

What Does Campus Teach About Baptism?

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Finding a new church home can feel like diving into a cool, refreshing pool on a scorching hot day. Or it can feel like walking to the end of a diving board suspended fifty feet above a pail of water! I shiver when I think of some of the questions you might ask as you consider whether Campus is the church for you.

"Will I make lasting friendships here?"

"Does the worship take me into the presence of God?"

"Can I find a way to use my gifts in serving others?"

"Will my children find friends? Will they learn to love Jesus?"

Is this is a safe place for them to grow up?"

Along with these relational, spiritual and vocational questions, you probably have some doctrinal concerns as well: "What does Campus teach about . . . ?" As I said, trying to find a new church home can be an intimidating experience. This booklet seeks to help with at least one of those doctrinal questions: What does Campus teach about baptism?

### ***Navigating the Faith***

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When it comes to the teachings that shape our faith, Campus has a rather simple philosophy; *speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent*. We believe the Bible is God's written word, inspired, infallible and the final authority for all that we practice and believe. That isn't to say we've got it all figured out -- not by a long stretch. Our goal,

however, is to follow God's written word as closely and consistently as possible. It is the only reliable compass for navigating the sometimes-confusing voyage of faith.

If the Bible clearly commands some attitude, action or behavior, we want to obey it. We'll teach it as a command and encourage you to obey it as well. If, however, the Bible is silent on a subject, we do our best to avoid being dogmatic. If God didn't draw a line, neither should we. In matters of opinion, we extend and expect both liberty and love.

The Word on Water

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Each of the first three gospels tell the story of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13 - 17; Mark 1:9 - 11; Luke 3:21 - 22). Matthew's is the most detailed account. He tells that John the Baptist objected, at first, to Jesus' request for baptism; *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* (3:14).

Jesus replied, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness"* (3:15). To Jesus, baptism was a necessary step. John finally complied with his request.

Not only did Jesus submit to baptism, he also commanded his disciples to baptize (Matthew 28:18 - 20). While his earliest followers frequently struggled to put Jesus' words into practice, they seemed to accept his command to baptize without question. A quick survey of a few passages illustrates their compliance.

- ♦ Acts 2:27 - 39. When the people attending the feast of Pentecost were touched by Peter's message about Jesus, they asked, *"What shall we do?"* Peter replied, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
- ♦ Acts 8:26 - 39. At the command of the Spirit, Philip approached an Ethiopian government official and *"told him the good news about Jesus."* Apparently, Philip's message included something about baptism. The official said, *"Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized."*
- ♦ Acts 16:16 -34. After an earthquake freed the prisoners in his charge, Paul and Silas prevented a Philippian jailor's suicide. Shaken by the events of the evening, the jailor asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* They spoke the word of the Lord to him and immediately the jailor and his family were baptized.
- ♦ Romans 6:1 - 9. Paul explains the connection between Christ's death, burial and resurrection and our death to sin, burial in water, and resurrection to new life.
- ♦ 1 Peter 3:21. Peter emphasizes that baptism, far more than just a plunge into the water, is actually a heartfelt response to God's gracious offer of salvation.

## *Entering the Passages*

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A passage is more than just a verse from the Bible; it is a portal to a new life. To enter a passage is to travel to some place new. Perhaps these passages invite you to explore where you've been and maybe even to step out in a new direction. Have you been baptized? If so, was your baptism a response to God's grace? Or were you baptized in compliance to your parents' wishes or the expectations of a church? If you haven't been baptized, we urge you to explore these passages to see where they might lead you. We'd be honored to accompany you on the journey.

Cross Currents

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Seekers frequently ask us challenging questions. The freedom to inquire, reason together and discover new meanings is indispensable to spiritual growth. Here are a few of the questions we sometimes hear when we talk with people about baptism.

*By emphasizing baptism, aren't you trusting your own performance of a religious ritual rather than the saving work of Christ?*

Paul's teaching on this issue in Ephesians 2:8,9 is as crisp and clear as a mountain spring.

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."*

If you are saved, you are saved by God's grace through faith -- not by your own good behavior, your performance of some religious ritual, or your ability to submit to any set of rules. All through scripture, the point is the same; human beings cannot make themselves right in the eyes of God by what they do. Our works, no matter how good nor how many, are insufficient.

Think about it this way: Drop two people into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. One is a world-class distance swimmer -- the kind of athlete who gave up triathlons because they were too easy. The other learned to swim at summer camp in 1969 and hasn't been in the water since. Which one is going to make it to the coast of California from the middle of the Pacific? Neither!

