



Introduction

While virtually every Christian church practices the rite of baptism there remains considerable disagreement within Christianity regarding this rite. This paper defines the 2 Pillars Church position on baptism and aims to provide clarity from Scripture regarding our position. This is not intended to be a comprehensive, technical, theological treatise nor do we interact in-depth with all of the varying positions within the scope of Christianity. Rather, the scope here is a practical guide to understanding how baptism is carried out at 2 Pillars.¹

For those interested in the broadest, quickest understanding of our approach to baptism, we recommend you read the "Position Summary" section as well as the "2 Pillars Church Baptism Process" section.

For those desiring a deeper understanding of our position, we recommend you read this document in its entirety. Any adult pursuing baptism here at 2 Pillars Church is *required* to do so as are the parents of any child who may be pursuing baptism.

Position Summary

At 2 Pillars Church, it is our intent and desire that all members be baptized by immersion. As a church **we practice believer's baptism (i.e. credobaptism)² by immersion only**. We will, however, accept into membership a believer who was baptized as an infant who knows, understands, and lives out the gospel provided that the tradition in which he/she was baptized did not view baptism as regenerative nor treat it as a simple ceremonial "show." For the sake of doctrinal unity, all 2 Pillars Church elders are to be immersed believers who not only support, but also teach and lead, from conviction, the practice of baptism by immersion only.

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is an *ordinance* (or sacrament)³ of the Church that, rightly understood, primarily *signifies* union with Christ⁴ declaring the believer's faith *in* and identification *with* Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Galatians 3:27 teaches us that those who have been "baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ."

Further, baptism is an *act of obedience* to the command of Jesus⁵ in which the believer *demonstrates* an outward witness of an inward faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Augustine rightly called baptism a "visible word" drawing attention to the fact that the rite of baptism is a pictorial representation of the gospel and that without the gospel, it is little more than a ceremonial show. "Take away the word," Augustine said, "and the water is neither more nor less water. The word is added to the element, and there results the sacrament, as if itself is a kind of visible word."⁶

¹ For a balanced, helpful, and more comprehensive interaction with the theological nuances of various positions within Christianity, see Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* pages 1098-1114.

² "Credo" is Latin for "I believe" and thus "credobaptism" is used to indicate "believer's baptism."

³ The term "sacrament" refers to an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible spiritual reality. The term "ordinance" became popular in reaction to (and in distinction from) the Catholic use of "sacrament" and aimed at referring to baptism (and Communion) as statutes "ordained" by Christ himself. While we recognize this history of the differences in terminology, we use these two terms interchangeably.

⁴ David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1988), page 70.

⁵ Matthew 28:18-19

⁶ Augustine, "Exposition of the Gospel of John" 80.3. Cf. Sermon 227 quoted in Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), page 820.

What Does Baptism Look Like?

Baptism looks like someone proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that he is the Lord and Savior of their life. That person is then fully and momentarily immersed under water symbolizing their union with Christ in his death and burial – being baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”⁷ – and then raised up out of the water symbolizing their union with Christ in his resurrection as well their being raised to walk in newness of life.⁸

While immersion may not be the only valid form of baptism⁹, it is the form that seems to most fully preserve and accomplish the meaning of baptism (i.e. union with Christ) for the following reasons:

1. The Greek word *baptizo* means, most simply, “to plunge, dip, or immerse” something in water.
2. Immersion seems to be required in several instances of baptism in the Bible:
 - a. Mark 1:5 – people were baptized by John “in the river Jordan.”
 - b. Mark 1:10 – when Jesus himself was baptized, “he came up out of the water.”
 - c. Acts 8:38-39 – Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water.”
3. The symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection seems to require baptism by immersion as Romans 6:3-4 states,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

In similar fashion, Colossians 2:12 speaks of Christians as “having been buried with him [Jesus] in baptism” as well as being “raised with him through faith.”

Why Do We Baptize?

Being baptized does not make someone a Christian.¹⁰ Likewise, not being baptized does not cause someone to stop being a Christian. Yet all Christians should be baptized as a matter of obedience to Jesus’ command.¹¹

In addition, it is almost universally agreed that baptism is in some way connected with the beginning of the Christian life, with one’s initiation into the universal, invisible church as well as the local, visible church.¹²

⁷ Matthew 28:19

⁸ Romans 6:3-4

⁹ Some traditions prefer “sprinkling” or “pouring” water over the person being baptized rather than full immersion.

