

THE JOY OF BAPTISM AT: THE RIDGE

“The ordinance of baptism by immersion is commanded by the Scriptures. All who repent and believe on Christ as Savior and Lord are to be baptized. Thus they declare to the world that they have died with Christ and that they also have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life.”

Biblical Christianity is surprisingly simple. When distilled to its essence, the teachings of Jesus involve virtually none of the ceremonies, rituals or other features usually associated with religions. Yet Jesus did leave us with ordinances, concrete ways of connecting with His person and with other believers. Water baptism and Communion are the two ordinances practiced by at The Ridge. Neither makes us a Christian, but both communicate to us what it means to be one, as well as telling the world at large what we have become and are becoming.

Baptism is a meaningless exercise if a person doesn't believe in Jesus the Savior. Many people are sincerely deluded that by having at some time or another been baptized, that covers the issue with God. However sincere their motivation or the motivation of their parents, baptism is only a human work that can earn nothing from God apart from coming to Christ and receiving salvation as the free gift. Then baptism is a sign of our obedience to His lordship. He calls us to be baptized.

Some who have accepted Christ as adults wonder if the baptism they received as infants fulfills the New Testament mandate of water baptism (1 Peter 3:21). At The Ridge, we believe baptism in water is to follow salvation (acceptance of Christ and His forgiveness of our sins) as demonstrated in the New Testament. For this reason we urge all new converts to follow the biblical pattern of water baptism in obedience to Christ.

What is The Ridge' position concerning the baptism of children, their security in the Kingdom, and the practice of dedicating them to the Lord?

According to the Bible, everyone (adult or child) who recognizes his or her need of a Savior and then repents and believes in Christ should be baptized (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:36-38). But in the Scripture there is no record of infants or very young children being baptized. This is because they are not yet able to understand the need of a Savior.

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Yet God places a high priority on children. When asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus responded, “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (**Matthew 18:3**). God’s love for children is also shown in the Old Testament. In Leviticus the Lord specifically prohibited the people of Israel from offering their children as a sacrifice to the pagan god, Moloch (**Leviticus 20:1-5**). It seems fair to conclude that if God forbade children from being sacrificed, He would not order those same children to be placed in the eternal fire of hell. From these Scriptures we at The Ridge deduce that children are loved by God, and until they come to an age of understanding (some call it “the age of accountability”), they have a place in the kingdom of God. This means that should a child die before developing to a point where the knowledge of Christ can be understood and applied through forgiveness, the child would inherit eternal life in heaven as an heir of God’s kingdom.

In **Luke 2** we see the parents of the baby Jesus taking Him to the temple “to present Him to the Lord” (**Luke 2:22**). Later the Gospels tell us that little children and infants were brought to Jesus for Him to touch them and bless them (**Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17**). In following this practice, we at the Ridge encourage parents to publicly dedicate their children to the Lord. This is usually done in a church service. In dedicating their child the parents acknowledge the child as a gift from God and vow before Him and the congregation to set a godly example for the child and a commitment to lead the child to Christ at an early age.

There are many people who have received Jesus Christ but who have not come to the waters of baptism. The Bible very clearly calls us to baptism in this sequence: repent and be baptized. So if you were baptized a long time ago, before you received Jesus, you need to be baptized now. This doesn’t impugn the sincerity of your parents who may have brought you for baptism as an infant.

Some might ask: “How do you feel about people who are baptized as infants?” I thank God for parents who had enough spiritual savvy that they at least cared enough to do something that indicated that they thanked God for that child and wanted to acknowledge it to the Almighty God. It’s not a matter of saying anything unkind in that arena, but looking at the fact that **you and I have our own responsibility after we receive the Lord**; you need to get baptized in water. That’s the Word of God.

At The Ridge, we dedicate babies but we do not baptize them, not as a feisty opposition, but because it avoids the child later being confused, thinking because they got baptized then that now, after they’ve received the Lord, they

don't need to be baptized. **Repent and be baptized: those things are to go in tandem. That's the Word of God.**

Water baptism: dead, buried, and raised with Christ

While Jesus himself did not baptize anyone, He immediately delegated this responsibility to His followers (**John 4:2**) who continued the practice under His direction (**Mathew 28:19**) as a way of initiating new believers into the faith (**Acts 2:41**). For 2,000 years, followers of Jesus have made three powerful statements concerning the act of water baptism: a statement to the past, a statement about the present and a statement that addresses the future.

A Word to the Past tense: I have chosen. At various times in history, misguided Christians have attempted to coerce others into baptism as a way of forcing them into their religion. These campaigns hardly accomplished Jesus' original mission for the church to "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (**Matthew 28:19, NIV**). Obviously, being a "disciple" is meant to come first, and that by free choice. An Ethiopian who came to faith by way of Philip's witness asked him, "*Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?*" (**Acts 8:36**)

This is the attitude that baptism represents: a desire to announce that I have chosen to follow Christ. The Ridge commends water baptism for those believers who are old enough to understand the experience. Understanding is needed in order to fulfill the biblical emphasis on voluntary choice and saving faith.

A Word to the Here and Now: I can identify. Baptism is a way of telling the world that I identify with Jesus in every respect. When a believer enters the water, he or she is being "buried with [Christ] in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (**Colossians 2:12**). In this sense, every baptism is a funeral for the old self, a way of saying that sin and death no longer own me, "because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (**Romans 6:6-7**). But it is much more. The grave could not hold Jesus any more than the water can hold us. At Christ's return, the grave will be unable to hold us as well (**Romans 8:11**).

Christ's death and resurrection and ascension are the great universals of the Christian faith, accessible to anyone who believes. Despite some differences in theology and method, all Christian traditions practice water baptism in some form, telling the world that their faith is not a set of beliefs, but a life lived out in Christ. We at The Ridge advocate water baptism by immersion whenever it is possible, in order to reinforce the symbolism of burial and resurrection and to reflect the practice as normally found in the New Testament.

A Pronouncement to the Future: I will be faithful. Scripture records baptisms taking place in public settings. Since church buildings were not in normal regular use until the third century A.D., the public nature of the ordinance most

likely persisted for generations. Thus, to be baptized as a Christian in a largely pagan culture was to make a very public statement of total commitment to Christ, and to face the consequences of that commitment.

Public baptism makes it impossible for Christians to practice a “secret” faith concealed from a possibly hostile world. A baptismal service, especially when accompanied by the new believer’s retelling of his or her spiritual journey, is a powerful witness to the risen Christ and a statement of commitment to the Savior that cannot be retracted. It is a way of saying that I have counted the cost and decided to serve God with all my heart (**Luke 14:25-33**).

We at The Ridge strive to implement the historic Christian practice of baptizing “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (**Matthew 28:19**). In addition to being Jesus’ only instruction on the matter, this wording reflects the triune God’s total commitment to the believer. The Father’s love sent the Son to the cross. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit upon the church (**Matthew 3:11; John 15:26**).