

BAPTISM

AT MERCY VILLAGE CHURCH



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Some Content Adapted From The Village Church in TX

(WE DO NOT OWN ALL OF THIS CONTENT)

www.mercyvillage.church

What is Baptism?

Baptism is the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; it signifies and seals our adoption into Christ, our cleansing from sin, and our commitment to belong to the Lord and to his church.

Is Baptism with Water the Washing Away of Sin Itself?

No, only the blood of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit can cleanse us from sin.

NEW CITY CATECHISM QUESTIONS 44 & 45

HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL:

This booklet is designed to give an overview of the theological convictions of Mercy Village Church on the topic of baptism. We provide this booklet to those who wish to be baptized at Mercy Village Church or simply desire to learn more about our beliefs. Those who attend the Mercy Village Church Gospel Class will receive a copy of this material. Those desiring to be baptized at Mercy Village Church are asked to read the material prior to meeting with a Mercy Village Church pastor. As you read it, note any questions that you might have regarding the material and be prepared to ask those questions during the baptism interview.

WHAT ABOUT KIDS:

We provide a supplementary document for help discussing this topic with children. If you need that document, and have not received it, please let us know. We encourage parents/guardians to read this current document first and only then, move on to the supplementary document.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism and communion (the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances¹ prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ as visible symbols of invisible grace. They are discernible and tangible representations of both the invisible realities of the gospel² and the Spirit's application of this gospel to our lives.

With both ordinances, believers have an opportunity to "remember" God's goodness and grace, especially as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both baptism and communion picture Christ's death and resurrection and our participation in His death and resurrection through union to Him in faith. As we enter into the waters or watch another do so, we are reminded that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and that we, too, have died to the old self in order to live for Christ.

What a person believes about baptism affects how they will perform the ordinance. Who should be baptized? When should they be baptized? How should they be baptized? All of these questions are answered as we reflect upon what baptism means.

At Mercy Village, we believe that baptism is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts the release from the mastery of Satan, sin and death.

As a symbol, baptism illustrates a number of significant realities:

1. Christ's death and resurrection
2. The disciple's union with Christ in His death and resurrection
3. The new life in which a disciple walks
4. Cleansing and washing away of sin

VERY IMPORTANT! IS BAPTISM MERELY A SYMBOL?

Within the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of the sacraments was fiercely debated, even between the various Reformers. ***Without attempting to justify any particular position, it is important to assert that baptism is in some mysterious sense a "means of grace," in which God sanctifies and encourages His people.*** That said, it is important to bear in mind a few helpful truths regarding what baptism is not and does not do:

¹ Protestant theology has often chosen the term "ordinance" rather than "sacrament" in order to distance itself from the accompanying nuances of the Roman Catholic usage of that term. That said, if understood properly, either term is acceptable.

² Though there are various ways to describe the "good news," it centers on the provision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a substitute for our sins. He lived a perfect life, was crucified, and was raised three days later. Through faith in Him, we are united to Him and thus reconciled to God.

1. **BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE.** Though grace is mysteriously mediated through the ordinance, it is not saving grace but rather sanctifying grace. We are more conformed to the image of Christ as we obey Him in the call to be baptized.³
2. **BAPTISM IS NOT “NECESSARY” FOR SALVATION.** Without in any way diminishing the duty and delight of baptism for a believer, we must also warn against thinking which suggests that salvation is dependent upon baptism. The gospel is one of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone.⁴

WHY SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

MATTHEW 28:18–20 *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

ACTS 2:37–41 *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

ACTS 22:16 *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*

1. To obey the commands of Christ
2. To evidence that a person is a disciple of Christ
3. To follow the example of Christ

³ While 1 Peter 3 states, “baptism...saves you,” it is important to note the context and particularly Peter’s immediate clarification that it is not the water but the “appeal to God” which saves. This corresponds to passages such as Romans 10:13, which states that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” We appeal to God and call upon Him as an expression of faith. Baptism is a symbol of this faith which alone saves.

