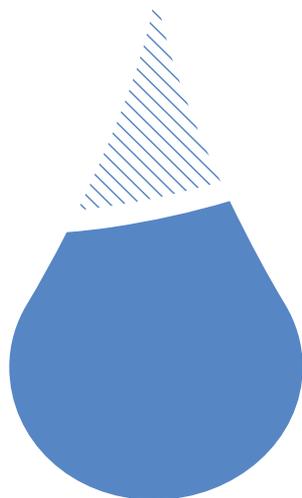
HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO KNOW TO BE BAPTIZED?

You need to realize only that you are a sinner in need of saving and that Jesus is your Savior. As you grow in Christ you'll learn more about baptism and other teachings of the Bible.

IN BAPTISM, TO WHAT AM I COMMITTING?

You are committing to following Jesus with your life. That doesn't mean you'll never mess up. We all do. But, when you do, you'll re-align yourself and keep following.





MORE QUESTIONS

WHY DOES SOUTHLAND BAPTIZE BY IMMERSION INSTEAD OF SPRINKLING OR POURING?

Let's look at how the word baptism is used in the Bible. The original language of the New Testament was Greek. When Paul and other authors wrote of baptism, they always used the Greek word that meant "to dip or immerse." There are other Greek words that mean "to sprinkle or pour," and the authors would have used those words if they had intended to include other modes of baptism. The preference of baptism by immersion can be seen in Acts 8:38 when Philip baptized a man from Ethiopia. After the man expressed his faith in Jesus Christ, they went down into the water – an action not necessary if Philip were baptizing him by sprinkling. Immersion was the commonly accepted form of baptism in the church for hundreds of years. Only in the later centuries did men begin to substitute different modes of baptism.



SHOULD INFANTS BE BAPTIZED?

In order to answer this question, we must first understand the nature of human beings. First, are we born with the mark of sin on our lives? Or do we have a “clean slate” until we are old enough to understand when we are acting contrary to God’s commands? At Southland we believe all mankind has a sinful nature – we all have the tendency to sin. However, we believe that a just God does not hold us accountable for sin until we are old enough to understand when we are in rebellion against Him. When someone is old enough to recognize their sinful nature, we encourage them to accept Christ, who died on the cross, paying the price for their sins. We realize many parents have had their newborn child baptized, making a public declaration of their intent to raise the child to know God. Although this is admirable, we don’t believe a newborn baby is capable of choosing to sin – an act of willful disobedience to God – so baptism isn’t necessary. Adult baptism is not a sign of disrespect for what your parents did. In fact, it can be seen as a fulfillment of their prayers. Be thankful for the heritage of concerned parents, but don’t neglect to make your own personal pledge of faith to God through baptism.



DO YOU BELIEVE PEOPLE ARE SAVED IF THEY HAVE ACCEPTED CHRIST AS SAVIOR BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN IMMERSED?

In the early church, there weren't any situations where people accepted Christ without being baptized. The closest scriptural example we can find of a believer who wasn't immersed is Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). He was a very spiritual man who had a great fervor about his relationship with Jesus. But Apollos had not been taught correctly about baptism. Apollos knew only of John's baptism, which was one of repentance and preparation for the coming Messiah. He wasn't familiar with the Christian baptism as the Apostles in the early church taught it. When Priscilla and Aquila instructed him, Scripture tells us Apollos was willing to change his ideas and submit to Christian baptism – baptism into Christ. Priscilla and Aquila did not judge him; they taught him. This is our position at Southland.



DOES IT MATTER WHERE I WAS BAPTIZED?

No. If you were baptized in a Baptist church, Pentecostal camp or in the lake at a family reunion, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you knew that you were a sinner and Jesus is your Savior.

PERHAPS A MORE CRUCIAL QUESTION IS, "WHY NOT BE BAPTIZED?"

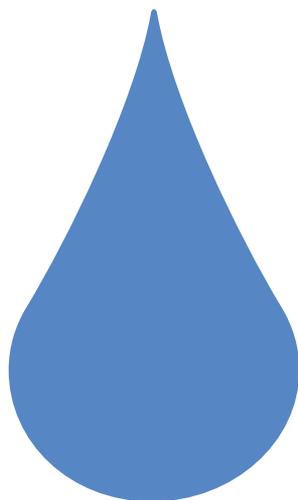
Christ set the example for us when John baptized Him. "But John tried to talk him out of it. 'I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,' he said, 'so why are you coming to me?' But Jesus said, 'It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.' So John agreed to baptize him" (Matthew 3:14-15, NLT). If Jesus thought it was important enough, shouldn't we?



CAN I BE A MEMBER OF SOUTHLAND AND NOT BE BAPTIZED?

The leaders of Southland are responsible to God for the doctrine we teach. Our interest is in leading people to lives of godliness and growth in Christ. Southland takes the position that baptism was an ordinance of the New Testament church. Everyone who accepted Christ was baptized. As a modern-day Church seeking to return to Biblical standards, Southland's leaders feel we should "do what they did" and "teach what they taught" in the Scripture. Baptism is too important to be compromised. We realize not everyone agrees regarding its importance, but we are called to shepherd the best way we know how. We believe that members of Southland should hold an elevated view of baptism.





FURTHER STUDY

WHAT BIBLE PASSAGES CAN I STUDY?

In Acts, which records the history of the early church, everyone who accepted Christ was baptized. Here are some Scriptures to study:

Acts 8:2, The Samaritans; Acts 8:36, The Ethiopian; Acts 10:48, Cornelius; Acts 16:15, Lydia; Acts 16:30- 33, The Philippian Jailer; Acts 18:8, The Corinthians; Acts 22:6, Paul

OTHER SCRIPTURE TO STUDY:

1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:11-12; Romans 6:1-4; John 3:16-23; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 5:29; Matthew 3:15; 1 John 2:4-6





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