

Position Paper

Baptism and Communion

The two central corporate celebrations (ordinances) of our community here at Crossroads Church Aspen are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is through Baptism that the inward work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is publicly professed and the person is incorporated into the Body of Christ. In celebrating the Lord's Supper we celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ; His active presence within the Church and His future returning. It is through these celebrations and others that we participate in God's unfolding story. We are a community on the move, whose life and mission are directed toward God (*visio Dei*).

In this paper we will briefly answer the following questions:

- Why is baptism and communion called ordinances and highlighted over other acts of obedience?
- What does our Belief Statement say about the Ordinances?
- Why is obedience to water baptism so important?
- Baptism does not save you, it is a key step of obedience
- What is the mode of baptism?
- Who can be baptized?
- What is the connection between baptism and communion?
- What is the difference between Water and Spirit baptism?

Why is Baptism and Communion called Ordinances and highlighted over other acts of obedience?

Protestants have historically recognized two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, whereas Roman Catholics have held to seven sacraments: baptism, the eucharist (Lord's Supper), confirmation, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and marriage. There is a difference of opinion regarding terminology. Catholics (and some Protestants) prefer the term *sacrament*, which comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, meaning "a thing set apart as sacred." The term *sacramentum* in the Latin Vulgate was also used to translate the Greek word *mysterion* (Eph. 5:32) and "came to be used for anything that had a secret or mysterious significance. Augustine called it 'the visible form of an invisible grace.' " Sacrament was later defined as an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." which does not have the connotation of conveying grace. An ordinance might

simply be defined as “an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church.” (Moody Handbook of Theology)

The term “ordinance” is simply defined as something believed to be ordained by God. The two ordinances of believer baptism and communion are to be regularly celebrated when the church gathers together corporately. They are set apart from all other acts of obedience within scripture because they are to occur when the Body gathers together. They are to focus the church on the saving grace of Christ within the individual life and the ongoing blessing of being in communion and fellowship with God through Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection.

What does our Belief Statement say about the Ordinances?

The following is from Crossroads Church Statement of Faith:

We believe Jesus Christ instituted two ordinances that all believers are to observe: Water Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (communion).

We believe water baptism symbolizes and identifies believers with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, bearing public testimony of their belief in Him.

We believe in baptism by immersion after conversion. (*Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 10:33,43,47-48; 38:44; Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 3:12-17*)

We believe the Lord’s supper is a memorial celebration of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. We believe the bread symbolizes His sacrificed body and the drink symbolizes His shed blood. (*Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:7-38; I Corinthians 11:17-30*)

The rite of baptism for the believer is a practice that was commanded by our Lord (*Matthew 28:19*) and followed by the church He established. (*Acts 2:38*) Baptism identifies believers with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*Romans 6:3-11*), and is subsequently intended only for those making a profession of faith in Him. Baptism is a symbolic picture of the spiritual reality of regeneration that takes place as the result of the Holy Spirit transforming the life of one trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (*John 3:5; I Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5*). Water also symbolizes the cleansing nature of regeneration as believers become purified from the consequences of sin, taking on a new nature in Christ. (*II Corinthians 5:17*)

Baptism comes from the Greek work *baptizo* which most scholars generally agree means “to immerse.” Its secular usage carried the idea of perishing by means of drowning (as for example, in a sinking ship). The Greek word *louo* is used in connection to the New Testament meaning of baptism (*I Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22; Titus 3:5*) and carries the idea of washing or cleansing the whole body as opposed to washing

parts of the body (*nipito*) or inanimate objects (*plyno*). Although the Greek word *rhantizo* (meaning sprinkle) is used in connection with Christ's blood being sprinkled on us as a sacrificial cleansing (*Hebrews 10:22; 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2*), this seems to allude more to the Old Testament practice of the sprinkling of blood in ceremonial sacrifices than to the New Testament practice of baptism. Although no explicit command is given in Scripture regarding the proper mode of baptism, it is clear that immersion carries the concepts of baptism (death, burial, resurrection, complete cleansing, new life, etc.) in a manner that is most meaningful.

The most important issue we feel is not the mode of baptism, but whether or not it is believer's baptism. If someone was sprinkled rather than immersed as a public profession of his/her faith, we will not require them to be immersed.

Why is obedience to water baptism so important?

From the scriptures we can see that the first thing anyone did who received the free gift of salvation by the grace of Christ was to get water baptized. This was an act of obedience because of being overjoyed with their new life in Christ where He accepted them just as they were taking their sin, shame and guilt and making them a new creation in Him. If someone balks at being baptized it is probably because they have not been taught the joy and importance of it.