⁴ John 3 states that unless a person is “born of water and the Spirit” he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Many point to this as evidence of the necessity of baptism. However, nothing in the context suggests that Jesus is speaking of baptism. Rather, He is alluding to the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, which speaks of both “water” and “Spirit.” Therefore, Jesus is saying that “new birth” or “regeneration” is necessary for salvation, not baptism.

Baptism is not merely a responsibility but also a privilege. We have the opportunity to evidence our trust in and love for our King through obedience in this ordinance. If we think of baptism as a mere burden, we have not properly understood the joy of following Christ in the call to be baptized. We should have a similar response as the Ethiopian eunuch who, when he believed the gospel, proclaimed, “What prevents me from being baptized?” It should be our joy, and we should eagerly anticipate our participation in the ordinance.

While there are certain costs associated with baptism,⁵ the reward of obedience is always worth it.

The desire to be baptized should be motivated by a desire to glorify God in faithful obedience. Any other motivation (to join a particular local church, to please a friend or family member, etc.) should not be the ultimate reason for seeking to be baptized.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

MATTHEW 28:18–20 *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

At Mercy Village we believe that “water baptism is only intended for those who have received the saving benefits of Christ through the new birth of the Holy Spirit.”

We practice what is called “believer’s” or “confessor’s” baptism, which means we only baptize those who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reading through Acts, we find baptism explicitly related to repentance, receiving the Word, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit.⁶ There is no explicit evidence to suggest that nonbelievers were baptized.

ACTS 2:41 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

ACTS 8:12 *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*

GALATIANS 3:27 *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

⁵ In certain cultures, those who are baptized open themselves up to public persecution. Even in our context, participants often face the ridicule of family and friends.

⁶ See Appendix B: Paedobaptism for an extended look at the distinctions between believer’s baptism and infant baptism and for thoughts on the referenced passages in Acts.

ROMANS 6:3–4 *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

SHOULD A PERSON BE REBAPTIZED?

At Mercy Village Church, we hold that baptism should not be repeated. If you were baptized in a Protestant church—even as a child or infant—and that baptism now holds meaningful significance in your walk with Jesus, then we joyfully affirm it and encourage you to *remember your baptism* as a milestone of God’s saving grace and covenant love. However, if your baptism feels disconnected or meaningless to you—if it lacks personal substance or significance as a marker of your faith and belonging to Christ—we would invite you to prayerfully consider being baptized again. This is not about chasing an emotional experience or reliving a spiritual high. It’s about embracing the gift of baptism as a visible, memorable testimony of what God has done in your life. We do not receive Catholic baptisms as valid for membership, but we do receive all Protestant baptisms that are personally meaningful and consistent with gospel belief. If not, baptism may be your next step.

While we do not consider Catholic baptisms to align with our understanding of baptism when welcoming Christians into membership, we joyfully receive Protestant baptisms—whether from childhood or later in life—when they reflect gospel belief and hold meaningful personal significance.

WHEN SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

ACTS 22:16 *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*

As soon as a person trusts Christ, he or she should be baptized. The Scriptures do not speak of a delayed baptism in which a regenerate believer refrains from obedience to the ordinance. In all the accounts in the Scriptures, baptism is rather immediate. This pattern of somewhat immediate baptism should be emulated unless there are convincing reasons to delay baptism.

IMPROPER MOTIVATIONS FOR DELAYED BAPTISM:

1. FEAR

One of the most common reasons for delaying is fear, but such anxiety should not hinder our obedience. It is important to know that fear is sin and thus should not to be passively accepted. Confronting sin is an essential aspect of discipleship, and a person’s obedience in this area is an excellent way to begin the process of sanctification in the area of the fear of man.⁷

⁷ An excellent resource on this topic is “When People are Big and God is Small” by Ed Welch.

2. NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH

There will never be a time where a person will be “good enough” for baptism. Our right to enter the baptismal waters is grounded upon Christ’s righteousness, not our own. If we have been united to Him, we should confidently draw near in obedience to His command and example.

