

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING

# Baptism

# Introduction

We at Westlake Church are excited about the interest you have shown in being baptized. We would like to help you during this important process. Our hope is to provide you with a tool to discover God's plan of salvation for your life. This guide is divided into three sections:

- **Adult Bible Study (pages 2-6)**

This study is for adults desiring to know more about baptism or for parents of students who are considering baptism. We would like for you to take some time and fully understand baptism according to God's Word.

- **Westlake's View on Baptism**

This material is our biblical understanding of the act of baptism.

- **Baptism Key Details**

If you choose to get baptized at Westlake, this section will give you a breakdown of the process leading up to and the day of your baptism.

At any time if you have questions, please feel free to contact one of our Pastors at the church office at 317-241-9451. Specific contacts are:

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## Adult Baptism Study

Even though there are multiple opinions regarding baptism, there is only one truth that really matters—the truth revealed in the Bible. Baptism follows salvation. This study guide is designed to guide you through a personal discovery of what the Bible says about our relationship with God and baptism.

Take time to read and investigate the following points. The fill-in-the-blank sections correspond with the New International Version (NIV) translation of the Bible. If you don't have an NIV Bible, you can still read along in your own Bible. An answer key is available at the end of this study guide to provide any fill-in-the-blanks to which you cannot immediately discover an answer.

### 1. God created everything, including you.

- Read Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:31, God looked at all that He had made, and it was \_\_\_\_\_.
- Psalm 139: 14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and \_\_\_\_\_ made; your \_\_\_\_\_ are wonderful, I know that full well."
- How does it make you feel to know that you were created by God and are special to him?

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### 2. Sin entered the world and ruined the perfection of God's creation.

- Read Genesis 2:16-17. What did God tell Adam that he could do?
- What did God command Adam not to do? Why?
- Read Genesis 3:6-8. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate of the fruit. What did they realize? What did they do?

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Adam and Eve had been in a perfect relationship with God, but when they sinned, they were separated from Him. Instinctively, they realized this and hid in shame. If you read the rest of Genesis 3, you will see that God sent them out the Garden of Eden. They could no longer live freely in His presence.

Why does God take such a harsh view of sin? If God is loving, why couldn't He just ignore Adam and Eve's sin?

- Habakkuk 1:13 describes God this way: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."

- 1 John 1:5 says “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”
- It is contrary to God’s nature to sin or to tolerate the presence of sin. As much as He loves us (His creation), He cannot have a relationship with us, because of our sin.

**3. Everyone has sinned. Because God is just, He cannot leave those sins unpunished.**

- Adam and Eve aren’t the only ones who have sinned. What does Romans 3:23 say? “For \_\_\_\_\_ have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- What is sin? Sin is choosing to disobey God. Read what James 4:17 says about sin. Take a moment to write down some of the sins you have committed in your life.

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Most of us instinctively realize that sin brings consequences. If you speed, you may get a ticket. If you rob a bank and are caught, you will go to jail. What does the Bible say is the consequence of sin?

- Read Romans 6:23  
According to this verse, what “wages” are we to receive for sin? \_\_\_\_\_

Remember what God told Adam in Genesis 2:17? Death and separation from God are the natural consequences of sin; because God’s holy nature cannot be in the presence of sin.

Because of our sin, we have all earned the “wages” of death.

- God is perfect, holy, and just. Isaiah 13:11 says, “I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their \_\_\_\_\_.”

**4. But God is also merciful, and wants to restore our relationship with Him. He knows we cannot do this on our own.**

- Read Romans 6:23 again. We already discussed that the wages of sin is death. But what, according to this verse, is the gift of God? \_\_\_\_\_

This verse perfectly captures the way in which God is both just and merciful. He is wholly just. He is righteous. He cannot just “ignore” sin. But He is also wholly merciful, and wants to provide a way for us to be in a relationship with Him.

Many people believe that if the good things they do outweigh the bad things, then they can get to heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth. No “good” thing we do can ever erase or outweigh our sin. The only wage we can earn on our own is death.

Read Isaiah 64:6. “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our \_\_\_\_\_ are like \_\_\_\_\_.”

This verse clearly tells us that even the best things we do (our “righteous acts”) are like “filthy rags” compared to God’s holiness. Have you ever had a piece of cloth that you thought was white, until you put it up against another that was pure white, and suddenly your cloth looked gray and grubby? We don’t just look grubby, we look “filthy” next to God’s pure holiness.

