

Who Can Baptize at The Village Church?

Scripture is strangely silent regarding the prescription of requirements to perform the ordinance of baptism. Though this silence does not entail absolute indifference to the issue, it should cause local churches to approach it with considerable caution in mandating a particular practice.

To perform baptism at The Village, a person must profess faith in Christ and have been previously baptized following conversion. This implies a number of biblical understandings to be further developed.

Ordained or Not

Though historic tradition and practice has restricted the performance of the ordinance to males who have been formally ordained for ministry, such a restriction is not demanded by the Scripture. In fact, the biblical precedent is the equipping of the saints so that they may perform the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12) as lay "priests" (1 Peter 2:4-10).¹

Male or Female

As a consequence of the historic emphasis on the role of the professional pastor/priest in performing baptism, many churches have traditionally prohibited females from performing the ordinance. While fully embracing the complementarian conviction of the biblical restriction of the elder/pastor role to qualified and called men, we see nothing within Scripture to lead us to conclude that women are prohibited from the performance of baptism. Where the Scripture grants freedom, we should be quick to express the same performance of this ordinance. Where the Scripture grants freedom, we should be quick to express the same.

Requirements

Though there are no explicit texts mandating certain restrictions, wisdom suggests that at least a few qualifications be placed upon those performing the ordinance. We might summarize the qualified individual as one who is:

1. A believer in Jesus Christ
2. Baptized subsequent to salvation²
3. In good standing with a local church

Again, though there are no explicit Scriptural mandates, wisdom would suggest that only believers who have themselves publicly identified with Christ in baptism should be allowed to administer the ordinance to another. The person should also be considered to be in good standing with his or her local church. It would certainly seem strange to otherwise allow performance of the sacred ordinance to be performed by one who has not personally participated in it or who is under formal discipline for unrepentant sin.

Conclusion

As a church, we want to be firmly committed to the sufficiency of Scripture and maintain tradition to the extent that such tradition accords with clear biblical teaching and/or wisdom. In the area of performing baptism, it seems as though the only real requirements should be belief, baptism and general Christian obedience. Therefore, it seems as though prohibiting those who do not meet these general conditions from performing the ordinance is most wise and faithful to the principles which we can glean from God's good Word.

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¹ It is interesting to note that, at times, Scripture emphasizes that certain leaders were not the ones to themselves personally perform baptism ceremonies. For instance, Jesus was not baptizing, but His disciples were (John 4:1-2), and Paul celebrated the fact that he was not commissioned directly to baptize, but rather to preach (1 Corinthians 1:13-17).

² The Village Church is convinced of the biblical prescription and pattern of believer's baptism by immersion. However, if one who is being baptized requests baptism by one who was 'baptized' as an infant, we will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis. This in no way implies a compromise on our part in regards to our theological convictions, but is rather a desire to acknowledge the distinction between that which is absolutely essential (belief in Christ) and that which is somewhat more peripheral (the timing and mode of baptism).