

# ***BAPTISM THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Christian baptism has served as a symbol of passing from death into life through Christ's resurrection. The practice of baptism began with the Jewish practice of ritual cleansing (the Mikvah). The earliest church adopted it as a practice in leaving behind the old life of sin and being born again into the new creation found in the person of Jesus.

## ***THEOLOGY***

The Greek word for baptism is *gr: baptizo*, which was commonly used to describe ships that had sunk in the water's depths. The word has a connotation of death, describing the sinking of a vessel to a watery grave. The early church adopted this word to describe the practice of new believers in Jesus, being submersed into the waters of death, in which their old nature of sin died, and coming out of the water as a new creation, born anew into the life of Christ.

The practice of baptism is a symbolic picture of dying with Christ and being raised together with Him, supernaturally and by God's power, to live a new life sustained by the victory that Jesus in his own death burial and resurrection.

This is all summarized by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:1-11 when he wrote:

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup>Or don't you know that **all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** <sup>4</sup>We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Historically, the church has been committed to the practice of baptism because Jesus, himself, commanded the practice. Building it into his great commission of his disciples in Matthew 28, Jesus gave specific instructions to his disciples (and thereby to us as well) that they were to "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

From the very beginning, most Christ-followers have practiced baptism for new believers as a sacrament (sacred commandment) and believe that a significant spiritual exchange takes place in the act beyond mere symbolism. Like communion, baptism is a means by which believers in Jesus experience God's grace and presence that brings salvation and regeneration.

Scripturally speaking, the only pre-requisite for someone choosing to be baptized is a belief in and confession of Jesus as the resurrected son of God (Romans 10:9,10) and a willingness to become his disciple.

## ***KEY SCRIPTURES REGARDING BAPTISM***

### **Matthew 28:19**

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### **John 3:5**

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the kingdom without being born of water and spirit."

### **Acts 2:38**

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

### **Romans 6:4**

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.

### **1 Corinthians 12:13**

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

### **Galatians 3:26-27**

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.

### **Colossians 2:11-12**

When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision-the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

## ***PRACTICE***

The details of the practice of baptism have been disputed by many in the church for centuries. This is important to note as we consider what practices we embrace at GFC. Understanding that no one church has the corner on a perfect practice helps to approach the subject with humility and opens the door for us to design a way of baptizing people that fits within the normal way we do things.

The following answers to specific questions regarding practice are answered with the above in mind:

**1. Do we immerse or sprinkle people in baptism?**

GFC primarily practices full immersion. This is the most consistent with the description of baptism according to scripture. Additionally, we acknowledge the validity of sprinkling as this has been an accepted practice for many in the church for hundreds of years. Although our common practice is full immersion, we would, upon request or due to medical reasons, sprinkle.

**2. How old should someone be before we baptize them?**

GFC holds to the "age of reason" position regarding the appropriate age for baptism. This means that we will baptize anyone, regardless of age, so long as they are old enough to understand what they are doing. Regarding children younger than 12, we rely on the parents to attest to their child's ability to understand the decision to believe in Jesus and be baptized.

**3. Does GFC practice "spontaneous" baptisms?**

We embrace and practice spontaneous baptisms, so long as people understand that the prerequisites are the repentance of sins and the belief in and confession of Jesus as the resurrected son of God.

"Spontaneous" baptisms generally take place in predetermined "normal" baptism services in which an invitation is given for anyone present to participate in the celebration by being baptized themselves.

**4. Are we willing to baptize anyone?**

Yes. As stated above, the only prerequisites for someone to be baptized are the repentance of sins and a belief in and confession that Jesus is the resurrected son of God.

**5. Who can baptize people at GFC?**

If GFC is being represented, then the person who is baptizing should at least be a leader in good standing who embodies the purpose, mission, and vision of GFC.

**6. Are there any places outside the weekend service where we wouldn't want to baptize folks as long as we can immerse them?**

No.

**7. What language should be used when we are baptizing someone?**

The baptism officiant should ensure that the baptismal candidate has repented of their sins and that they believe in and confess that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God.

Once this has been confirmed, the officiate should use the following language:

*"Upon your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!"*