Jesus our example

Jesus' was baptized by John as it says, "to fulfill all righteousness". Jesus is our example and He commanded each of us to be baptized as a public profession of our heart's commitment to follow Him as Savior and Lord. (Matt 3:16; Luke 3:21)

The Priority of Water Baptism

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

"All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John." (Luke 7:29-30)

The early church practiced water baptism immediately following profession of faith (Acts 2:36-47)

"Those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:41) A result of accepting the message of the gospel and putting your faith in Jesus was obedience to baptism and this also preceded becoming a member of the church.

Philip preaching in Samaria shows baptism immediately followed belief (Acts 8:12-13)

Philip sharing with and baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch -obviously the gospel which Philip preached made clear the important connection between belief and obedience to baptism because the Ethiopian had an urgency about getting baptized – we should ask why don't we see this urgency today? (Acts 8:34-28)

Paul was baptized as quick as possible after his conversion and baptism in the Spirit (Acts 9:18)

Lydia's conversion and household all were baptized immediately following belief (Acts 16:13-15)

The Philippian jailer was baptized along with his whole family immediately following belief (Acts 16:33-34)

Many of the Corinthians believed and were immediately baptized (Acts 18:8)

Cornelius and his whole household were baptized immediately following conversion (Acts 10:44-48)

The idea of our unity with Christ is intimately tied to our obedience in water baptism. (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:9-12)

Baptism does not save you, it is a key step of obedience

The scriptures are clear that we are saved by "grace" and not "works" of any kind. Obedience to baptism is just that – it is obedience to Jesus and it should be done as we see in scripture as a heart-felt desire to publically profess Christ.

There are two primary reasons why someone would struggle with obedience to baptism. They might not really be ready to commit to Jesus and follow Him or they might not understand what the Bible says about baptism. We will endeavor to incorporate discussion about baptism into all leadership and discipleship groups. (Eph 2:8, 1 Peter 3:21, Luke 23:42-43)

But is baptism necessary?

Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary if we are going to be obedient to Christ's commands and be a committed member of His church.

Reasons why it is not necessary for salvation:

1.) The Gospel is clear that salvation is by faith alone and not works or any kind. (Eph 2:8; Gal 5:1-12)

- 2.) The thief on the cross was saved and was not baptized. (Luke 23:43)
- 3.) 1 Peter 3:21, clearly shows the inward priority of the heart over the outward act
- 4.) The doctrine of justification clearly states that we are forgiven of our sins the moment we put our trust and faith in Christ

Reasons why it is necessary for obedience and the blessings that come with it:

- 1.) Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized. (Matt. 28:18-20)
- 2.) Jesus was baptized as our example. (Matt. 3:13-17)
- 3.) It is a requirement to be part of the local church. (Acts 2:38; 1Cor. 12:12-13)
- 4.) There is blessing and God's favor that come with all obedience to his Word. (John 14:15)
- 4.) There is great joy and the strengthening of one's faith. (John 8:31-32)
- 5.) There is assurance and confidence that you are identified with Christ and have been saved. (Romans 6:3-5, 11; 2Cor. 5:17)
- 6.) Baptism encourages the whole Body to see evidence of the Holy Spirit changing lives

Our Baptism celebrations should be a joyful time for the Body to come together and rejoice with those who are making a public profession of the inward working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. There is nothing to be scared about or apprehensive about. The fact is that Jesus commanded it clearly to be done publicly before the Body. If we are truly saved, and the Holy Spirit has sealed us and is working within us, we should be moved to desiring to obey and please our Lord. Often times it does come down to a pride issue. The question for all of us is; "Are we more concerned about our feelings and how we look etc or are we more concerned about pleasing Jesus?" We must remember what Jesus says, "If you love Me you will obey My commandments." (John 14:15)

What is the mode of baptism?

The practice of baptism in the New Testament was by immersion. This can be seen from the following:

- 1.) The Greek word "baptizo" means to plunge, dip or immerse.
- 2.) Mark 1:5; ""in the river Jordan"
- 3.) Mark 1:10, "Jesus came up out of the water"
- 4.) John 3:23, "because there was much water there
- 5.) Acts 8:36-39, sprinkling of water from a bottle would not do
- 6.) Rom. 6:3-4, baptism by immersion pictures best our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection
- 7.) Col. 2:12, we were buried with Him in baptism, a graphic picture of immersion
- 8.) Acts 22:16, immersion pictures best the washing away of our sins

"In all the discussion over the mode of baptism and the disputes over its meaning, it is easy for Christians to lose sight of the significance and beauty of baptism and to disregard the tremendous blessing that accompanies this ceremony. The amazing truths

of passing through the waters of judgment safely, of dying and rising with Christ, and of having our sins washed away, are truths of momentous and eternal proportion and ought to be an occasion for giving great glory and praise to God. If churches would teach these truths more clearly, baptisms would be the occasion of much more blessing in the church.” (Dr. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.969)

Who can be baptized?

