

# Westwind Church

## Statement on Baptism

### What is Baptism?

The New Testament talks about 4 different categories of baptism. The first is the practice of baptisms (immersions or washings) that were common among the Jews and persons of other religious beliefs during that time period. The second is the baptism that John (the forerunner to Jesus) proclaimed and administered. His was a baptism of repentance. It signified people's acceptance of his message that they should turn back to the true God and be prepared for the coming of His promised Son, the Christ. The third is the baptism of the Spirit of God. This is a spiritual baptism, a regeneration of a person's life, sometimes referred to as their salvation experience. It is a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person as they place their trust fully in Jesus Christ for salvation (forgiveness and a restored relationship with God). The fourth is the water baptism that Jesus commanded should be submitted to by all who wished to become His disciples. It was intended to signify their acceptance of Him as their Savior and Lord, the Son of God.

Baptism in the Bible is immersion. This was the meaning of the Greek word before, during and after the time of Jesus and the Apostles. It is unfortunate that the English translators of the New Testament during the reformation and since have chosen to transliterate rather than translate the Greek word, "Baptidzo". It is also evident in the New Testament accounts of persons being baptized that they were immersed. (Most notable see Acts 8:38-39) The New Testament letters also give evidence that the symbolism in baptism corresponds to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. A person being put under the water symbolizes their death to sin and self, the old way of living, and coming up out of the water symbolizes their resurrection with Christ to a new way of life. (See Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12)

### Why do we teach that believers in Jesus Christ should be baptized in water following their conversion experience?

1. Jesus commanded it. He instituted water baptism as a sort of initiation rite that publicly marked those who were becoming His disciples. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16) It is an act of obedience for those who become His disciples. Jesus Himself modeled submission to water baptism at the hands of John (the one who was preparing the people to receive Jesus) at the beginning of His public ministry. (See Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:19-34)
2. The Apostles and the early Church practiced it. (Acts 2:36-41; 8:12; 8:35-39; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:8; 19:1-7; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21)
3. It is an outward picture of the inner event of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (spiritual birth). It is a symbol and a testimony that a person has received Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21) Through this symbol we identify with Jesus and His finished work for our forgiveness through His death on the cross and His resurrection.

### Why do we encourage people to be baptized after they have personally placed their faith in Jesus Christ?

We do believe that the universal church of Jesus Christ is made up of every person who has been "born-again", (John 3:1-8). People are born-again by God's grace through their faith (trust) in Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-7). Water baptism is an outward act of obedience and a symbol

that signifies that a person has in fact received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. It identifies them with Christ and the local expression of His church.

In the Scriptures, water baptism always immediately followed a person's conversion experience. (See the book of Acts) Though water baptism does not "save" a person it signifies that they have been "saved" and shows their desire to be affiliated with a local expression of the church. It was always a first step, a sort of initiation rite into life as a Christian which also "marked" them as a member of the visible, local church.

Then and today, baptism is the point at which many new believers experience the harshest persecution from their unbelieving families or persons in their prior religious affiliation. The reason this happens is that obedience to baptism solidifies visibly what a person has confessed with their mouth. At that point, their testimony is visibly demonstrated--they publicly demonstrate that they are now dead to their former manner of life and are now committed to being an obedient follower of Jesus Christ and are actively affiliated with His body, the Church.

### **Do you require baptism of people desiring to be "owners" of the church?**

The short answer to this is "no". We consider church ownership and baptism to be two separate issues. Church ownership is a decision to commit oneself to the Westwind worshipping community. It involves celebrating, connecting and contributing to God's story. It also means that an "owner" of Westwind will have a say in budget and major decision making (i.e. land purchase). Baptism is a spiritual decision that has to do with demonstrating your faith in Jesus and submitting to his commands. Therefore, though a person is not yet baptized, they can still be part of the worshipping community by celebrating through church attendance, connecting to others at Westwind, and contributing with their time, gifts and resources. We would encourage that person to prayerfully consider a believers baptism, but do not make it necessary to be an "owner" of Westwind.

### **What about infant baptism?**

We know that not all believers agree with our perspective of baptism. Our desire is to base our teaching and practices solely on the Scriptures. We do not see any clear practice of, or compelling teaching, concerning infant baptism in the Bible. Therefore, we do not and will not baptize infants. We understand that there are varying views of this and seek to promote unity within our church body.