



“Baptism: A Gift Of God’s Grace”



“Baptism—A Gift Of Grace”

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves. it is the gift of God" --Ephesians 2:8, 9

When a new baby enters the world or a couple begins a new relationship, it is customary to celebrate the occasion with gifts and to surround the person with acts of love. In the same way when people experiences new life or begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God also wants to extend some special gifts to them and surround them with His love. One of these precious gifts is the gift of baptism. At its very essence baptism is a wonderful expression of God’s unconditional love, and it is an important part of a relationship with God. It demonstrates God’s offer of forgiveness and salvation. It holds the promise of new life, a fresh start, and the hope of a brighter tomorrow. In addition, it identifies a person as a follower of Jesus in the family of believers. This resource is designed to help you understand more about baptism and how to receive this tremendous gift.

What is the meaning of baptism?

In the book of Ephesians believers are urged to remain united in Christ and to remember that “there is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” Also in I Corinthians 12:3 it says that “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” At Grace Community we believe that baptism is a gift of God meant to unite true believers in faith, and it is our desire to maintain unity with others while seeking Biblical truth about the meaning of this act.

Certainly all Christians agree that baptism is a sacred act done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In addition, they see baptism an integral step in making disciples, but there is also some misunderstanding about whether baptism is something we do (“a first step of obedience”, “a public commitment”, etc) or something God does for us. A closer look in the Bible clearly reveals that baptism is an act of God’s grace and a means of conveying His blessing. Every time the verb “be baptized” is used in Acts and the letters of Paul, it is used in the passive voice (which refers to something that is received by a person—not done by a person).

While baptism is an important part of a journey of faith, it is also a celebration of the cleansing, new life, and salvation offered to us by God. In baptism we are reminded that Jesus died and rose again, and we receive the joy and power to live the new life that He wants for us. It is both an image of God's grace and an instrument of His continued blessing in a life. It a wonderful time to reflect upon what God has done for you and to receive again the promises God offers to you in the gospel. It has great value to people of faith and it is a key part of God's plan for becoming a passionate and devoted follower of Jesus.

Why is baptism important?

The value of baptism is not found in mere symbolism, but rather it is found in the blessing of God. The Bible elevates the significance of this act by acknowledging that in baptism God *celebrates and conveys* certain spiritual blessings. For example:

Baptism celebrates our connection to Christ

- *"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" --Col 2:12 (NLT)*

Baptism celebrates our new life in Christ.

- *"When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun!" --2 Corinthians. 5:17*
- *"By our baptism then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... so also we may live a new life!" --Romans 6:4*

Baptism celebrates other gifts given to us in Christ.

- *Forgiveness Of Sins & The Gift Of The Holy Spirit "be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"—Acts 2:38*
- *A Place In God's Family "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"—Gal. 3:26-27*

Who may receive baptism?

Virtually all Christians agree that believing adults and mature children who have not been baptized should receive baptism (*"Those who believe and accepted His message were baptized..."--Acts 2:41*). Yet over the past few centuries some Christians have debated whether young children and infants may also receive this gift. While there are brothers and sisters in Christ who look at this issue differently, we believe that the gift of God's grace in baptism is available to all God's children, and our practice is based on three important principles of Scripture.

#1 All people including infants are in need of God's grace.

In Psalm 51:5 King David writes, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." While little ones seem innocent at first, looks can be deceiving because all people have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). When we baptize and infant we are not confirming this child's faith or sealing his or her eternal destiny. Rather we are saying with humility that this is somebody who needs God's grace (the Bible tells us that through the disobedience of one person sin came into the world and all people were made sinners). At the same time we are also declaring the good news that God has sent His son Jesus to die for our sins and the sins of the whole world so that whoever believes in Him may be delivered from death, declared righteous, & given eternal life.

#2 All people are loved by Jesus & able to receive God's grace.

In the Gospel of Luke it says, "People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Lk 18:15-17) And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:16)

Sometimes people wonder, "How can an infant receive blessings or how can an infant believe?" Well, in Mark 10:16 it says that Jesus blessed the little ones, and in Matthew 18:6 Jesus himself

talks about the little ones who believe in Him. Also in Psalm 22:9 David writes “you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.” Perhaps we misunderstand the nature of faith when we confine it to "reason." Faith is not merely a product of reason but of relationship. It is a relationship of love and trust that goes deeper to the heart and soul.

#3 All people are included in the promises of baptism and invited to receive God's grace.

In Colossians 2:11-12 Paul connects the New Testament promise of baptism with the Old Testament practice of circumcision which had a special connection with kids. He writes, “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God...”

Also in Acts 2:38-39 the inclusion of children is made more clear when Peter tells the crowd to “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. The promise is for you and your children....”