¹⁰ Here we stand in opposition with a sacramental paedobaptist view of baptism held by Catholics, Anglicans, and the vast majority of Lutherans. The sacramental paedobaptist view of baptism will be briefly summarized below but, in short, views infant baptism as a “converting ordinance” – i.e. regenerative in and of itself. It should also be noted that there are churches who, while not holding to a position of sacramental paedobaptism (baptizing infants as a converting ordinance), baptize older children and adults with a false understanding that the physical act of baptism somehow saves the person. Many Restoration Movement churches fall into the latter category.

¹¹ Matthew 28:18-19

¹² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), page 1099.

Finally, the rite of baptism serves as a means of grace acting as a form of proclamation confirming one's salvation to oneself and affirming it to others. On this point, theologian Wayne Grudem writes:

There is the blessing of God's favor that comes with all obedience, as well as the joy that comes through public profession of one's faith, and the reassurance of having a clear physical picture of dying and rising with Christ and of washing away sins. Certainly this Lord gave us baptism to strengthen and encourage our faith – and it should do so for everyone who is baptized and for every believer who witnesses baptism.¹³

Who Should Be Baptized?

The subject of baptism should be someone who desires to follow Christ, desires to be baptized, lives consistently with an earnest confession of sin and repentance, and holds a faith in Christ's life, death and resurrection for him.¹⁴

The clear and consistent evidence of Scripture points to the subjects of baptism being those who have experienced new birth on the basis of faith.¹⁵ They should be able to communicate a credible *profession of faith* as well as exhibit *credible evidence of regeneration*.

By “credible profession of faith” we imply a right understanding of the gospel. Namely, that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and not of our own works.

Though we cannot “see” regeneration, we can see the effects of it. Those who are to be baptized should not simply be able to rehearse some facts about the gospel, they should also exhibit “credible evidence of regeneration.” Some of the biblical evidences of regeneration include:

- Repentance from sin (1 John 1:5-10)
- Deep love and affection for Jesus (1 Peter 1:8)
- A decreased appetite for sin as new inclinations and desires replace old ones (2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 4:22-24).
- Commitment to obedience (1 John 2:4)

By inspecting for a credible profession of faith and credible evidence of regeneration, we seek not to imply that one must have perfect faith or be free from sin. In fact, the Apostle John tells us that if we say we have no sin, then we are liars and the truth is not in us.¹⁶ Additionally, we know that we cannot perfectly guard from baptizing an unregenerate person as it is God alone who knows one's heart. What we seek, rather, is to guard the church from nominalism¹⁷ and the ordinance of baptism becoming a ceremonial show where zero diligence is enacted to ensure that those being baptized truly have experienced new birth on the basis of faith.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), page 981.

¹⁴ Mark Dever, “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church,” in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), page 333.

¹⁵ Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:44-48, 16:14-15, 16:32-33.

¹⁶ 1 John 1:8-10

¹⁷ By nominalism, we intend “watered down Christianity” or “Christian in name only.”

What About Infant Baptism?

Much of the controversy that surrounds the rite of baptism within various streams of Christianity is with regards to the issue of infant baptism (i.e. paedobaptism).¹⁸ To reiterate, 2 Pillars Church only practices credobaptism – that is, believer’s baptism. At the same time, we will accept into membership a believer who was baptized as an infant who knows, understands, and lives out the gospel provided that the tradition in which he/she was baptized did not view baptism as regenerative (a view which we will refer to as sacramental paedobaptism below) nor treat it as a simple ceremonial “show.”

In order to answer the question, “What about infant baptism?” we must therefore distinguish between two major forms of paedobaptism.

Sacramental Paedobaptism

The first view of paedobaptism is what we will refer to as “sacramental paedobaptism.” Variations of this view are held by Catholics, Anglicans, as well as nearly all Lutherans.¹⁹ The unifying element within what we are calling sacramental paedobaptism is the view that baptism itself is a *converting ordinance*. In other words, the physical act of baptism *causes regeneration*.²⁰

In Roman Catholicism, for example, baptism takes effect *ex opere operato* (that is, from the work performed). Catholic theology, therefore, holds that baptism is *necessary* for salvation, and that the act of baptism itself *causes* regeneration. In this view, baptism is a *means* whereby the church *bestows* saving grace on people.

