

## Everyone Should Be Baptized and Some Again

Romans 6:1-12

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What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:1-11).

Today I am speaking on behalf of our Elders regarding the issue of baptism. In March of this year, I talked you with about a concept called *semper Reformanda*, which basically means that the church needs to be always reforming. We told you that the Elders were working through some important questions about the subject of baptism, and we told you then that we would be discussing this matter in the Fall. We've completed our work and discussion, and I would like to walk you through some very important texts that inform our understanding and share with you a proposed constitution change for you to vote on during a congregational meeting on October 25, 2009.

### **Our Aim: Thoughtful, Charitable Clarity**

I have three aims for this sermon today:

1. To lay before you a biblical theology of believers baptism
2. To identify the differences between infant baptism and believer's baptism
3. To explain our proposed constitutional change

Now I don't want your curiosity about the constitutional change to distract you from the more important points of this message, so let me explain the proposed change up front. Our Elders have approved language that would allow a person who was baptized **after** receiving Christ by another mode than immersion to join College Park Church if they are convinced in their

conscience that their baptism is valid. In other words, we would allow for a **mode exception** if being rebaptized would violate their conscience.

Some of you might wonder why we are talking about this? Let me say three things:

1. It is not an attempt to down-grade our membership requirements or de-value the importance of believer's baptism.
2. It is an issue that College Park has been talking about for years, one that I was asked frequently when I candidated, and one that is raised in every membership class. Therefore, we need to have a clear and thoughtful answer.
3. As non-denominational church that practices believer's baptism by immersion, our Elders felt it wise to clearly communicate who we are, where we stand, and what are the boundaries and limitations associated with baptism. We wanted to strengthen our position while acknowledging the boundaries of this issue.

Therefore, my aim is to thoughtfully and charitably bring biblical and practical clarity for us on the important subject of baptism. Now in order to look at his, I would like to answer three questions: 1) What is baptism? 2) Who should be baptized? and 3) Who should be rebaptized?

## **What is Baptism?**

Let's start by defining terms. Baptism is a spiritual position pictured and affirmed as a believer through the symbolic cleansing of water. Now it is important for you to see here that I'm leading my definition with the spiritual reality. When most people think of baptism, they think of what they see – a person getting in a tank of water, going under, and coming back up. That is baptism. However, baptism is much more than that.

It is a very simple symbol but it is filled with significant spiritual meaning. I like to think of baptism (and Lord's Table) as dynamic symbolism which means that the activity is only a symbol but it has a deep and powerful meaning. A good comparison might be a wedding ring. It is just a symbol but we make it a part of the wedding ceremony and to remove it when you are married would be concerning. True, it is just a ring; but there is a reality behind the ring that is filled with meaning. The ring symbolizes something far more. Therefore, baptism always has two realities – spiritual and symbolic.

The spiritual reality relates to what happens to a person when they receive Christ, and the Bible often refers to the spiritual effect as "baptism" or in baptism like language. There are number of ways that we see this in the Bible:

- **Believers are described as being baptized “in Christ”** - Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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 (Rom 6:3-4). “Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12).
- **Believers are baptized in one Spirit into one body** – “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13)
- **Believers have been washed by regeneration** – “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6).

So this is the spiritual reality that happens to a person when Christ is received, and it is this reality that is pictured in baptism. The physical act of baptism looks back toward the spiritual reality of dying and rising with Christ, of being cleansed of our sins, of passing through judgment, of being indwelt with the personal presence of Jesus, of being placed into the universal church, of being one with other believers, and of being called to walk in newness of life. The spiritual reality is a tremendous truth to ponder.

Therefore, the physical symbol of believer’s baptism is an outward affirmation of what has already taken place spiritually. In other words, the person entering the water is already “in Christ”, baptized in one Spirit, and washed by regeneration. The outward act is a picture of what has already occurred. That is why the Bible records the baptism of people **after** they have come to faith in Christ not before. "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:47-48).

At College Park, we practice believer’s baptism by immersion. We do this for two reasons. First, the etymology of the word “baptized” means to plunge, dip or immerse something in water. Secondly, we believe that the mode of immersion (completely dunking a person under the water) is the best symbol that captures the meaning and significance of spiritual baptism. It is the clearest picture of being buried and raised with him (see Romans 6:4-5, Colossians 2:12).

In summary, the ordinance or sacrament of baptism symbolizes and affirms a spiritual reality that was created by faith in Christ. There are two realities of baptism – spiritual and physical. Both are important.

## Who Should Be Baptized?

The second question moves us from the realm of spiritual position into a very practical matter. Who should be baptized? And the biblical answer must be that every disciple of Jesus Christ should be baptized. Why do I say that?

1. **It is a commanded mission of the church** - 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 (Matt 28:19).
2. **It is closely linked to genuine faith and repentance** – "And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ..."<sup>1</sup> (Acts 2:38)
3. **It is the first step after receiving the gospel** - And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family (Acts 16:31-33)

Baptism is a commanded step of obedience to be embraced by all who have genuinely received Christ as Savior and Lord. Again, it is an important outward symbol of a spiritual reality.