Why do you think so many people try to “earn” their way into heaven?

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**5. God has given us a way to be forgiven and have eternal life, and that way is through Jesus Christ.**

- Remember the first passage we studied, in Genesis 1. God created the world and every person in it. Before Adam and Eve’s sin, God looked at creation and called it “very good.”
- Read John 3:16. “For God \_\_\_\_\_ the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Even after the sin of Adam, Eve, and the rest of humankind, God still loved the world so much to send His one and only Son, Jesus, so that we could have eternal life.

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Who is the “him” this verse refers to? \_\_\_\_\_

This passage tells us that Jesus had no sin. He is the one exception to the rule that all have sinned. He was born and lived on earth. He was fully human, and at the same time, fully God. He “knew no sin.” Because of this, only He could die and pay the price for our sins. Because of this, and only because of this, we can receive the gift of God’s righteousness and eternal life.

- Read Ephesians 2:8-9. This gift of God is called \_\_\_\_\_. We receive this gift through \_\_\_\_\_.
- Romans 3:22 says, “The righteousness from God comes through \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus Christ to all who \_\_\_\_\_.”

**6. God has shown us clearly how to accept this gift.**

A gift is worthless unless it is received. God offers His gift of grace freely to all people, but not everyone chooses to accept the gift.

- In order to accept the gift, you must \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ is God’s \_\_\_\_\_.

Earlier you read John 3:16. Go back and read John 3:16-18. In order to accept God’s gift, we must believe that the gift exists, and that it is found in Jesus who lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21), died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3), and that He was raised back to life (Acts 2:24).

- You also need to \_\_\_\_\_ according to Acts 3:19. Repentance is more than just saying “I’m sorry.” To “repent” means to turn away from a life full of sin, and turn toward God.
- Then, you “\_\_\_\_\_ with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’” (Romans 10:9). In other words, you must be willing to acknowledge in front of other people that you are putting Jesus in charge of your life.
- Finally, you can be baptized (Acts 2:38, 8:36, 9:18). In the early church, when someone came to believe in Jesus and accept His gift of grace, that person was baptized. We follow the same practice today.

The water in the baptistery has no special powers. If you don't believe in Jesus and accept his gift of grace, then baptism is nothing more than getting wet. But being baptized is clearly what the New Testament teaches believers to do when they come to a place of faith in Jesus.

## **7. God calls us to live our lives in grateful response to his gift of grace.**

- Nothing that you do either before or after you are baptized earns your salvation. Ephesians 2: 8-9 says "For it is by \_\_\_\_\_ that you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God - not by \_\_\_\_\_ so that no one can boast."
- That same passage tells us how God wishes us to live once we have accepted His grace. Read Ephesians 2:10. "We are God's \_\_\_\_\_, created in Christ Jesus to do \_\_\_\_\_, which God has prepared in advance for us to do."
- Some people think that grace gives them a "free pass" to continue sinning. But Romans 6:1-4 clearly shows the error of this thinking.

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that \_\_\_\_\_ may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were \_\_\_\_\_ into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a \_\_\_\_\_."

God has offered forgiveness of our sins not only so that we may have eternal life, but so that our lives on earth can be transformed, too.

## ANSWER KEY

The bulleted answers correspond to blanks under each section in the studies.

1. God created everything, including you.

- very good
- wonderfully, works

2. Sin entered the world and ruined God's perfect creation.

- eat from any tree in the garden
- eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because you will surely die
- Their eyes were opened, they realized they were naked. They clothed themselves with fig leaves, and hid from God.

3. Everyone has sinned. Because God is just, He cannot leave sins unpunished.

- all
- death
- sins

4. But God is merciful, and wants to restore our relationship with Him. He knows we cannot do this on our own.

- eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord
- death, eternal life
- righteous acts, filthy rags

5. God has given us a way to be forgiven and have eternal life, and that way is through Jesus Christ.

- so loved
- Jesus
- grace; faith
- faith; believe

6. God has shown us clearly how to accept this gift.

- believe; Jesus; Son
- repent
- confess

7. God calls us to live our lives in grateful response to His gift of grace.

- grace; gift; works
- workmanship; good works
- grace; baptized; new life

## Westlake's View on Baptism

Baptism is a positive command. Depending on whom you ask you will hear dozens of different traditions, teachings and opinions about the subject of baptism. Even though there are multiple opinions, there is only one truth that really matters—the truth revealed in the Bible. On the authority, subject, action and design, the Scriptures are plain. Westlake strives to model itself in accordance with the Scriptures. Please read the following statements for clarity on our understanding of baptism.

