

Questions & Answers About Baptism (Heath Church of Christ)

Why does HCC baptize by immersion and not by sprinkling or pouring?

The original language of the New Testament was Greek. When the Apostle Paul and others wrote about baptism, they always used a Greek word (verb – baptidzo) that meant to “dip, plunge or immerse.” There are other Greek words that mean “to sprinkle or pour.” If the writers had intended to introduce other modes of baptism they would have chosen the appropriate word. Instead they specified immersion.

A scriptural example comes from Acts 8:38, where Philip baptizes a man from Ethiopia. After the man expressed his faith in Christ, Philip and the man went down into the water, indicating the mode of baptism was by immersion. Immersion was also the commonly accepted form of baptism during the first four centuries of the church and sprinkling was not officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church until the 14th Century.

Should infants be baptized?

We must ask another question in answering this one. Are people born with the mark or guilt of sin already in our lives? Or are people born as a “clean slate” and not seen as sinful in God’s eyes until they are old enough to personally choose to act in opposition with what they know God has commanded?

At HCC, we believe that all mankind has a sinful nature or a tendency to sin. However, we believe that God does not hold us accountable for sin until we are old enough to understand that we are in rebellion against him; the one Almighty God. When a person reaches that age of accountability, we encourage them to accept Christ through faith, repentance, confession and baptism.

We recognize that many parents have had their infant children baptized or christened by sprinkling for reasons of making a public declaration of their intent to raise the child to know God. While this is admirable, we do not believe that a newborn baby is a sinner in need of salvation, but is covered by the grace of Christ until the age of accountability and is therefore not in need of baptism. Likewise, newborns cannot express faith and have nothing of which to repent, two items which the New Testament connects with baptism (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38). If you were sprinkled as a baby, in a different faith tradition, thank God for the foundation of faith that your parents laid for you. Now we ask you to build on that foundation with what you know is needed.

Does baptism (water) itself actually save a person?

No. The Bible teaches that Christ saves us. Acts 4:12 states that salvation is found “in no other” than Jesus Christ. However, receiving Christ requires some response on our part. The Bible makes it clear that our response to Christ includes a process of faith, repentance, confession and baptism. Each step is important, but none more important than the other. These then are the ways that we trust Christ for salvation.

Believe (Acts 16:31)

Repent (Acts 2:38)

Confess (Matt. 16:16-18, Romans 10:9-10)

Be Baptized (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 2:38-41, Acts 8:36-38)

Salvation in Christ is a process that has a beginning point, includes these steps, but is not fully completed until Christ returns at his second coming at the end of the time. There are many biblical reasons to be baptized including the washing or cleansing of sin (Acts 22:16), to publicly declare one’s faith in Christ (Colossians 2:12), to be obedient like Jesus (Matthew 3:15) and to do what the Bible commands (Acts 2:38, 10:48). At HCC, we rejoice with everyone who acts on this crucial biblical step in response to what God has revealed in His word.

Do you believe that those who have accepted Christ as Savior, but have never been immersed, are saved?

First, we should understand that in the early church no one accepted Christ without being baptized. The closest example we might find in scripture of a believer who was unimmersed is Apollos in Acts 18:24-26. Apollos was a very intelligent man who had great fervor about his relationship with Jesus. But he had not been taught correctly about baptism. He was instructed by a Christian couple named Priscilla and Aquila and was willing to adjust his understanding and then he submitted to Christian baptism. Priscilla and Aquila did not judge him, but taught him. That is our position as well. It is not our place to determine whether someone is saved – that is reserved for God alone. Our job is to teach everyone everything the Bible says.

Isn't baptism just a "work?" And doesn't the Bible say that we are not saved by works?

Baptism is a work, but it is a work of faith by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness (John 6:29). It is a work that God has ordained that demonstrates a commitment to Christ alone as our Lord. It is God's work in that through the process of salvation he works forgiveness, cleansing and the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. We are not saved by our own works, but by the work of God through Christ. Baptism is a work of God that he invites us to participate in through faith in Jesus Christ.

Can I be a member of your church and not be baptized?

Baptism was an ordinance in the New Testament church (Matthew 28:18-20); therefore it is in ours as well. In the New Testament everyone who accepted Christ was baptized into Christ. Through their participation in baptism, they became members of the church. At HCC we believe in following the scriptural example as closely as possible. Thus, all those who have chosen to be members at HCC have been immersed into Christ, either here or at another church. We recognize that other churches do not have this position, but we make no judgment regarding their practices.

Are there specific Bible passages that I can study to help me understand this issue?

The book of Acts in the New Testament records the start of the church. Therefore, this book has the most passages of scripture teaching us about baptism. Specifically see Acts 8:12, Acts 8:36-39, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 16:13-15, Acts 16:30-34, Acts 18:7-8, Acts 22:14-16.

Other passages in the New Testament include I Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:11-12, Romans 6:1-4, John 3:16-23, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 3:15, I John 2:4-6.

(Invitation) – If you have other questions regarding baptism or church membership, please call the HCC office and a member of our staff will get in touch with you. If you are ready to commit your life to Jesus Christ through baptism, you can schedule a baptism immediately or come forward during one of our Sunday morning services and a decision counselor will meet with you to make arrangements for your baptism. We can arrange both public and private baptisms. The water is always warm and ready! May God bless you as you continue to seek Him!