Further, the Roman Catholic church declares that “Baptism... includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins [and] birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father”²¹ and further declares anyone that does not agree with their position to be anathema (cursed).²²

Likewise, according to Lutheran theology, baptism “works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.”²³

Insisting on a sacramental paedobaptist view is akin to the insistence of the Judaizers that circumcision was necessary for salvation. This is a view that Paul vigorously rejects in Galatians 5:1-12. For these reasons, sacramental paedobaptism is understood to be counter-to the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and thus is **rejected** on the basis of not being biblical.

¹⁸ “Paedo” comes from the Greek *pais* and means “child” and thus “paedobaptism” is used to indicate “infant baptism.”

¹⁹ Some Lutheran churches are more “Calvinistic” than they are “Lutheran” and thus would align more closely with the Reformed paedobaptist view rather than the sacramental paedobaptist view and thus deem baptism as non-regenerative.

²⁰ A careful note will be made at this point that not all “practicing” Catholics and Lutherans will hold to a view of regenerative baptism. What is to be stressed here, however, is the theology of these traditions. Whether a Catholic or Lutheran actually agrees with the theology of their tradition is another matter; however, each Christian has the responsibility to investigate what it is that their tradition holds as true in order to uphold the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, experience shows that many who practice sacramental paedobaptism have no real understanding as to *why* they practice it. This again is a gospel issue that must be addressed lest we continue to propagate baptism as a ceremonial show.

²¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec. 1279, from www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P30.HTM, accessed 5 September 2011.

²² The Council of Trent, Session VII “On Baptism”, especially Canons V, XII, and XIII, from <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch7.htm>, accessed 5 September 2011.

²³ The Small Catechism, Section IV in The Book of Concord, from <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#baptism>, accessed on 5 September 2011.

Reformed Paedobaptism

A second, and distinct view of paedobaptism is what we will refer to as “Reformed paedobaptism.” The most notable example of churches adhering to this position would be the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) although there exist other, non-PCA churches that hold a similar view as well. Reformed paedobaptism, while still insisting on the baptism of infant children of believing parents, differs from the sacramental paedobaptist view in that it does not deem the physical act of baptism to be regenerative. On this point, John Calvin (the authoritative figure in the Reformed paedobaptist heritage) wrote: “How false is the teaching... that through baptism we are released and made exempt from original sin.”²⁴

Instead, Reformed paedobaptists hold an involved position based on the following:²⁵

1. The agreement that there is no direct biblical command in the Bible to baptize children, but rather an implied one.
2. The implied command to baptize children is rooted in an understanding of the relation of baptism in the New Testament to circumcision in the Old Testament as a sign and seal of the covenant.
3. The covenant made with Abraham in the Old Testament was primarily a spiritual covenant and circumcision was the sign and seal of this covenant.
4. This covenant is still in force and is essentially identical with “the new covenant.”
5. By the appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the covenant and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal.
6. Baptism in the New Testament is substituted as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace.
7. If children received the sign and seal of the covenant in the old dispensation, surely they have a right to receive it in the new.

As such, Reformed paedobaptists hold that “Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.”²⁶

In meshing all of the above together with an understanding that baptism is not regenerative, the best way to understand the Reformed paedobaptist position is that of a *probable salvation*. In other words, as long as the child grows up to be faithful to the Lord (which, given the fact that he is being raised by Jesus-loving, gospel-believing parents, the odds would seem to be increased) he will be saved, thereby making effectual the promises signified in baptism. We refer to this as “probable salvation” because it would seem that Reformed paedobaptists assume their children will be regenerated until proven otherwise.

²⁴ Calvin’s Institutes, 4.15.10.

²⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), pages 632-634.

²⁶ See the Westminster Confession, chapter 28. Available online at http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/.

Charles Hodge, another notable Reformed scholar, summarizes the above well in stating, “God, on his part, *promises* to grant the benefits signified in baptism to all adults who receive that sacrament in the exercise of faith, and to all infants who, when they arrive at maturity, remain faithful to the vows made in their name when they were baptized.”²⁷

Further credence is granted to this perspective in that those who hold it still require a credible profession of faith to be made upon maturity on the part of the infant who was baptized. In other words, they do not simply assume that all infants baptized in this tradition are saved, but rather they strive to affirm salvation by a credible profession of faith.