### Who should be baptized?

All believers are candidates for baptism. Christ said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Anyone who is willing to repent of their sins, and confess their belief in Jesus, should be baptized. (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38-39)

### How should we be baptized?

To understand how we should be baptized is best determined by looking at the meaning of the word. The New Testament of the Bible was written in Greek. The Greeks had, and still have, a word for **immerse**, one for **sprinkle**, and one for **pour**. **Baptizo** means dip or immerse, **rantizo** means to sprinkle, and **cheo** means to pour. This is now the meaning of these words in Greek, and was also the meaning when Christ was on earth. The Holy Scripture consistently uses the word baptizo, which means "immerse."

The Apostle Paul states that baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We are buried with Christ by baptism (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12). At Westlake we baptize people by immersing them in water. This act symbolizes, according to the teaching of scripture, the burial of the old self and the resurrection of a new life with Christ.

### What does baptism symbolize?

#### 1. Death and Resurrection

"In baptism you were buried with him and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him [Jesus] from the dead." (Colossians 2:12)

a. Being lowered in the water symbolizes that our old spiritual nature controlled by sin has died and been buried. The water symbolizes the grave.

b. Being raised from the water symbolizes that our new spiritual nature now controls us. It is a nature empowered by the Holy Spirit and one which desires to obey God and live for Him.

#### 2. Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

"Peter replied: ' Repent and be baptized, everyone one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."  
(Acts 2:38 & 41)

Baptism is a public testimony that you have invited Jesus to live in your heart and be your Lord and Savior. It symbolizes that you have put your faith in Him to restore your relationship with God which your sins broke.

3. Washing away of sin.

"...Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his [Jesus'] name." (Acts 22:16)

Baptism does not literally wash your sins away. The water is symbolic of the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for us on the cross. We are forgiven because Jesus died for us and because we have chosen to put our faith in Him. Baptism symbolizes the moral cleansing which takes place when we become a Christian.

4. Commitment to obey Jesus Christ and live by His Word.

"...Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to **obey everything I have commanded you...**" (Matthew 28:19-20)

A Christian is one who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and has decided to live his or her life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That means obeying Him, which is living by the principles of the Bible. Baptism symbolizes that a person has made a decision to obey Jesus and live under His Lordship.

### **When should we be baptized?**

A person should be baptized at the time he or she trusts in Christ. The Bible teaches we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), moreover in the New Testament church, a person's baptism was always the first expression of faith, not separate from it. So baptism was not just a memorial of faith, but was intended to offer a means of union with Christ and a benchmark of transformation, marking the place and time a person made a commitment to Christ (Romans 6:1-8). At Westlake we believe baptism is the next step after one commits their life to Christ.

As well, the Bible clearly teaches that a person should be baptized when he or she is capable of 1) believing in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior, and 2) when the individual is capable of repenting of sin. In Mark 16:16, Jesus said that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Jesus clearly indicates that a candidate for baptism must first have the capability of believing in Him. Moreover, in Acts 2:38, Peter preached that an individual must repent and be baptized. He clearly indicates that a candidate for baptism must first have the capability of repenting of sin. The word for "repent" in the New Testament means "to change the mind." A candidate for baptism must believe that Jesus alone can save a person from sin, and intentionally decide to "change the mind" (i.e., repent) about sinful behavior.

Clearly, that helps us understand that little children are not likely candidates to be baptized. Young children may not have the intellectual development that enables them to believe that Jesus alone saves them from sin, and to conscientiously turn away from sinful behavior. Because the commitment of baptism requires a more adult level of cognitive and developmental readiness, the pastoral staff recommends that children be at least 10 years old to be baptized. Proverbs 20:25 issues a significant caution against the danger of making a vow before adequate knowledge, forethought, and reflection have been given. In an effort to prevent young people from making a premature commitment that they may not fully understand, this minimum age has been recommended.