Therefore, I would encourage those of you who know Christ as your Savior and who have never been baptized to consider the importance of taking the step of believer's baptism. Let me assure that baptism doesn't save you; it doesn't change the spiritual reality any more than a ring changes my marital status. But I would challenge you to consider why you haven't taken this step before, and if you should consider taking the first commanded step by Jesus.

Now there is another issue that you may be wondering about: infant baptism. I'm sure that most of you are aware that certain churches practice infant baptism. I'd like to help you understand the difference because it is important. I'm going to summarize the views on infant baptism to two: Catholic and Protestant.

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<sup>1</sup> Some have used this verse to imply that baptism is essential for salvation. However, Peter in the context of Acts 8 is calling for a decision after the crowd asked him "What shall we do?" My view is that Peter includes baptism here as a confirmation that their repentance is genuine and a gift from God. It is important to see this passage in light of other passages that clearly teach that no act of human work creates forgiveness (Eph 2:8-9, Titus 2:5-6). Therefore, Peter is calling for a response to the gospel message not inferring that baptism saves.

### ***Catholic View: Baptism necessary for salvation***

The Catholic Church teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation in that it causes regeneration. Therefore the baptism of a child, in this view, is a means by which grace is bestowed upon a child.

“By baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins as well as punishment for sin...”<sup>2</sup> “Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord’s will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the church itself, which we enter by baptism.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Protestant View: Baptism symbolizing probable future regeneration***<sup>4</sup>

Another view is held by those who espouse a Reformed or Presbyterian perspective. They view infant baptism not as an event that creates regeneration but rather as a rite performed in the hope of future regeneration. Without getting too deep into the details, those hold this view see baptism as a replacement for circumcision, and they see baptism as bringing a child into the community of faith. Later in life it is hoped that the child will embrace this baptism through Profession of Faith or Confirmation. This view is different from the Catholic view in one very important way: it does not view baptism as creating new birth. Therefore, it is important to note here that even though infant baptizers and believer’s baptizers may differ, the issue in play is not the way that someone is saved. The differences are important but it is not an issue of salvation.

College Park does not baptize infants and for good reason. Let me give you four reasons:

1. There is not sufficient biblical support for baptizing infants.
2. Believer’s baptism is clearly the biblical pattern and infants cannot be professing believers.
3. Baptism is a symbol based upon faith not a symbol that anticipates faith.
4. Baptism pictures being “in Christ,” and children who are not professing believers are not yet “in Christ.”

Therefore, for those of you who were baptized as infants, I would encourage you to consider being baptized as a believer. That is why my title read “and some again.” Now I know that this is a difficult issue for some of you. I understand that. My entire family was rebaptized, and it was a challenging subject to discuss with our extended family. Additionally, my last church was in an area with a high concentration of Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches. So I often had to deal with this issue. Let me encourage you that there is a loving and thoughtful way to

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<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Catechism of the Catholic Church, (New York, New York: Image Book, 1994), 353

<sup>3</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, 357

<sup>4</sup> Many Episcopalians and Lutherans, while considered Protestant, hold a view that is more similar to the Catholic view than what I mention here when it comes to baptism.

talk with your family about this, and to help you I wrote an article to walk you through some things to think about as you enter into that discussion.

## **Proposed Constitutional Change**

I've said all of this in order to frame the discussion for our proposed wording change in the constitution. It is important for you to know two things: 1) College Park is committed to believer's baptism by immersion, and 2) we see a clear distinction between infant baptism and believer's baptism.

The situation that we have encountered is some people who have been attending College Park for a while, who were genuinely converted, and were baptized **after** receiving Christ. However, they were baptized by a means than immersion. These people view their post-conversion baptism as legitimate, and to be baptized again would be to invalidate their former profession of faith and violate their conscience. The Elders have wrestled with should the question of whether or not we should require these people to be baptized again simply because they weren't immersed. In other words, does being baptized by another mode make that baptism invalid?

Our conclusion is that we should not require them to be baptized again simply due to different mode. Although we feel that the mode is important, we are trying to get these issues in the right order of importance. In other words, the mode of baptism is secondary to the spiritual reality. We came to the conclusion that preventing someone from joining the church and requiring him or her to be baptized again simply because of the mode would be to elevate the mode over the meaning of baptism.

Therefore in article IV, section 1 on membership our proposed wording would read:

*Membership in the Church shall be restricted and limited to regenerated believers who have received baptism subsequent to regeneration. CPC practices immersion as the mode of baptism. The elders will consider, as exceptions, some who desire membership and have been baptized by another mode subsequent to conversion if it is a strong matter of their conscience informed by the Scripture and led by the Spirit.*

And our covenant would read:

*Having been led by the Holy Spirit to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and on the public confession of our faith having been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, solemnly and joyfully endeavor to keep the spirit of this covenant as one body in Christ.*

We are proposing this change for two reasons:

1. We are attempt to get important issues in the right order of importance (e.g, not elevating method over meaning)
2. We do not want to violate someone's conscience about the validity of their post-conversion baptism

As Elders we want you to see the real importance of baptism – that it is a dynamic symbol capturing some of the most glorious and important truths connected to our salvation. We also wanted to strengthen our commitment to the powerful picture of immersion while recognizing that that the meaning of baptism supercedes the mode.

And it is our prayer if you are new at College Park, you know Christ as Savior, but you've not been baptized that you will consider taking this important step.

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