As summarized by a sister Acts 29 Church of ours, the key difference between Reformed paedobaptists and credobaptists (i.e. believer’s baptism – the position held by 2 Pillars Church) is the proper ordering of events with respect to the children of Christian parents.²⁸

As credobaptists, we expect the order to be

Discipleship → Conversion → Profession of Faith → **Baptism (of believers)** → Admission to the Communion Table → Ongoing Sanctification

Reformed paedobaptists expect all of the same things as credobaptists for their children, just in a different order:

Baptism (of infants) → Discipleship → Conversion → Profession of Faith → Admission to the Communion Table → Ongoing Sanctification

Our Position with Respect to Infant Baptism

In brief, the rationale for why Reformed paedobaptism is not held as the primary view of 2 Pillars Church (or even *in parallel with* the primary view of 2 Pillars Church) is because while the Reformed paedobaptist would not say that baptism *causes* regeneration, nor that it symbolizes a regeneration that *has already occurred* nor even that it *guarantees* a future regeneration since we cannot be certain that all who are baptized in this tradition will be finally saved; what it *does convey is probable future regeneration* which we referred to above as *probable salvation*.²⁹

Probable or promissory salvation seems to add a meaning to baptism that is nowhere conveyed in the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see anyone baptized with the *hope* that they will sometime in the future be regenerated. Instead, what we see in the New Testament, and what we hold to at 2 Pillars Church, is that baptism symbolizes and proclaims that inward regeneration *has occurred*.

While we dismiss any view of baptism that sees the rite as regenerative (i.e. the sacramental paedobaptist view), we do acknowledge the Reformed paedobaptist view to be biblically defensible.³⁰ Thus while it is not held as the primary view of 2 Pillars Church, we do allow for those

²⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 3, p. 582.

²⁸ See “Toward a Biblical Understanding of Baptism” written by the elders of Coram Deo. Available online at: http://cdomaha.com/files/CD_baptism2011_web.pdf, accessed on 5 September, 2011.

²⁹ For a further and convincing analysis of this conclusion, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), page 979.

³⁰ For a robust, biblical defense of the Reformed paedobaptist position, refer to Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), page 622-643.

baptized in a Reformed paedobaptist tradition to become members of 2 Pillars Church so long as they do not become divisive with regard to the 2 Pillars Church position on baptism.³¹

Divisiveness over this matter will be met with church discipline in accordance with Titus 3:10 and Matthew 18:15-17.³² In addition, for the sake of doctrinal unity, clarity, and consistency, all 2 Pillars Church elders are to be *immersed* believers who not only *support*, but also teach and lead, *from conviction*, the practice of baptism by immersion only.

In saying this, Reformed paedobaptists are encouraged to do three things:

- 1) Prayerfully reflect on their conviction from Scripture and not simply tradition. Our desire is that those who hold to a Reformed paedobaptist view study the matter for themselves and come to their own conclusion and conviction based on Scripture and not simply tradition.
- 2) Prayerfully reflect on the magnitude of their conviction. Some Reformed paedobaptists hold such a strong view that to not baptize infants is to act in disobedience to God's Word and thus consists of unrepentant sin.³³ Persons falling into this category that are pursuing membership with 2 Pillars Church will be directed and encouraged to find another church home that holds their conviction.
- 3) Prayerfully reflect on their ability to submit themselves to the authority of the elders regarding the position of 2 Pillars Church on baptism. If one feels that they will not be able to be non-divisive over this matter, they will be directed and encouraged to find another church home with leadership to whom they are able to submit themselves.

So Do I Need to Be Re-Baptized or Not?

If you are someone who was baptized as an infant, you may find yourself more confused than not after wading through the prior section. You may still be saying to yourself, "Do I need to be re-baptized or not?"

In order to be as practical as possible, we encourage you to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) If you were baptized as an infant (whether it be in one of the aforementioned traditions or one that we have not explored) do you, in good conscience, know and understand what that baptism meant?
- 2) Can you, in good conscience, state that your baptism was performed in a tradition that did not view baptism as regenerative?³⁴

³¹ In acknowledging the Reformed paedobaptist position to be biblically defensible and in accepting those holding such a position into membership, we acknowledge that members holding such a position may bear (or adopt) children, and further, desire to act out of their biblically defensible conviction to baptize their children. Any such instance must be approached individually, uniquely, pastorally, and in close communication with the elders of 2 Pillars Church.