### **Why should we be baptized?**

As commanded by Christ, every believer should be baptized. It is important to becoming a Christ follower (Matthew 28:19). Furthermore, through baptism we are following Christ's example (Matthew 3:13-17), accepting forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38),

expressing trust in Christ (Acts 8:12-13), and testifying to God's work in our lives (Romans 6:1-8, Galatians 3:27).

The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to recognize their sin and guilt, and the only way in which the human soul can be wiped clean of sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:27-10:7). This "washing away" of sin is most clearly symbolized in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16).

Since one of the biggest obstacles between God and man is human pride, baptism also offers a venue by which believers humble themselves before God and others, and admit their need for Christ's redemption (James 4:6). In addition, baptism meets a God-given human need for expression. Baptism is the scriptural expression of faith in Christ.

The act of baptism alone cannot save an individual. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved only through accepting Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Those who were never baptized by immersion but were sprinkled for baptism as infants rest in God's merciful hands. We hope that Jesus will say to any person who has truly submitted to Him but was not taught about immersion, "Your faith has saved you."

Every biblical example of baptism is by immersion. That is why we turn the matter over to God. Anyone sprinkled as an infant should be grateful that their parents cared about their spiritual condition, but there comes a time to personally claim the faith yourself, and immersion is the appointed means.

### **Should a person ever be rebaptized?**

Rebaptism is allowed for those who lack confidence in their initial baptism experience because they don't remember it, they were coerced, or their heart was not right with God at the time. Anyone who has fallen into sin after having been baptized should repent and seek forgiveness, but rebaptism is not necessary (Acts 8:13-24).

### **Must a person be baptized during a worship service?**

No. In fact, the biblical model was "immediately" (Acts 8:38, 16:33), yet baptisms during worship services are encouraged at Westlake because they provide the opportunity to testify to your faith and show humility.

### **Summary statement**

Paul exhorts all believers to unite, for we are all of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Regardless of our particular beliefs regarding the mode of baptism, it is important for all Christians to seek unity as representatives of Christ's body. We believe the source of unity is the truth of God's Word, and we pray that baptism will be a place of unity, not division, among believers (John 17:17-21).

## Baptism Key Details

Each baptism candidate should write a few sentences of what baptism means to you. Include when you committed your life to Jesus Christ, any description of what happened which you would like mentioned, any instrumental persons, and why you want to be baptized. We need this in writing at least one week before the baptismal service. You can mail it to the church, give it to a pastor personally, drop it by the office, or email it to one of the pastors. We will use what you've written to personalize your baptism. However, we will not read it word for word.

### **These are the practical instructions regarding the actual baptism.**

1. Enter the dressing area quietly, find an empty dressing room (there are five of them), lock the door, and change into what you want to be baptized in. Please whisper in the dressing area as sound does carry into the worship center.
2. Once you are dressed to be baptized, come into the platform stairwell and onto the landing area out of view from the congregation. The baptizing pastor will enter the dry area behind the baptismal tank and motion for candidates to enter the water. When the pastor motions for you, walk down the steps and stand facing the congregation. Children or short persons will want to stand on the seat in the tank so that the congregation can see them.
3. Relax. You are in good hands. Enjoy the baptismal experience and cherish its meaning. Then live out its symbolism each day.
4. The baptizing pastor will introduce you and summarize what you said in the testimony you submitted. Once the pastor is ready to baptize, the candidate will then sit on the seat and will be facing the stairs.
5. When the pastor says *"Upon your profession of faith I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,"*
  - a) Put your left hand on the back of your right wrist and tighten your fingers around it.
  - b) Grab your nose with your right hand – if you want to hold your nose when you go under.
  - c) Bend backwards at the waist and the pastor will help you sit back up after being totally submerged in the water.
6. When you come out of the water, wipe the water from your face, and stand up slowly. The church will likely be celebrating by clapping.
7. Exit the baptistery, return to your dressing room (unless there are others you want to see baptized), and change into dry clothes. Remember to be quiet. You can exit the dressing area into the hallway when dressed.

### **WHAT TO BRING**

1. Clothes to change into for actual baptism. You may want to wear shorts and a shirt or long pants. It is recommended that women do not wear a white T-shirt.
2. Towel. You'll need something to dry off with as you will be completely immersed in the tank of water.

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