

Why Must I Be Baptized to Join the Church?

Bridgeway Church draws people from various denominational and religious backgrounds. Consequently those who come from a different church tradition may or may not understand Bridgeway's doctrinal stance on a number of church issues.

A popular question among newcomers is **“Why must I be baptized by immersion in order to join Bridgeway Church?”** Inquirers will make comments such as... *“Other churches don't require it... It is not necessary for salvation... Isn't that a legalistic requirement? ... Aren't there various interpretations of the scripture for baptism?”* etc. These are good questions that certainly deserve good answers.

First of all baptism is an issue of ***conviction not preference***. To say that it is *“required”* by the church is an understatement. A better word would be *“assumed”*. It should be assumed by the church that a person would be baptized by immersion because God requires it. In fact He commands it. Baptism is a conviction derived from the very Word of God and not to be considered a preference. A preference is something that is neither right or wrong but rather a choice that is subject to a persons desire or taste. It is purely optional such as choosing blue over red or picking the pecan pie over the coconut cream. Where as a conviction is based upon Gods revelation and offers no option. Since baptism is a command of God (Matthew 28:19) it must be obeyed and expected by the church.

Secondly baptism is an issue of ***interpretation not tradition***. Some say, “I was baptized by sprinkling in my own denomination years ago” or “I was christened as a baby.” Why must I be re-baptized now by immersion? Various denominations will define their traditions and establish ordinances from their particular interpretation of scripture. Jesus confronted the Pharisees when He said *“Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”* (Matthew 15:3) Note Christ's statements in the gospel of Mark. *“Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. He was also saying to them, you are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition...thus you are invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down...”* (Mark 7:8-9; 13)

Church tradition is ok provided that it is firmly established on a proper interpretation of scripture. The term baptism is a transliteration from the Greek word **“baptizo”**. The word is a household name that literally means **immerse**. The word was used to describe drowning, dying fabrics or even dipping horseshoes in water to cool them.

Therefore the translation for **“baptizo”** can only be **immersion**. It has no other meaning. The apostle Peter writes *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of ones own interpretation.”* (2Peter 1:20) The Bible must be

interpreted the way God meant it and thus we must look to the literal and contextual translation of the text.

Baptizo has one interpretation and cannot be applied in any other way. This is important when it is used in a command of God.

Thirdly baptism is an issue of *love not law* Jesus said in *John 15:9-10*, “*Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in My love, if you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.*” Jesus obeyed His Father because of His love for Him. We too should obey because of our love for Christ. When we obey God’s command to be baptized we are demonstrating our loving submission to His perfect will.

There is a fourth reason believers’ baptism is required at Bridgeway. It is an issue of *privilege not burden*. Some believers see baptism as a nuisance or burden to add to their spiritual “to do” list. In fact some are embarrassed by it! Christians must understand the great privilege of being publicly identified with Christ through baptism. The Apostle John knew the joy of this privilege when he wrote, “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are!*” (1John 3:1) He was pleased to be associated with Christ and His calling.

Also the Apostle Paul writes “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*” (Romans 1:16) He too, counted it a privilege to be identified with Christ.

Jesus said “*For who ever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*” (Luke 9:26) This statement by Christ alone should give us good reason to be baptized.

A wedding ring is a wonderful symbol of marriage. It signifies that a person belongs to another through a loving covenant relationship. There is no law that says one must wear a wedding ring, however those who are married choose to wear them indicating that they belong to someone and are committed to them. Likewise, it is a great privilege and honor to be baptized proclaiming our allegiance as the bride of Christ.

Finally baptism is required in our church because it is an issue of *integrity not hypocrisy*. In order to maintain the integrity of Christ’s church we must be of biblical substance. The church today is a signpost of truth to the world and its message must be characterized by clarity, purity, and power. There should be no trace of hypocrisy. When believers are allowed entrance into the membership of a local church and by passing Christ’s divine command to be baptized it creates confusion, dilutes the strength of the church, and pollutes its message. Churches that have differing views of the bible have lost their power of influence.

Healthy churches know what they believe and why they believe it. This is why it is the conviction of Bridgeway Church that baptism by immersion is in keeping with God's command and is expected by our church if we are to be obedient.