

Why Does The Village Church Require Baptism for Membership?

Summary: *A prior confession of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, active involvement in biblical community and baptism are all criteria which we believe to be strongly enough stressed in Scripture as to mandate our inclusion in the official process and policy of our body. These factors are not merely functional, but are birthed out of our theological convictions, which therefore shape our philosophy and outworking of ministry.*

Membership at The Village Church is conditioned upon a number of criteria, which we believe to be strongly enough stressed in Scripture as to mandate our inclusion in the official process and policy of our body. These factors are not merely functional, but are birthed out of our theological convictions which therefore shape our philosophy and outworking of ministry.

The first of those requirements is that prospective members have made a prior confession of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Given that the historical definition of a church is a collection of the redeemed, this criterion is the foundation for future consideration. While unbelievers are always welcome and encouraged to attend, serve or otherwise engage in the various facets of ministry within our midst, true membership is restricted to those who are first a part of the universal church, the body of Christ.

A second condition for membership is that those undergoing the process are currently engaged in active biblical community. For a more thorough explanation of our reasoning behind this criterion, we encourage you to check out our membership book or listen to any of the various teachings on community as a family trait. Suffice it here to mention that we are strongly opposed to the individualistic, personal, self-centered form of religion which resists vulnerability, accountability and authenticity. Our faith is corporate and shared and we are, to a great degree, dependent upon God's grace as it flows from the lives of those around us.

The final expressed condition for membership is baptism following conversion. For a clarification of immersion as our requisite form of baptism, you are encouraged to read through the pertinent section of our baptism book. As to the issue of why baptism is even included at all as a criterion or requirement for membership, the following should expound upon those beliefs.

As the foundation of this policy, we consider Scripture to clearly highlight the command to be baptized. While some passages are certainly to be restricted by audience and context, others are much more relevant to universal application to the body. For example, see the Great Commission as recorded in

Matthew 28:18-20. Second, see Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Lest we interpret the sermon as solely applying to the gathered audience of Jews, we find further evidence in Acts 10:48 of Peter commanding Gentiles to be baptized. To be perfectly honest, the idea of a non-baptized "Christian" in the times of the epistles was completely foreign. In fact, in many of Paul's writings, he uses baptism into Christ as a euphemism for salvation (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, et al). This serves to further reinforce that baptism, while not being necessary to attain salvation, is the natural overflow and result of such redemption. In other words, we believe that all of God's people at all times in all places should pursue baptism as an expression of obedience to Scripture and the God Who authored it.

As an explicit and universal command within Scripture, we believe baptism is not merely an issue of wisdom to be applied subjectively, but of humble obedience to God's declared will for His people. In light of this position, we would hold that one who professes to be a believer and yet has refused and still declines the call to be baptized is engaged in ongoing, unrepentant sin. In order to head off the subsequent need for church discipline created by accepting membership in such a situation, we have established this issue as a potential litmus test of a heart of humility and worshipful obedience to the commands of the God Who is worthy of our deepest praise and submission.

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