THE PRACTICE OF MERCY VILLAGE CHURCH

At Mercy Village Church, we ask believers who wish to be baptized to immediately read this document, talk to a pastor, and commit to participation in a Baptism Service.⁸ First, this practice allows us to discuss the gospel and the meaning of baptism and to teach our theological convictions regarding both. Second, it allows the church the opportunity to celebrate together as a congregation sharing in the joy of a person’s obedience and agreeing to walk with him or her in fellowship. Finally, it allows the person being baptized to invite family and friends who will have an opportunity to celebrate and hear the proclamation of the gospel.

HOW SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Though other denominations and theological traditions baptize by pouring or sprinkling, Mercy Village practices baptism by immersion.⁹ We do so in light of the following considerations:

1. The Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizo) literally means to plunge, submerge or immerse.

Our English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek baptizo. Baptizo was used in Greek literature to describe the act of immersing something in water or another liquid. It later became a technical term that referred specifically to the Christian ordinance of baptism.

2. The representation of union in Christ’s death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion.

Whether buried below or above ground, the symbolism of burial is still that of being placed under something. Likewise, resurrection is accomplished by coming out of something (whether grave or tomb). Immersion best symbolizes this reality by actually placing the believer under the water and bringing them out.

In addition, it is interesting to note the use of water to symbolize judgment in the Scriptures (e.g. the flood of Gen. 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exod. 14). Thus, by passing through the waters of baptism, the believer expresses trust that God’s judgment has been satisfied by Christ.

⁸ Baptism Services are regularly scheduled services where we rejoice in new births in our congregation and rebirth through baptism.

⁹ Except in those rare cases in which immersion is impossible or impractical. By way of examples, baptism by sprinkling is certainly to be practiced in the case of a person who is physically unable to be immersed or in the case of a particularly severe drought in which water is sparse.

COLOSSIANS 2:12 *Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

ROMANS 6:3–4 *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

3. The surrounding context of baptisms in the Scriptures suggests baptism by immersion.

MATTHEW 3:16 *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately **he went up from the water**, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.*

MARK 1:5, 10 *And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins...And when **he came up out of the water**, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.¹⁰*

JOHN 3:23 *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, **because water was plentiful there**, and people were coming and being baptized.*

ACTS 8:38–39 *And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both **went down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they **came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.¹¹*

WHERE SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Although there are no prescriptions in the Scriptures to location, we prefer to practice the ordinance within the context of the local church in order to allow the congregation to celebrate together in a person's act of obedience and submission.

That said, we do not want to prescribe what the Scriptures do not, and thus we do allow for baptism to occur outside the weekly gathering. Our preference in such cases is that video and/or pictures be taken to record the event so that the church can share in the joy.

¹⁰ The prepositions here are crucial. Verse 5 has the Greek *en*, not another preposition meaning beside or near. Verse 10 has *ek* not *apo* which would have been used for merely going away from the water.

¹¹ It is important to note that this verse speaks of both Philip and the eunuch going down into and coming up out of the water, but the significance is found in the fact that they actually entered into the water which would have been unnecessary if baptizing by sprinkling or pouring. Surely the caravan would have had sufficient water for those modes had they been a preferable practice.

WHO CAN PERFORM BAPTISM?

The Bible gives no prescription for the requirements to perform baptism. Contrary to some traditions, there seems to be no biblical reason to restrict the duty to men who have been ordained to vocational ministry.

Therefore, we allow any believer, male or female, who has faithfully obeyed the ordinance of baptism to perform the ordinance of baptism.

APPENDIX A: HOW WE BAPTIZE AT MERCY VILLAGE

PRIOR TO THE BAPTISM:

1. We ask those wishing to be baptized to read through this booklet, and to speak to a pastor concerning any questions they might have. This allows us to explain the gospel and our theology of baptism.
2. After reading through this document, we ask for participants to submit a brief testimony of conversion in which we look particularly for evidences of grace and a proper understanding of the gospel. For instance, we want to make sure a person does not articulate that he or she was born a Christian or thinks that Christianity consists merely in moral improvement.