In the Bible we discover that God never made a covenant with those who followed Him that did not include their children. And this family nature of God's promises made clear in the New Testament promise of baptism. Based on this teaching of Scripture we believe that children of believers are included in God's covenant of grace and that they may receive the gift of baptism.

Naturally some people might wonder if this means that all people who are baptized will ultimately go to heaven. It does not. While God's covenant of grace was extended to all the descendants of Abraham, only those who understood their need for God and grew into personal faith were saved. In much the same way we believe baptized children must come to confess their sinfulness, turn to God; and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin as they are led into a mature personal faith in their Savior.

When we think about it, it is an exciting thing to know that God has a special place in His kingdom for families and for the little ones who are brought to Him. While some families may have different preferences relating to baptism, we invite children and adults to receive this gift. As we do this we express the truth that we have been saved by grace alone, apart from works, and we gain assurance of God's love for us and His gracious work in our lives.

What options are there for a baptism service?

A Public Service

When a person is part of a church family, it is wonderful to celebrate God's work in your life with others in the community of faith. This type of celebration is usually scheduled in advance, and it may happen during or just after a morning worship service.

A Private Service

Since baptism is a celebration of your relationship with Jesus and your connection with a community of believers, most baptism services are part of a worship service. However, sometimes it may be possible for a pastor to officiate at a smaller 15-minute service with family and friends at a home, lake, pool, or beach. Generally, these services will be held on a Sunday afternoon at a location to be arranged by the participant.

Method Of Baptism

Since Jesus did not specify a single method we do not either. For infants and young children pouring may be an appropriate picture of God pouring out His love, Spirit, and blessing on a child. For older children and adults immersion is a beautiful representation of dying to our old sinful nature and rising to new life in Jesus Christ.

How can a baptism be meaningful & memorable?

For Everyone:

- Invite people. This is a special time in your life and your faith, so be sure to invite your family, friends, small group members, etc. There is no limit on the number of guests!
- Video tape it or take lots of pictures.

For Adults:

- Write a thank you to God for what He has done for you
- Share why a favorite verse or song is meaningful to you.
- Write a brief testimony / story of God's work in your life (ideas and suggestions on how to write a brief testimony can be found at www.ExploreGrace.com/resources.htm)
- Make a 2 minute video testimony or power point slide show of God's work in your life.
- Use this time of celebration to affirm your relationship with your local church and ask about joining as members (find more info at www.ExploreGrace.com/membership.htm)

For Parents Of Young Children:

- Write a brief letter, card, or note to your child. Let them know how much you love them and how much God loves them. Tell them about your desire to see them grow in life's most important relationship.
- Choose a special verse to give to your child or a favorite song to be sung or played.

I am a little nervous. Do I have to say anything?

If you are a new to the faith or a little nervous, don't worry. We are delighted to be a part of this important step in your newly found walk with Jesus. Our intent is to come alongside of you and help ensure that your baptism is a *non-threatening event* that will be a personal time of deep significance for you.

In a typical baptism service most of the talking is done by the pastor who may share a few Bible verses, give a brief devotional talk, or share about the meaning of baptism. However, a baptism service can be a special time to affirm in a simple way your own faith in front of people who love you and are thrilled to hear what God is doing in your life.

Is baptism a once for all fix?

Unfortunately not. While God imparts His grace and blessings to the child or new believer, the work of becoming more like Jesus is ongoing work of God's Spirit in all people. In addition, baptism is not the end of the life of faith. It is always seen in the Bible as a first step of faith which is to be followed by a life of faithfully following Jesus. To believe on Jesus is a present continuous action, and as children and new believers mature their faith must grow from a childlike trust to a mature belief that they possess for themselves.

When can I be baptized?

One simple answer is as soon as you are part of God's family. In Acts 8:35-38 it says, Phillip "told him the Good News about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So they went down into the water and Philip baptized him." --Acts 8:35-38. There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have begun a relationship with Jesus, you can and should be baptized. If you wait until you are ready or until the perfect time, it may never come.

Can family or friends be baptized together?

We expect that each person or family who receives this gift of understands the meaning of baptism and is coming with faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. In the New Testaments several baptisms included whole households who had encountered God's grace. Other baptisms were just of individuals. Sometimes it might not be wise to wait on others to join you in baptism. This might make them feel pressured or uncomfortable, and it might keep you from experiencing the joy and excitement of this special act.

Do I have to be a member to be baptized at Grace?

No. Membership is not a requirement for a person to be baptized at Grace. We only ask that you be regular attenders who are trusting in Jesus for salvation and have a sincere desire to have Christ centered life and a God honoring home. However, baptism is a requirement for those seeking membership.

