

Baptism Position Paper
Oakwood Christian Church
April 2016



According to our understanding of the New Testament, here are our answers to several important questions regarding baptism.

Who should be baptized? All those who are willing to repent of their sins and confess their belief in Christ should be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-39).

How should we be baptized? The word for “baptism” in the New Testament is the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “to immerse in water.” The New Testament says baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-5). Baptism serves as a symbol of the burial of the old self and the resurrection of the believer’s soul to walk in life with Christ. Therefore, at Oakwood, we baptize people by immersing them in water.

When should we be baptized? A person should be baptized at the time he or she trusts in Christ. The Bible teaches we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but in the New Testament church, a person’s baptism was always the first expression of faith, not separate from it. So baptism was not just a symbol or a memorial of faith, but was intended to offer a means of union with Christ and a benchmark of transformation, marking the place and time a person made a commitment to Christ (Rom. 6:1-8). At Oakwood, we are attempting to restore the original intent and practice of baptism. Therefore, we ask a person to be baptized at the point that he is ready to make a commitment to Christ.

Why should we be baptized? A person should be baptized to follow the example of Christ (Mat. 3:13-17), to obey Christ’s command (Mat. 28:18), to accept forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), to express trust in Christ (Acts 8:12-13), and to testify to God’s work in his or her life (Rom. 6:1-8; Gal. 3:27). Baptism also serves to cleanse a guilty conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to recognize their sin and guilt. The only method by which the human soul can be wiped clean of sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27-10:7). This “washing away” of sin is most clearly symbolized in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Since one of the biggest obstacles between God and man is human pride, baptism also offers a venue by which believers humble themselves before God and others and admit their need for Christ’s redemption (James 4:6). In addition, baptism meets a God-given human need for expression. Everyone needs an outlet for emotion, or an expression for an impression. Baptism is the outlet for an expression of faith in Christ.

The act of baptism cannot save an individual. We are saved only through accepting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Baptism demonstrates the believer’s acceptance of Christ and is the point of time when the believer receives assurance of his or her faith. Those who were never baptized by immersion but were sprinkled for baptism as infants rest in God’s merciful hands. We hope that Jesus will say to any person who has truly submitted to him but was not taught about immersion, “Your faith has saved you.” Yet someone who understands Christ’s command to be baptized and refuses to obey should not consider himself to have submitted to Christ.

Should a person ever be rebaptized? Any person who has trusted in Jesus as the only Son of God and who has willingly been immersed into Christ may become a member of Oakwood Christian Church whether the baptism occurred at Oakwood or elsewhere. Rebaptism is encouraged for those who lack confidence in their initial baptism experience because they don't remember it, they were coerced, or their heart was not right with God at the time. Anyone who has fallen into sin after having been baptized should repent and seek forgiveness, but rebaptism is not necessary (Acts 8:13-24).

Must a person be baptized during a worship service? No. Baptisms at other times are acceptable (Acts 8:38; 16:33), but baptisms during worship services are encouraged at Oakwood because they provide the opportunity to testify to your faith and show humility.

Paul exhorts all believers to unite, for we are all of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Regardless of our particular beliefs regarding the mode of baptism, it is important for all Christians to seek unity as representatives of Christ's body. We believe the source of unity is the truth of God's Word, and we pray that baptism will be a place of unity, not division, among believers (John 17:17-21).