BAPTISM SERVICES:

1. We have hope to have regular Baptism Services in which the church celebrates baptisms together. We encourage those wishing to be baptized to do so within the context of these gatherings.¹²
2. Participants are asked to personally share their testimonies¹³ if possible or to have the person baptizing them to share for them.
3. After the testimony—upon entering the water—the person performing the baptism will ask three important questions, “Do you believe that Jesus is God?”, “Do you believe Jesus died and rose again?”, and “Do you believe that Jesus has the power to forgive sins?” The baptizee will respond to each question, “Yes” or “I do.”
4. The baptizer will then immerse and subsequently raise the baptizee out of the water while saying, “I baptize you, my (brother or sister) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ [Some will choose to also say, “Buried with Jesus in His death, raised with Him in His resurrection” which is taken from Rom. 6:4 *We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*]

¹² We should remember from the “Where Should a Person be Baptized?” section that this is a preference, not a prescription.

¹³ See Appendix-E: How To Write A Baptism Testimony for help with this specific opportunity.

¹⁴ Following the formula of Matthew 28:19, we baptize using the Trinitarian confession. In Acts, the apostles typically baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” but this should not be viewed as differing in meaning from Matthew’s prescription. The context of Acts is concerned with testifying to the resurrection of Christ, and thus He is distinguished among the persons of the Trinity, but all that is true of the character (“name” often represents character in the Scriptures) of Christ is true of the Father and Spirit, as well.

HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Wear dark shorts and a dark shirt to maintain modesty.
2. Bring a change of clothes, towel and bag to hold your wet clothes after you change.
3. Feel free to sit with visiting family and friends, we'll call all the participants up front as we prepare for the baptisms.
4. Arrive 10 minutes prior to the service where you are being baptized, so we can confirm that all the participants are there.

BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP

At Mercy Village Church, baptism is a requirement for membership. We believe baptism is a sacred and visible expression of belonging to Christ and His Church. While we practice baptism by immersion, we do not require a specific mode for membership. If you were baptized in a Protestant church—whether as a child or as an adult—we joyfully receive that baptism, as long as it reflects gospel belief and holds meaningful significance in your walk with Jesus. If it does not, we'd be honored to walk with you as you consider taking that step.

APPENDIX B: CREDOBAPTISM VS. PAEDOBAPTISM

As discussed in the section on “Who Should be Baptized?” Mercy Village only baptizes those who, at the time of baptism, are able to personally profess faith in Christ. However, not all denominations and traditions follow this practice. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Anglicanism and a number of mainline Protestant denominations practice infant baptism (called paedobaptism from the Greek *paidon* meaning infant or child). While all practice the same form, the underlying theologies of each are quite distinct. Without going into detail regarding each, we will look briefly at the two most common in the particular context of Mercy Village, Roman Catholicism and Protestant Paedobaptism. For further study on this topic, see the recommended resources in Appendix D.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Roman Catholicism teaches that all infants should be baptized at which time the child is regenerated or born again. In the case of infants, who are unable to exercise saving faith, the faith of the church is effective to remove original sin and bestow saving grace.

OUR RESPONSE:

The faith of another person will not substitute for a person’s own response to the gospel, and the baptismal waters hold no special powers of regeneration. While God’s grace is certainly present in the waters, it is the grace of sanctification, not regeneration or justification.

The Roman Catholic understanding of baptism crosses over into the realm works-righteousness which stands in contrast to the protestant understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Galatians, a gospel of works is ultimately “another gospel”. We hold to this response with humble and gracious tenacity and a full-fledged commitment to, as much as is possible, to live peaceably with all.

PROTESTANT PAEDOBAPTISM

Protestant paedobaptism is similar to Roman Catholic infant baptism in form only. According to Protestant theology, faith alone is the instrument in justification, and therefore saving grace is not bestowed in the waters. Therefore, those who practice infant baptism in the Protestant tradition are our brothers in the faith in regards to the essential elements of orthodox Christianity. Without diminishing our overwhelming agreement on the fundamentals of the faith with those who practice infant baptism, it is nevertheless important to highlight this area of disagreement.

