

## COLE COMMUNITY CHURCH POSITION ON CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Christian baptism was instituted by the Lord and practiced by the early church. This is plain from the words of the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19); and from numerous passages in the book of Acts: Acts 2:38, 8:16, 36-38, 9:18, 10:48, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 19:5. Baptism, then, is an historic ordinance of the church.

Baptism is intended to be symbolic. Some see it as a picture of purification from sin (Titus 3:4-7); others believe that it represents our being placed into Christ or identified in Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11); some suggest that it symbolizes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at conversion (Acts 2:32, 33, 38). We can’t be sure because the writers of the New Testament never clearly stated what baptism was intended to signify.

The important thing to remember is that regardless of the meaning of baptism, baptism itself is only a symbol. It does not save; it only signifies. (Just as a wedding ring does not make a marriage but only signifies it. ) Baptism is “the outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.” We become inwardly a member of Christ’s church by faith in him; we are openly **declared** to be a member of his church by baptism. Baptism is to others a visible sign of our less visible, new membership in the body of Christ and is to us a seal of our union with Christ.

Needless to say, we are obligated to observe this ordinance; we neglect it or undervalue it to our loss.

It’s probable that the early church practiced baptism by immersion; the Greek words for baptism suggest it, and the Biblical descriptions of baptism conducted by the apostles and by members of the early church are best explained in this way. However, the Bible does not command baptism by immersion and we cannot be absolutely sure that in every instance that method was used. Therefore, we can in good conscience practice other modes: effusion (pouring) and sprinkling.