Is rebaptism or a reaffirmation of baptism necessary?

The question of rebaptism is very closely related to the questions of what is the meaning of baptism and who are the appropriate recipients. If our baptism was dependent on our steps of obedience or the steadfastness of our faith, we would probably have to get rebaptized every time we stumbled or doubted. If on the other hand baptism is a gift of God based on the promise of His Word, then we need not doubt the promise of God given in baptism and which He has not taken back. Therefore, if a person has been baptized with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is not necessary to be baptized again.

Scripture states that we should "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit...one faith, *one baptism*" (Eph 4:3-6). In light of this verse, we differ from churches that require individuals to be baptized according to a specific church's customs and requirements. Such a narrow view of baptism according to one's preferences is usually not helpful and certainly not a requirement. However if a person is motivated by a sincere desire to follow God, he or she may consider a reaffirmation of God's promises in baptism.

Is baptism just a symbol of our commitment to God?

From time to time Christians have compared baptism to a wedding ring—a symbol of a commitment already made. While many people see their baptism as a symbol of their commitment to God, it is helpful to remember one crucial distinction. The ring you wear from your wedding day is in fact a reminder of the promise that *someone else* made to you. The words of a wedding ceremony are "do you give this ring as a symbol that you will keep this pledge and perform the vow that you have made?" And when the ring is given to the other person the spouse says "with this ring I thee wed." In other words the ring that you wear is a reminder of someone else's promise to you.

Well, in much the same way baptism is a moment in time when God affirms the promises He made to you and He makes his love tangible and real in your life. It is a time when the relationship is strengthened and it is a time that you can always go back to. If our faith was dependent on how committed we were, how pure we stayed, or how we felt, we would be on very shaky ground. But when our faith is based on what God has promised to us we stand on solid ground because we have assurance that God is always faithful.

How can water bless you or save you?

The bottom line is that we are saved only by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus. So if only Jesus saves, another question to consider is "How does God extend His grace and blessings to us?" Clearly this happens through His Word. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

When the promises of God's Word are received in connection with the water, God in His mystery imparts His grace and blessing upon our life.

What do I need to know before baptizing my child?

Your Responsibility As A Parent

When a child is baptized a parent also acknowledges a solemn responsibility and trust - a responsibility to raise your child in the nurture and instruction of the Lord. The baptism service provides you, as a parent, an opportunity to make this commitment public before God, your friends, and family.

An Informational Meeting

To help encourage you in your role as a parent we ask each parent desiring to baptize his or her child at Grace Community to attend an informational meeting where you will receive information of the following:

1. The importance of baptism
2. The responsibility of the parent in raising children who love and serve God.
3. Ways to make a baptism service more meaningful and memorable for you

Use Of Sponsors Or “Godparents”

Regardless of what term is used, we do welcome you to choose significant individuals to give you support, encouragement and accountability as you seek in your role as parents. These sponsors will be asked to affirm their desire to assist you in raising your children in the Christian faith; however, they are not required.

What About A Person Who Is Not Baptized?

It is not uncommon to wonder, “What if I don’t baptize my child?” Does this imply that he or she will be left outside of God’s grace or that the Holy Spirit is somehow working more in the life of a baptized child than in my child? It is conceivable that the same question could be asked of a baptized adult versus an unbaptized adult. While it is possible for a person who has not been baptized to be saved, this does not mean that we should neglect this precious gift. Besides the thief on the cross, there is no Biblical example of a believer in Jesus who is not baptized.

Although many wonder about what happens to those who are not baptized, the gift of baptism seems to address some more relevant questions such as: What if a parent wanted to bring a little one to the Lord as parents did many years ago when Jesus was on earth? What if a person desired assurance of God’s love and care for his or her child? What if a new believer wanted to know God’s love for them personally and to experience the new life and birth that God promises in a significant way? Is there a way to do this?

In the Bible the answer is clearly yes! When God affirms His love for His children, when He calls them by name, and when He meets them personally it is for their benefit. When we are baptized we are recipients of God grace and His wonderful promises of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. We are also reminded that God’s love and grace is extended to all people—even little ones and even sinful people like us—and it is something that you can always go back to. In addition, it is a moment in time when God made His love real and tangible to us personally.

In some ways the gift of baptism is like the gift of communion. When we receive the bread and the cup we are assured that Jesus gave his body and blood for us—but we are not implying anything about those who do not commune as regularly. Baptism and communion are acts of grace—not of condemnation—meant to strengthen faith and life. With this in mind we invite you to consider this receiving this precious gift.

If you have other questions that you would like to discuss or if you would like to consider being baptized at Grace Community, we would love to talk to you. Please contact Pastor Jeff Olsen at (813) 994-9363 or jeff@exploregrace.com