Protestant paedobaptism prescribes baptism of adults who convert to Christianity but differs in practice from those who perform believer's baptism by additionally prescribing infant baptism for children of believing parents. This view is founded upon three main arguments:

1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant.
2. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant as circumcision was the sign of the Old.
3. There is essential continuity between the Old and New Covenants.

This discussion centers on the degree of continuity between the Old and New Covenants.¹⁵ Within the Old Covenant, Israel was commanded to circumcise their sons on the eighth day as a sign and seal of their being included within God's covenant with the nation. Protestant paedobaptism interprets baptism as analogous to circumcision (using Col. 2:11-12 as a reference) and thus teaches that the sign and seal should be performed for children of New Covenant believers, as well. As Acts 2:39 states, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off."

OUR RESPONSE:

1. The Old Covenant community was primarily entered into physically (by birth), whereas the New Covenant is entered into spiritually (by rebirth—being "born again").¹⁶ Whereas Protestant paedobaptism prescribes baptism for those in physical infancy, credobaptism (believer's baptism) insists upon the baptism of those in spiritual infancy, having been born again through the Holy Spirit.
2. The Old Covenant community was a mixed community composed of both believers and unbelievers (Rom. 2:29, 9:6). The New Covenant community is technically a congregation of believers (Jer. 31:34).¹⁷
3. Though there is a great degree of continuity between the covenants, there is also substantial discontinuity. The Old Covenant consisted of shadows which pointed to the substance fulfilled in Christ (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). We need to be careful about directly applying elements of the Old Covenant without recognizing the essential distinctions.

¹⁵ In contrasting the Old and New Covenants, it is recognized that there was not simply one old covenant, but indeed various covenants appear throughout the context of Genesis through Malachi.

¹⁶ Note the relationship between Jesus' mention of "water" and "spirit" in John 3 in the context of being "born again" with the promise of "water" and "spirit" in the New Covenant prophecy of Ezekiel 36. See John Piper's *Finally Alive* for a helpful theology of regeneration in general and for a discussion of its role in the fulfillment of the New Covenant in particular.

¹⁷ This is not to deny that there are those who are unregenerate within the visible church but simply that the true community of the Church consists of those who have been born again to the living hope (1 Pet. 1:3).

4. Passages such as Acts 2:39 do not affirm the paedobaptist position. The “promise” affirmed is the promise of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4 and 2:33), and it is specifically applied to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” The fact that the promise is for “your children” should no more lead us to thinking that all children are covenant community members as the fact that it is for “all who are far off” should lead us to conclude that all people everywhere are. The passage teaches that the Holy Spirit will be given to all whom Christ calls to Himself, not that we should baptize children.

Our theological conviction regarding believer’s baptism is confirmed as we look in the book of Acts. Here are the baptisms in Acts and the descriptions given of those who were baptized.

ACTS 2:

In chapter 2, we find Peter preaching the Word in the midst of the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The crowd cries out in conviction, “Brothers, what shall we do?” to which Peter responds, “repent and be baptized.” In verse 41, we read that those who were baptized were “those who received his word.”

ACTS 8:

There are two accounts of baptism in chapter 8. The first occurs in response to the preaching of Philip (one of the seven selected in Acts 6 to assist the apostles) in Samaria. In verse 12, we read that many were baptized: “When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”

The second account again involves the ministry of Philip as he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. After preaching Christ from Isaiah 53 to the eunuch, he requests baptism, and Philip obliges. The text itself does not specify the conditions for such baptism; although, some manuscripts record the eunuch stating, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

ACTS 9:

Chapter 9 contains the baptism of Paul immediately after his experience on the Damascus road. Within the context, we read that Ananias was specifically sent to minister to Paul that he might receive sight (having been blinded by the vision of Christ in 9:3-9) and “be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 10:

The 10th chapter includes the baptism of Cornelius and, presumably, his household. After Peter preached the gospel to those who were gathered, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.” Peter describes this as having “received the Holy Spirit.” When Peter recounts the experience to the church in Jerusalem, their interpretation of the event is that it evidenced that “God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

ACTS 16:

Like chapter 8, this chapter also includes two distinct accounts of baptisms. The first involves Lydia and her household. Though nothing is specifically stated about the condition of her household (see below “What About Household Baptisms?”), Lydia’s baptism is related to the reality that “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul,” and her subsequent appeal is based upon her perceived faithfulness (vs. 15).

