

ANTHEM POSITION PAPER ON BAPTISM

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” – Romans 6:3-4

We at Anthem Hayden Church believe that there is a profound spiritual reality attached to baptism. This reality goes much deeper than the mere physical and outward ceremony of going under the water; instead, it reaches our very souls. This spiritual reality, or spiritual baptism, is the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when one places their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. (Acts 1:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 4:5)

The Holy Spirit convicts man of sin (John 16:8) and convinces us that Jesus is the only hope for our salvation. Only by placing our faith in Jesus and His blood that was shed on the cross can we become forgiven by God – this is salvation! (Ephesians 2:8) Scripture tells us that there is a profound transformation that takes place at the point of salvation; 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Having been recreated by God into a new creature, Jesus fulfills his promise to us new believers by baptizing us in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16, Acts 1:5). It is the limitless power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to stand in the victory of Christ in this life and prepares us for the life to come. (Romans 8:11)

For this new God-given life to occur, we must put to death our old self, so that Christ may live through us. Romans 6:3-4 says, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” The death and resurrection of our Lord perfectly illustrates to us the spiritual reality of our conversion. Our old life is put to death, and in miraculous fashion God raises us up, giving us new life- His life!

This new life is attained by faith in Christ alone (John 3:16, Acts 4:12); we cannot please God with spiritual ritual, religious ceremonies, personal performance, or stellar church attendance. These are all external, physical, and visible attempts to cleanse our hearts before the Lord, and they simply do not work. (Galatians 2:16) That is why we rejoice and celebrate the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Pioneer of our faith: offering us an internal, spiritual, and invisible transformation that forgives our sin, cleanses our consciences, and deposits His Spirit within us. This is the spiritual reality of baptism! So, what does water baptism accomplish?

A distinction must be emphasized between the symbolic act of water baptism and Christ's baptism of the Holy Spirit that we received when we placed our faith in Him. 1

Peter 3:21 states this clearly: “baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh (water baptism), but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (spiritual baptism).” We affirm that water baptism is not essential for one’s salvation, though it is clearly advocated. (Matthew 28:18-20) We believe that water baptism is a powerful symbol that beautifully illustrates the spiritual reality of our salvation. (1 Peter 3:21) Water baptism is the visible demonstration of the invisible transformation that has already taken place; it is the public proclamation of a personal relationship with the Creator.

While water baptism is not essential, it remains an important and powerful testimony of faith which is valuable for the edification of the body, the participating believer, and those not yet saved who may be in attendance. The English word “baptize” descends from the Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizmo), which means, “to dip, submerge, immerse or plunge.” The physical act of water baptism clearly demonstrates the miraculous process of salvation: the entire body of the believer is submerged under the surface of the water illustrating the death of the old, sinful nature. Almost instantly after being submerged, the believer rises, drenched in water, demonstrating to all the overwhelming abundance of God’s grace and love that we are immersed in. This illustrates how complete God’s forgiveness is, covering and cleansing our entire being. Lastly, water baptism exhibits our new life in Christ, as exhibited by the believer coming up out of the water, thus illustrating the beginning of a new life, one lived through Jesus and for Jesus.

We find no scriptural evidence that salvation contingent upon the act of water baptism. However, water baptism is a useful tool when understood in the correct context. For believers, water baptism is a good and admirable aspiration, a helpful demonstration of Christ’s saving work in their lives. When understood as a symbol of the spiritual reality, water baptism can be used for teaching about our salvation, it can be used to encourage the body, to hold new believers accountable to their decision to follow Christ, and as a line-in-the-sand moment illustrating the transformation that has taken place.

We believe that scripture is very clear that we are saved through Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit, which he gives to us when we place our faith in Him to save us. Only after this is water baptism beneficial, making water baptism available only to those who have experienced God’s salvation. We believe that water baptism is of no benefit for those who have not yet placed their faith in Jesus. Water baptism in and of itself does not obtain God’s favor, nor is anyone saved through water baptism.

We believe that water baptism reflects our own deeply personal decision to die unto self and live for Christ, thus it is never used as a hollow religious tradition. It is not our practice to offer water baptism to young children who are not yet able to differentiate their faith from that of their parent(s), and/or who are not able to clearly articulate their personal testimony of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. If older children would like to be baptized, it is necessary that they understand and are able articulate the spiritual reality of their salvation.