

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 great caution in what they mandate for their own practices.

The position of The Village Church regarding the requirements for those who perform baptisms within the church is that one must profess faith in Christ and either have been baptized after conversion or at least be pursuing baptism.¹ In developing this position, it would be helpful to look at some of its implications.

Ordained or Not

Though historic practice has restricted the performance of the ordinance to males who have been 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 (Ephesians 4:11-12) as lay “priests” (1 Peter 2:4-10).²

Male or Female

The historic emphasis on the role of the professional pastor/priest and the restriction of such to males has led many churches to prohibit females from performing the ordinance. While fully embracing the complementarian conviction of the restriction of certain roles, we see nothing within Scripture that leads us to conclude that women are prohibited from the

performance of this ordinance. Where the Scripture grants freedom, we should be quick to express the same.

Believer in Christ

Though there is no explicit text which mandates this restriction, wisdom demands that only those who have professed belief should perform the ordinance.

Baptized Subsequent to Salvation³ or Pursuing Baptism⁴

Though there is no Scriptural prescription behind this policy, it is based upon our desire to protect the solemnity of the occasion, particularly against the performance of the ordinance by one who has not personally participated in the ordinance. Should one who has been disobedient to the command of baptism be able to perform the baptism of another?

Occasionally, we have instances in which two people desire to baptize each other (what we will call mutual-baptism).⁵

Traditionally, The Village Church has universally denied such requests, instead asking for one of the two to be baptized by an influential friend or pastor first. After having been baptized by another, that person is then encouraged to baptize the other.

While stressing the wisdom of restricting the performance of a baptism from one who has been disobedient to the command of baptism, it is important to ask whether or not our denial of mutual-baptism is necessitated. In such a case, neither party is being disobedient, but rather both are pursuing obedience.

Revision to church policy to allow for mutual-baptism certainly rubs against the traditions which we have been handed. Without neglecting the importance of tradition, it is also important that we not be enslaved to traditions where those traditions are not absolutely grounded in either clear prescriptions or clearly defined wisdom from the Scriptures. Scripture alone is our final and ultimate authority, and by it we must examine our policies and practices.⁶

¹ This position will be more fully developed under the fourth point.

² It is also interesting to note that, at times, Scripture goes to great lengths to indicate that an authority did not actually do the majority of baptisms. 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).

³ 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).

⁴ The “or pursuing baptism” is an amendment to The Village Church's historical position.

⁵ This could include friends, siblings, family members or any of a number of relationships in which two (or even more) people were mutually beneficial to each other's conversion and/or the subsequent maturity and, thus, desire to baptize each other.

⁶ There is one particular area where we are inclined to discourage (though not prohibit) mutual-baptism. In the case of a married couple, our preference would be to have the husband first baptized by another and for him to baptize his wife. We believe this approach better mirrors the concept of headship in the Scriptures. As stated, this is our preference, and we encourage individuals in that direction, but we do not formally restrict mutual-baptism for spouses if they desire it after considering this concern.

If Scripture does not restrict the practice of mutual-baptism and if neither party is evidencing overt disobedience, it seems as if any restriction on our part extends beyond the authority which we have been given as shepherds of the Word.

Conclusion

As a church, we want to be radically committed to the Scriptures and maintain tradition where such tradition accords with the text. In thinking through the silence of the Scriptures on the explicit requirements for the performance of baptism, we must tread carefully in our interpretation of implicit evidences for restrictions. It seems as though prohibiting those who are not professed believers and those who have neglected the command to be baptized from performing the ordinance is most wise and faithful to the principles which we can glean from the Word.

© 2010 *The Village Church. All rights reserved.*