The second account in chapter 16 involves the jailer and his household, who heard the “word of the Lord” that was preached to them by Paul and Silas (vs. 32). As in the case of Lydia, no explicit mention is made as to the spiritual condition of the jailer’s household, but his own is specifically included as vs. 34 indicates that they rejoiced “that he had believed in God.”

ACTS 19:

The final account of baptism in the book of Acts is found in chapter 19. In this context, Paul discovers some “disciples” who had been baptized into John’s baptism of repentance but had not yet received the Holy Spirit. In response, Paul baptizes them, lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS?

Though the explicit mention of the baptism of an entire household is only made in the two accounts in chapter 16, the narrative of Cornelius’ conversion probably implies the same. Proponents of infant baptism (paedobaptism) believe that such baptisms can be used as implicit justification for infant baptism.¹⁸

If households were baptized and if those households included infants, we have biblical evidence of paedobaptism. What are we to make of these claims? Here are a few thoughts:

First, it must be noted that the entire argument is founded upon the presumed presence of infants within the household. The text itself does not necessitate such a reading. There is no convincing evidence of infants in the households (though to be fair, there is no explicit statement otherwise either).

Second, the texts in question have clues which at least suggest that all who were baptized had been converted.

1. Acts 10 explicitly states that Cornelius “feared God with all his household.” In other words, all in his household were described as fearing God. Those who were baptized were those who “feared.”

¹⁸ It must be noted that household baptisms are not a major line of defense of the paedobaptist position. See the relevant section on paedobaptism for the typical theological defenses of infant baptism.

2. Acts 16 describes the baptism of the jailer's household. In verse 31, Paul or Silas says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Surely this does not mean that if the jailer believed, his household would be saved as Protestant paedobaptists would agree. The best interpretation of this text is that those who believed would be saved and that those who were baptized were those who believed. In addition, the word is spoken to his entire household (vs. 32), and his entire household rejoiced together (vs. 34).
3. Additionally, consider the relationship between 1 Corinthians 1:16, which states that Paul baptized "the household of Stephanas" and 1 Corinthians 16:15, which states that his "household" consisted of devoted converts.

SUMMARY: While the timing and mode of baptism are not absolutely essential to the Christian faith, they are nonetheless important theological convictions that we hold firmly. We love and respect our Protestant brothers and sisters who disagree with believer's baptism, but we believe and subsequently teach it as the biblical form of baptism.

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CREDOBAPTISM – the view that only those who have been regenerated and trust Christ as Lord and Savior should be baptized, also known as believer’s or confessor’s baptism

PAEDOBAPTISM – the view that infants of believing parents should be baptized

IMMERSION – a mode or form of baptism in which the baptizee is submerged under the water

SPRINKLING – a mode or form of baptism in which the baptizee is sprinkled with water, also known as effusion or pouring

REGENERATED – to be “born again,” regeneration refers to the event in which God grants new life to His children, and they subsequently exercise faith and love toward Him

JUSTIFICATION – the term for the declaration of righteousness that God credits to our account. It is often distinguished from “sanctification”

SANCTIFICATION – a progressive work of God in which believers are continually conformed to the image of Jesus Christ

APPENDIX D: FOR FURTHER STUDY

RELEVANT PASSAGES IN THE SCRIPTURES:

- Matthew 3, 21, 28
- Mark 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 16
- Luke 3, 7, 11, 12, 20
- John 1, 3, 4, 10
- Acts 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22
- Romans 6
- 1 Corinthians 1, 10, 12, 15
- Galatians 3
- Ephesians 4
- Colossians 2
- Hebrews 6, 9
- 1 Peter 3

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* – edited by Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright
- www.desiringgod.org/topics/baptism-membership

APPENDIX E: HOW TO WRITE A BAPTISM TESTIMONY

Writing Your Baptism Testimony

A guide for sharing your story at Mercy Village Church

Why We Share Testimonies at Baptism

Baptism is a sacred moment. At Mercy Village Church, we refer to it as a **sacrament**—a God-given and grace-filled act of worship. It's also a **symbol** of what Jesus has done for us, a **story** of how that grace has changed our lives, and a **celebration** of new life in Christ and belonging to His church.