The ordinance of baptism symbolizes the beginning of the Christian life and the New Testament shows that only those who give an adequate profession of faith should be baptized.

- 1.) Acts 2:41; shows that “those who received His word were baptized
- 2.) Acts 8:12; “When they believed Philip they were baptized”
- 3.) Acts 10:44-46; baptism was allowed for those who heard the Word
- 4.) Acts 10:47-48; baptism was allowed for those who had received the Holy Spirit
- 5.) Gal. 3:27; clearly shows that Paul assumed everyone who had been baptized had already put their faith in Jesus
- 6.) Rom. 6:3-4; shows that only those identified with Christ have been baptized

These verses clearly show that the New Testament requires profession of faith before baptism. In the above verses Romans 6:3-4, this could not apply to an infant, so those who argue for infant baptism have to resort to another interpretation here, they speak of being adopted into the covenant or into the covenant community. Also Colossians 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:21 could not be applied to an infant, because it presupposes a profession of faith and a walking in it.

Those who hold to infant baptism must ask the question; “What does baptizing the infant actually accomplish?” The Roman Catholics answer this question clearly. They say that the act of baptizing the infant causes regeneration or salvation. In other words they believe baptism is a requirement for salvation. This is where we radically disagree with the works-based salvation of the Roman Catholic Church. We believe that salvation is a free gift of God by His grace through faith alone, not works. We believe that baptism symbolizes what has already taken place inwardly inside the believer. Here though, those who hold to infant baptism (protestant churches) have a problem, for they can’t and won’t say that baptizing an infant guarantees their salvation or they would be like the Catholics, so the only explanation left is that it symbolizes probable and hopeful future regeneration. The problem with that is that the New Testament never pictures baptism that way, but always as a definite outward expression of inward regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Plus, all those holding to infant baptism, do require that child when they get older to make a personal profession and go through instruction before they can be a full member of the church partaking in communion.

So, we need to ask then, *“How old should children be before they can be baptized?”* The scripture does not give us an exact age, but as we have seen from looking at several verses that anyone who can give an adequate profession of their faith in Jesus Christ knowing what He has done for them and realizing the great blessings given to them can and should be baptized. This will vary from child to child. What a joy as a church Body to see little children stand up and make a profession of faith and step forward in obedience to God and desire to be baptized.

What kind of baptism will the church accept?

If someone at a previous church was baptized by sprinkling instead of immersion, we will accept that baptism here for membership as long as it was truly a believer baptism; that is, that the person was baptized after making a real profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The reason we will do this is because there should only be one baptism (believer baptism) and to make someone go through baptism again just because they were sprinkled would be nullifying their previous baptism just because of the mode of baptism. Again, the priority is the heart and realizing why we should be baptized. With this said, this Body as stated above believes that immersion is the biblical mode of baptism so all baptisms will be by immersion.

What is the connection between baptism and communion?

It is clear from the scriptures that the Lord’s Table or participating in communion is reserved for those who have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their life. It is a believer’s table. We can also see in the scriptures that there was no such thing as a believer who had not been obedient to baptism. Baptism was the act of obedience which showed that they were a follower of Jesus and a key step to becoming a member of the church.

We will not require someone to be baptized before they participate in communion. We will however highly encourage everyone to spend time as the scripture says examining themselves to make sure they are following what our Lord commands in the area of baptism. We will encourage parents to teach their children these principles and we will reinforce them during Crossroads Families, XGT(Middle School) and AP(High School). (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:38-47; 1 Cor. 11:17-34)

What is the difference between Water and Spirit baptism?

We can see in the scriptures that there is a distinction between obedience to water baptism and Spirit baptism. Water baptism is something we are commanded to do in obedience to our Lord – it is an issue of obedience. Spirit baptism is something which God brings upon His people. It is something which is to be sought after because it is promised to those who believe and are baptized. Now the baptism of the Spirit can

occur either before water baptism (in Cornelius' and Paul's experience) or it can happen at the same time as water baptism (Jesus' example) or it can happen after water baptism. All three experiences; profession of faith, water baptism and Spirit baptism should ideally occur at roughly the same time. All three of these experiences we will teach and endeavor to help people experience and grow into.

(Matt 3:11, Mk 1:8; Luke 3:16, John 1:33-34; Acts 1:5; 2:36-41; 8:14-17; 9:18; 10:44-48; 11:15-17; Acts 19:1-7)

Final Remarks

If you have any questions about any of the above information we would love to talk with you. Please contact either a member of the pastoral staff or an elder to set up a time to discuss these issues.