³² Divisiveness would here include teaching others in contradiction to the position of 2 Pillars Church. It should be noted that while the Reformed paedobaptist view is *permitted*, it is not *held* by the elders. Therefore teaching and leading others in or towards this view will be deemed as divisive. This is a thorny and sensitive issue that is to be handled delicately and with pastoral wisdom and care for the flock of God who is in return to obey and submit to the leaders God has placed over them (Hebrews 13:17).

³³ See for example Douglas Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations: Infant Baptism – Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996), 9. Wilson argues that in order to be a biblical Christian, infant baptism *must* be required.

³⁴ It is quite rare in our Midwestern culture to find someone who was baptized in the Reformed paedobaptist tradition and thus a tradition that viewed infant baptism as non-regenerative. For this reason, the default of 2 Pillars Church is to call into question the biblical grounds of any cases of infant baptism.

- 3) Can you, in good faith, say that it is not possible to recall a time where you did not know and believe in Jesus and live your life in light of the gospel? In other words, did your baptism have actual significance in your life as you moved toward maturity (or was it more of a ceremonial show)?

If you answered 'no' to any of the above, our strong encouragement is that you be re-baptized. It should be here noted that it is very common for those who were baptized as infants to say something along the lines of, "I grew up in a good home with well-intentioned parents, was baptized as an infant, but really did not have a clue about the gospel until quite recently." If that is you, again, our encouragement is for you to prayerfully ask yourself the above three questions.

We desire to be pastoral and loving in this matter. If you are wrestling through whether or not to be re-baptized, please enter into dialogue with the elders or deacons of 2 Pillars Church.

If, after study, prayer, and dialog, you cannot in good conscience be baptized as a believing adult, the elders of 2 Pillars Church will prayerfully *consider* honoring your infant baptism as sufficient for church membership so long as you express your settled conviction of conscience that your infant baptism was biblically valid and that you cannot in good conscience be baptized as a believing adult.

Final authority in issues of membership and baptism rests with the elders of 2 Pillars Church, as those called by God to shepherd his flock (1 Pet. 5:2).

What About Baptismal Regeneration and Non-Infants?

We acknowledge that, while it is much less common, not all those who are baptized in traditions that see baptism as regenerative are infants. An adult or young adult, for example, may come to saving faith in Christ and thus be baptized in a church or tradition that holds to a position of baptismal regeneration (i.e. that the physical act of baptism is what saves you). Instances like this are quite convoluted and must be handled individually with pastoral wisdom and care. If you were baptized as a non-infant in a tradition that holds a position of baptismal regeneration, our encouragement is for you to seek the counsel of the elders as to whether you might need to be re-baptized. Finally, any such instances will be addressed as part of the membership process, in particular, during the membership interview.

How Does Baptism Relate to Communion and Membership?

Mark Dever has helpfully summarized that, "Without a correct understanding of baptism, membership and church discipline are more difficult to practice. Conversely, without a careful practice of church membership and discipline, both baptism and the Lord's Supper can be cheapened."³⁵ In agreement with that statement, we find that a biblical practice of baptism with respect to Communion and Membership should aid in protecting the church from nominalism.

Historically, baptism has been considered an initiate rite into the church celebrating one's entrance into the believing community. The Lord's Table (used synonymously here with Communion), on the other hand, is a community meal open to all who declare unity with the

³⁵ Mark Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), page 339.

believing body through baptism. In congruence with the church throughout history, we hold that baptism should, *ideally* precede one's participation in the Lord's Table.

We state this as "ideal," however, because we recognize that in certain circumstances (i.e. a new believer who has not yet had an opportunity to be baptized for whatever reason including limitations in offered opportunity by the local church itself), a non-baptized believer may be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper given that that person is also being urged to be baptized as soon as possible. Such a person should willingly submit to being baptized since "if they are willing to participate in one outward symbol of being a Christian, there seems no reason why they should not be willing to participate in the other, a symbol that appropriately comes first."³⁶

In direct regards to membership, 2 Pillars Church *requires* baptism as a prerequisite for church membership. We therefore ask every potential church member to tell us about their baptism experience, and in so doing, we aim to ensure that all members of 2 Pillars Church have been biblically baptized. The command to be baptized is clearly taught in Scripture, is simple to obey, and is significant for the boundaries of the church. To required it for membership is to do no more than Scripture does of Christians.³⁷

How and When Are Children to Be Baptized?