Your baptism is a chance to **share that story**—a way to proclaim, in your own words, what Jesus has done for you. Through your testimony, you're not only honoring the work of God in your life—you're also encouraging others who may be wrestling with questions, doubts, or a longing to follow Jesus themselves.

We believe baptism is more than just a step of obedience. It's a **sacred milestone** in the life of a believer and a **public witness** to the church and the world: *"My life is committed from this point forward totally and completely to Jesus Christ."*

So when you share your testimony, you're not just giving information—you're bearing witness to the gospel. And we can't wait to celebrate that with you.

What Is a Testimony?

Your "testimony" is simply a short story about how you've come to trust in Jesus. Everyone's story is different—some dramatic, some quiet, some over time, some in a moment. But they all point to the same truth: **Jesus saves, and He is worthy of our lives.**

We invite everyone being baptized at Mercy Village to write out their story and read it aloud just before entering the water. It usually takes **less than 60 seconds** to share.

Your testimony should include these five simple parts:

1. **Life before faith:** What was your life like before you trusted Jesus? (This can be brief—especially for kids who've grown up in a church context.)
2. **Coming to faith:** When and how did you come to believe in Jesus? What helped you understand your need for Him?
3. **The turning point:** Were there any key conversations, events, or realizations that played a role?
4. **A declaration of faith:** This is where you affirm that you've placed your trust in Jesus and want to follow Him.
5. **Gratitude:** Mention anyone (family, friends, mentors) who helped you along the way.

A Few Helpful Notes

- Aim to write something that can be read slowly and clearly in **under a minute**.
- Keep it honest and simple. This isn't a performance—it's your story.
- It's okay if you don't remember an exact moment of conversion. Some testimonies involve a gradual awakening to grace over time.
- Parents of younger children can help them craft their testimony in their own words, or co-read it with them if needed.

Sample Testimonies

Adult Example:

My name is Jane Doe. A few months ago, I started realizing that I had been trying to carry everything on my own. I had heard the gospel many times, but it finally clicked—I needed Jesus. I confessed my sin and placed my trust in Him. I now know I'm forgiven and loved, and I want to live for Him. I want to thank my sister and my community group for praying for me and helping me take this step.

Child Example:

Hi! My name is Johnny, and I'm 10 years old. One night, I talked to my mom about Jesus and asked questions about sin and forgiveness. I told Jesus I was sorry for my sin and that I believe He died and rose for me. I want to follow Him, and I'm excited to be baptized. Thanks to my mom and dad and my Sunday school teacher for helping me know Jesus!

General Example:

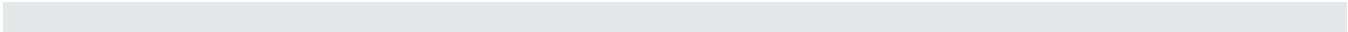
I'm John Doe. Over the past year, I've realized that all the success I was chasing didn't satisfy me. God used friends and conversations to slowly open my heart to the truth. About a month ago, I trusted in Jesus and gave my life to Him. I'm being baptized today as a symbol of that transformation and as a way to say—my life belongs to Jesus now.

Final Step: Send Us Your Testimony

Once you've written your testimony, please send it to a pastor at least **one week before your baptism**. This gives us time to help you refine it if needed and make sure you feel confident and ready.

We are so excited to celebrate your baptism with you.
Thank you for sharing your story—it matters.

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Mercy Village Church

www.mercyvillage.church