

The Nature of Baptism and Membership for Students A Pastoral Clarification

As with many of life's most important moments, it is the goal of Reynolda Church to walk alongside parents as they spiritually lead their students toward a closer walk with Jesus. Two of the many significant markers in the spiritual development of a student are baptism and church membership. Yet, for many, these spiritual markers remain confusing. This document seeks to clarify the distinction between Reynolda's two modes of baptism and the appropriate time for students to become members of this worshiping body.

Although it is true that often, in many churches, the processes of baptism and membership are either synonymous or simultaneous, we think it best to divide the two moments. Although we believe that any student who is either the child of believing parents or a confessing believing himself/herself should receive the sacrament of baptism, our leadership thinks it best that students only join the local church when the student is able to grasp the responsibility of being a leader and voting member in the congregation.

What follows is our effort to define both the nature of these two issues and the processes that accompany them. It is our hope that the spiritual journey of your student is a partnership between Reynolda and your family. As always, it is our goal to be a spiritual resource to the families in our body and in the city

The Nature of Baptism

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments celebrated by Reynolda and both are a vital part of our community. Wayne Grudem makes these comments concerning baptism: "Since Jesus commanded his church to baptize (Matt. 28:19), we would expect that there would be a measure of blessing connected with baptism, because all obedience to God by Christians brings God's favor with it."¹ Baptism plays a very important role in the life of any faith community as water, as in the case of the Red Sea and Jordan River, symbolizes a profound transition for the people of God. Grudem continues:

Although we must avoid the Roman Catholic teaching that grace is imparted even *apart from* the faith of the person being baptized, we must not react so strong to this error that we say that there is no spiritual benefit at all that comes from baptism, that the Holy Spirit *does not* work through it and that it is *merely symbolic*. It is better to say that where there is genuine faith on the part of the person being baptized [or at least one parent of the one being baptized], and where the faith of the church that watches the baptism is stirred up and encouraged by this ceremony, then the Holy Spirit certainly does work through baptism, and it becomes a "means of grace" through which the Holy Spirit brings blessing.²

Reynolda Church, as a part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, recognizes both infant and believers baptism. Let us take just a moment to explain the differences.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1994) 954.

² Ibid, annotation added.



Infant Baptism

Many believe that baptism should be administered to all infant children of believing parents. This is a belief that is held by many at Reynolda and it is rooted in what is called the “covenant argument.” This claim contends that all children of at least one believing parent should be baptized into the covenant community (the church).

Quickly, this belief is based on three biblical principles:

1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant as an outward sign of their entrance into the covenant community.
2. Baptism is the New Covenant parallel to circumcision. In the New Testament, the outward sign of entrance into the covenant community is baptism.
3. There is record in the New Testament [i.e. Lydia (Acts 16:15), Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) and Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16)] of household baptism.

This parallel can also be seen in Colossians 2:11-12:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Presbyterians and Reformed Christians often believe that baptism is a sign to be given to those who are part of the covenant of grace. A person is not part of the covenant because of baptism; baptism is a sign given to those who are part of the covenant. Those who are part of the covenant are not necessarily saved; rather, children are brought up in the covenant so that they might be raised in the context of the family of believers, so that the church may provide the child with an environment that would make the Christian faith seem real and true.

Believer’s Baptism

There are also many at Reynolda who believe in the practice of believer’s baptism. To those who believe in believer’s baptism immersion baptism is a shadow of something which already took place in the heart of the believer the moment he/she made a professional faith and was saved (1 Pet. 3:21). Water baptism is the act representing the identification of the Christian with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, baptism is to be performed on believers. These verses support these ideas:

- In Acts 2:41 we observe that they received the word, and then they were baptized.
- In Acts 8:12, 36, 37 we find that they believed, and then they were baptized.
- In Acts 10:43, 44, 47, it is plain to see that those who believed received the Holy Spirit, and then they were baptized.

You are "crucified" (standing upright in water), you are "buried" (immersed into the water), and you are "resurrected into life" (raised out of the water). Water baptism then, is a picture of spiritual baptism as defined in Rom. 6:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. It is the outward testimony of the believer's inward faith. A sinner is saved the moment he places his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is a visible testimony to that faith.

Reynolda’s Position

Reynolda’s position is that we have no position. We believe that the act of baptism is sacramental, but it is not an essential issue. Our leadership desires to shepherd your family through this process. Thus if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. If you desire baptism for either your infant or believing child, please contact the church office.



CLASS: New Beginnings

We do want to make sure families and students are fully informed about what it means to be a believer and the nature of baptism. Thus, periodically we will offer a class (usually February and October) wherein parents will bring their students to ask questions about the faith, baptism and next steps. For those students who received infant baptism, our New Beginnings class will be an opportunity for you to confirm his/her faith and embrace Jesus as their own. Similarly, for students who have not or have recently made a profession of faith, this class will serve as an opportunity to make a profession of faith. For those who have not yet been baptized, this will be scheduled as soon as the church calendar allows.

Following the class, both groups will have an opportunity to celebrate before the church community the work God has done in his/her life through Jesus.

Membership

Membership in a local church body should be taken seriously by all professing believers in Jesus Christ. Meaningful involvement in a vital Christian community of faith is essential to the life of every believer. It is a biblical admonition for every believer. Therefore a commitment to a local body of like-minded believers will ensure three benefits in your walk with Christ:

1. Your personal spiritual growth and the fulfillment of your Christian responsibility (Eph. 4:11-15);
2. Your personal accountability (Gal. 6:1-2); and
3. Your Christian productivity (I Cor. 12:1-31)

The New Testament affirms that when a person makes a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ he is "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). This figurative expression affirms that to be a Christian is to be an active member of Christ's church. It is in the context of a local body (church) of believers that you exercise your spiritual gift, you receive biblical instruction, and you actively join with others to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

It is because we highly value church membership that we believe this "rite of passage" should be reserved for students who are mature enough to embrace the responsibility. Thus, Reynolda, as a guiding principle, encourages only students who have completed the eighth grade to join the church. This, in no way, diminishes the value of students to our body. In fact, it is because we so highly value the role of students in this community that we desire church membership be an important tradition point for all students.

Starting Point (Student Edition)

Several times a year (usually November and March) Reynolda will offer a Starting Point class that will provide students with an opportunity to join our local body. It will be held following the 11am worship service and will include lunch, an overview of our beliefs and an opportunity to sign the membership covenant. All students are encouraged to attend this class at some point during their high school years, even if he/she is previously a member of this or another body.

What if my student is already a member at another church?

If your student joined a previous church, it is still our preference that each student wait until the time between the eighth and ninth grade year. We firmly believe this is the best time to join the church and embrace the responsibility that comes with such a partnership. However, if a parent deems a transfer of membership with the parents to be an important step, we will allow a younger student to transfer membership from another church. If this is the case, please contact Pastor Chris or another Student Ministries staff member about the process for your student joining.