It should be noted that the position held by 2 Pillars Church is one of *believer's baptism* not simply *adult* baptism. For that reason we treat children the same way we do adults with respect to baptism meaning that they should, in an age-appropriate manner, be able to communicate a credible profession of faith as well as exhibit credible evidence of regeneration.

Because this is such an important topic, we address it in depth in, "Children, the Sacraments, and Membership" and direct you to that publication.

Who Can Perform Baptisms?

In order that those being baptized have a right understanding of what actually is happening, it is right for the church to safeguard the practice of baptism and keep it from abuse as well as guard from nominalism.

With that said, we agree with Wayne Grudem that,

Since baptism is the sign of entrance into the body of Christ, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13 on inward spiritual baptism), then it seems appropriate that it be done *within the fellowship of the church* wherever possible, so that the church as a whole can rejoice with the person being baptized and so that the faith of all believers in that church might be built up.³⁸

While the New Testament does not explicitly state or restrict *who* can perform baptisms, we find that it is normally prudent to have someone perform the baptism who well-represents the congregation as a whole. Ideally, this is an elder or deacon though we do not mandate such.

³⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), page 997.

³⁷ Mark Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), page 341.

³⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), page 984.

We openly invite anyone who was instrumental to the candidate's coming to faith to join-in and be a part of the baptism rite itself. This may be a parent, a mentor, a close friend, etc.

In addition, we find that following a consistent process of assessing candidates for baptism within the local church further lessens the need for a strict stance on *who* performs the baptism and it is to that process that we now, finally, turn.

2 Pillars Church Baptism Process

It is God alone who knows one's heart and therefore there is no human way to fully guard against an occasional baptism being performed of someone who proves over time to be unregenerate. We understand, however, that hypocrisy, while it cannot be finally and fully prevented, can be discouraged by due diligence. With that in mind, the following is the process we follow as a church with regards to baptism:

- 1) **Repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.** Jesus alone saves. Baptism, is an outward symbol of the inward regeneration that *has* occurred.
- 2) **Be in community.** Because baptism is an "initiation rite" that celebrates your entrance into the people of God (the church), other Christians around you need to know you and affirm the change in your life. This is part of how we verify credible evidence of regeneration.
- 3) **Make your desire for baptism known to your Gospel Community Leader (preferred), an elder, or a deacon.**
- 4) **Read the 2 Pillars Church Position on Baptism (this paper).**
- 5) **Write out your conversion story (1 page or less).** Your conversion story is the story of how God brought you to faith in Jesus. Writing it down helps you communicate the gospel to others and invites them to celebrate what God has done in your life. An integral part of this story should include answering the question, "How do you know you belong to Jesus?"
- 6) **Complete a baptism interview.** The purpose of the baptism interview is to evaluate your readiness for baptism. In it, you should expect to provide a credible profession of faith (explaining what the gospel is) as well as talk about some evidences of regeneration in your life.
- 7) **Be baptized.** Following your baptism interview, specific instructions regarding the logistics of being baptized (what to wear, what to bring, when to be where, etc) will be communicated to you.

*Suggested Further Reading*³⁹

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. New ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

Berkhof's work should be consulted for a deeper understanding of the Reformed paedobaptist view.

Coram Deo Position Paper "Toward a Biblical Understanding of Baptism" - written by the elders of Coram Deo. Available online at: http://cdomaha.com/files/CD_baptism2011_web.pdf.

The work of Coram Deo was referenced and leveraged (especially as it relates to our Baptism Process) in the writing of this paper and reflects theology applied in the direct context of a local church.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1998.

Erickson's work provides the most balanced, fair, and charitable presentation of the various different perspectives briefly outlined in this paper and does so from a Baptist conviction himself.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.

Grudem's work is extremely helpful, yet is somewhat disappointing in his conclusive dismissal of any view that does not agree with his own.

Schreiner, Thomas R., and Shawn Wright, eds. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2007.

This edition is contemporary and addresses some helpful points in relation to the credobaptist approach. Most helpful was Mark Dever's chapter on "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church."

For additional reading, consult the footnotes throughout this paper.

³⁹ Listed in alphabetical order