

Revisiting Baptism

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

In looking at baptism, we saw that the evidence, on a prima facia (on the face) level, speak of baptism in terms of immersion. We still hold to this position. Baptism, rightly administered, should be by immersion. What we wish to put forward, is not a change in that position, but to allow an exception, in our bylaws (not in the articles of faith) allowing for someone whose experience with baptism has been that of a believer BUT has been by another mode: i.e. sprinkling or pouring. What we, the elder-deacon board, are proposing is adding the italicized words to Article 6.1 of our Constitution:

Anyone who genuinely believes in the Triune God - the Father, the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit – according to the Scriptures, who has been baptized Scripturally as a believer, who desires to be united to this local Church, who is willing to submit to its Scriptural government, and who enters into the Church Covenant by signature is eligible for membership. *While the preferred mode for believer's baptism is immersion, believer's baptism by sprinkling or pouring will not automatically disqualify from membership one who otherwise meets the criteria stated herein*

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

Early Baptist Not as "monolithic" as we think they were

We are not insensible that as to the order of Gods house, and entire communion therein there are some things wherein we (as well as others) are not at a full accord among ourselves, as for instance; the known principle, and state of the consciences of diverse of us, that have agreed in this Confession is such; that we cannot hold Church communion, with any other then Baptized believers, and Churches constituted of such; yet some others of us have a greater liberty and freedom in our spirits that way; and therefore we have purposely omitted the mention of things of that nature, that we might concur, in giving this evidence of our agreement, both among ourselves, and with other good Christians, in those important articles of the Christian Religion, mainly insisted on by us: and this notwithstanding we all esteem it our chief concern, both among our selves, and all others that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, and love him in sincerity, to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace; and in order thereunto, to exercise all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.

From the Appendix on Baptism from the original publication of the 1689 Confession of Faith

Listen: *Man of God: Particular Pilgrims* on John Bunyan and Baptism

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

RGC Article of Faith on members of the Church (26.4)

The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and conduct) their obedience to that call of Christ. They also consent willingly to walk together, according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves to the Lord and one to another, by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel.

This is the same as the 1689 Confession. This is the only paragraph pertaining to what constitutes members of a church in either. Notice that there isn't a prerequisite in terms of baptism. For the baptized believers in late 17th century London, as we saw above, they weren't of one accord in that matter.

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

"The Confession does not assert that someone baptized by another mode is not baptized. Immersion is necessary only to the 'due' administration. This may mean its 'proper, fitting, or suitable' administration. The Confession does not take up all the possible irregularities. It does not manifest a rigid, externalistic, or superstitious fascination with how much water is used." -Sam Waldron

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

Administration and Validity

What makes a baptism valid in terms of what we believe in our Articles of Faith

Article 29.2 of RGC Articles of Faith

Those who actually profess repentance toward God, namely, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.

The validity of a baptism has to do with the faith of the subject of baptism.

Article 29.4 of RGC Articles of Faith

Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary for the due administration of this ordinance.

This is how we are to administer baptism under normal circumstances. However, administration and validity are not one and the same.

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

Meaning of βαπτίζω (baptizo)

- wash, purify
- plunge, dip, wash,
- metaphorically plunge or dip
 - Israel being baptized into Moses-1 Corinthians 10:2
 - Baptism by the Spirit
- Passages like Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12, give us the idea that baptism by immersion best illustrates the realities being communicated (even if one rejects those as referring to water baptism).
- Yet passages like Hebrews 10:22 seem to tie the washing of the body with pure water as illustrative of our "hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." (i.e. a shower or pouring over). Do note, I do read this differently, but do see how it could be read otherwise
- This is just to illustrate why one could have a "good faith" baptism by a different mode
- What we can say is this: we receive such a person whose baptism is valid even though improperly administered

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

- Different Emphases by Baptists over time
 - Some emphasize subjects of baptism without reference to mode
 - Other emphasize the mode without reference to the subjects
 - CRC Pastor: "I kind of like the idea of doing both: sprinkling the infant, and when they're older, immersing them." This is someone whose understanding of baptists has to do with the mode.
 - Immersion is not unique to baptists (Eastern Orthodox Video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFGHerqhSC8&list=WL&index=23>
- Presbyterians allow for all three modes (immersion, pouring, or sprinkling). All denominations also allow for believer's baptism in the case of converts who did not experience infant baptism.
- The concerns we, the board, have
 - What of someone who came to faith as an adult, not having been raised in Christianity, who was baptized, as a believer, in a Presbyterian, Methodist, or other denomination which favors sprinkling or pouring?
 - Such were baptized in good faith, likely as new believers, not having been instructed in baptism as we understand it. Do we consider them "unbaptized?"
 - Do we require such a person, who was baptized in good faith, to be rebaptized?

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

- We must be wary of "landmarkism"
 - Landmark Baptists argue that they alone are the pure churches and that there is no universal church (visible or invisible). They assert they are not tied to the Protestants as they are part of an unbroken line going back to the apostles (J. M. Carroll's *Trail of Blood*)
 - a Landmark Baptist church will only accept baptism from another Landmark Baptist Church. Some require baptism regardless of where one has been baptized. For them, water baptism is not simply identification with Christ and His people, it's identification with Christ in a particular group of believers.
- Do we accept people into membership who were baptized as believers, in good faith, in Trinitarian traditions by immersion, though those churches might disagree with things very important to us?
 - Mennonite?
 - Assemblies of God and other Trinitarian Pentecostal?
 - Free Will Baptist?
 - Landmark Baptist?
 - "Traditionalist" Southern Baptist?
 - It seems that we should have no interest in requiring such people be rebaptized unless they were not genuine believers at the time (in such case, it isn't a "rebaptism" but a baptism)
 - To reject a baptism on the grounds that the baptizer disagreed with our mode is akin to rejecting a baptism because it was done by an Arminian. That sounds kind of "landmarky." Are we willing to go there?

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

Anyone who genuinely believes in the Triune God - the Father, the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit – according to the Scriptures, who has been baptized Scripturally as a believer, who desires to be united to this local Church, who is willing to submit to its Scriptural government, and who enters into the Church Covenant by signature is eligible for membership. *While the preferred mode for believer's baptism is immersion, believer's baptism by sprinkling or pouring will not automatically disqualify from membership one who otherwise meets the criteria stated herein*

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

What This Is Not

- This is not a proposal to change our practice with regards to how we ourselves administer baptism.
- This is not a proposal to move towards infant baptism
- This is not a proposal to expand the provisions of 6.1.1 and 6.1.2
 - 6.1.1 In special circumstances, a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was baptized as an infant according to certain “Protestant” traditions, may apply for membership in this church. This believer should first be instructed, and encouraged in the scriptural practice of “believer’s baptism”, and if during this instruction he/she comes to agreement with the convictions of this church regarding the practice of baptism, then he/she shall be baptized, as a believer, according to the Scriptures.
 - 6.1.2 If, however, such a believer is prevented by conscience from submitting to “believer’s baptism” the elders may recommend such a person for affirmation into membership, provided that he/she agrees to be submissive to the instruction of the church in this matter, and to continue to maintain a teachable and peaceful spirit with regard to the standards of the church respecting baptism.

Revisiting Baptism

Mode of Baptism and Membership

What This Is

- This is a proposed revision to our constitution to allow for exceptions regarding already baptized believers, baptized as believers, who wish to join our church but whose baptism was not by immersion: That is all
- This is expected to be a rare exception