The ocean represents, by a tiny fraction, the spiritual distance between a sinner and God. It doesn't matter how morally or ethically good you are, or how many rituals you perform. You can't cross that distance. No amount of repentance, prayer, good deeds, not even a dozen baptisms can make you right in the eyes of God. The only thing that justifies the sinner is trust in the saving work of Christ on the cross. As Paul said, salvation is "not by works."

*So why does Campus emphasize baptism?*

Our goal as Christians is to live as much like Jesus as we can. Since Jesus both submitted to and commanded baptism, we believe it must also be a part of our practice and teaching. Additionally, we see no conflict

between faith in Christ and obedience in baptism. The Bible never pits faith and baptism against each other. In fact, in Mark 16:16, Jesus put them together: *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."*

Nowhere does the Bible teach that baptism is a work *we* do for God. It does teach, however, that baptism is a work that *God* does for us (Colossians 2:9 - 12).

*I was christened as a child. Is that the same thing as baptism?*

We wish all parents were as committed to the spiritual development of their children as yours were. From the beginning, they wanted you to be a part of Christ's church. While we appreciate their commitment to your spiritual future, we do not believe that christening reflects the biblical model of baptism.

First, the word *baptism* literally means immersion. That's how all the Greek dictionaries define it. In some of the baptism scenes in the New Testament, the characters actually go down into, or come up out of, the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38, 39). That suggests that baptism in the first century involved more than sprinkling or pouring. Paul even compares baptism to a burial in Romans 6:1 - 9.

Second, in every example of New Testament baptism, the candidate was a believer; someone who was old enough to acknowledge by faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Old enough to admit they were sinners, old enough to make their own decisions. A fair amount of maturity is required to make those kinds of admissions and decisions.

Scripture always places belief before baptism. That way, we stay focused on Christ, not the ritual.

In no way do we mean to challenge the integrity of your parents' decision or to devalue the blessings of your spiritual heritage. In fact, baptism by immersion now offers you the opportunity to realize their prayers for you. They committed you to a life of spiritual progress and growth in your knowledge of, and obedience to the will of God. Your decision to be baptized by immersion now would in no way be a rejection of their hopes for you. It would, rather, ratify them.

*What about the thief on the cross? He was never baptized.*

No, as far as we know, he wasn't. He simply trusted Christ in the final moments of his life and was rewarded with paradise. There are a couple of ways to look at that story. We could view it as a paradigm for how sinners come to Christ. Simply repeat the words the thief spoke to Jesus, *"Remember me when you come into your kingdom,"* and you're saved. Of course, there are other verses that tell of how sinners repent of their sins and *are* baptized. It seems a bit cavalier just to choose whichever paradigm we like. Perhaps it's best to remember that Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. If we're looking for a model, we'd do well to follow His.

Another interpretive option is to stay focused on the cross of Jesus, rather than the thief on the cross. Viewed this way, the story stands as a moving testimony to the grace and mercy of God. It also illustrates the authority

of Jesus. He may grant salvation on any terms he might choose. But he is the one who chooses the terms. Not you. Not me. Since Jesus chose to include baptism we honor his authority by obeying his command.

*Okay, but what if I'm on my way to be baptized  
and a swarm of killer bees attack and kill me?*

That's what an insurance report would call "an act of God." Which is a good place to begin thinking about this question. Would God reject a soul that has made the decision to obey his command to be baptized, but is prevented from completing that obedience by some freak accident? Not on your life! God is just and merciful. He knows the heart.

The truth is, though, that most people aren't killed on their way to be baptized. It isn't accidents that stand in the way of obedience. It's attitude. By the way, did you know that the best way to survive a killer bee attack is to immerse yourself in water?

### *Conclusion*

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A few years ago a family decided to make Campus their church home. We spoke with them at length about baptism. No matter what we said, they just didn't see the need for it. Then, one Sunday morning they came forward after the sermon and asked to be baptized. Though grateful for their decision, I was surprised.

"We've been talking with you about this for over a year. What finally convinced you?"

Their answer was, as they say in the credit card commercials, priceless.

"Today you preached on Jesus' baptism. He was baptized to fulfill all

righteousness. We figure if the sinless Son of God needed to be baptized, we do too. We just want to follow Jesus."

That's as convincing a testimony as I've ever heard. In baptism, we follow Jesus. There's no better reason.

Making Arrangements

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A baptism can be arranged at any time, either during a worship service or another

time during the week. The baptistery is heated and we have a supply of clothes and

towels. You don't need to bring a thing. One of our elders or ministers will be happy to

baptize you, but you are welcome to ask anyone to share in this holy moment. To make

arrangements, please call our church office (770.923.0449).