

DOWNTOWN CORNERSTONE CHURCH
BAPTISM PRIMER

Water baptism is intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work, by faith, and become His disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the church, oneself and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It signifies that a person's former way of life has been put to death while, at the same time, being born again to a living hope in Jesus.

- STATEMENT OF FAITH on Baptism



HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL:

This booklet is designed to give an overview of the theological convictions of Downtown Cornerstone Church (DCC) on the topic of baptism. For those who wish to be baptized with DCC or simply desire to learn more about our beliefs, we teach a quarterly baptism class. Those who register for the class will receive a copy of this material when registering. Participants are asked to read the material prior to attending the class. As you read it, note any questions you have and be prepared to ask those questions during the class. We're looking forward to walking through this process with you!

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism and communion (also known as the Lord's Supper) are the two ordinances¹ prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ as visible symbols of invisible grace. They are tangible representations of the invisible realities of the gospel² and the Spirit's application of the gospel to our lives.

With both ordinances, believers have an opportunity to “remember” God's goodness and grace, especially as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Both baptism and communion picture Christ's death and resurrection - and our participation in them - through union to Him in faith. As we enter into the waters, or watch another do so, we are reminded that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and that we too have died to the old self in order to live for Christ.

What a person believes about baptism affects how they will perform the ordinance. Who should be baptized? When should they be baptized? How should they be baptized? All of these questions are answered as we reflect upon what baptism means.

The DCC Statement of Faith describes baptism “***as a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It signifies that a person's former way of life has been put to death while, at the same time, being born again to a living hope in Jesus.***”

As a symbol, baptism displays a number of significant realities:

1. Jesus' death and resurrection
2. The disciple's living union with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection
3. Passing through the waters of judgment to safety, in Jesus
4. Being cleansed and washed of all sin, in Jesus
5. Rising to a new life, with a new family, with new promises and a new future, in Jesus

IS BAPTISM MERELY A SYMBOL?

Within the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of the sacraments was fiercely debated, even between the Reformers. Without attempting to justify any particular position, it is important to assert that baptism is in some mysterious sense a “means of grace,” in which God sanctifies and encourages His people. That said, it is important to bear in mind a few helpful truths regarding what baptism is not and does not do:

1. BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE

Though grace is mysteriously mediated through the ordinance, it is *not* saving grace but rather sanctifying grace. We are more conformed to the image of Christ as we obey Him in the call to be baptized.³

¹ Protestant theology has often chosen the term “ordinance” rather than “sacrament” in order to distance itself from the accompanying nuances of the Roman Catholic usage of that term. That said, if understood properly, either term is acceptable.

² Though there are various ways to describe the gospel (or “good news”), it centers on the provision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a substitute for our sins. Jesus lived a perfect life, was crucified, and was raised three days later. Through faith in Him, we are united to Him, forgiven our sin and reconciled to God.

³ While 1 Peter 3 states, “baptism ... saves you,” it is important to note the context and particularly Peter's immediate clarification that it is not the water but the “appeal to God” which saves. This corresponds to passages such as Romans 10:13, which states that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” We appeal to God and call upon Him as an expression of faith. Baptism is a symbol of this faith which alone saves.

2. BAPTISM IS NOT “NECESSARY” FOR SALVATION

Without in any way diminishing the duty and delight of baptism for a believer, we must also warn against any thinking that suggests salvation is dependent upon baptism (as many cults suggest). The gospel offers salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.⁴ While baptism is *not* necessary for salvation it *is* necessary if we are to be obedient to Jesus’ command.

WHY SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

When we repent of our sin and place our trust in Jesus for salvation, we should be baptized. There are three primary reasons for followers of Jesus to be baptized:

1. To obey the commands of Christ.
2. To give evidence of genuine saving faith as a disciple of Christ.
3. To follow the example of Christ.

MATTHEW 28:18-20 [18] “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

ACTS 2:37-41 [37] “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ [38] And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be *baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. [40] And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ [41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

ACTS 22:16 “And now why do you wait? Rise and be *baptized* and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Baptism is not merely a responsibility but also a privilege. In baptism, we have the opportunity to demonstrate evidence of our trust in, and love for, our King. If we think of baptism as a burden, we have not properly understood the joy of following Christ in the call to be baptized. We should have a similar response as the Ethiopian eunuch who, when he believed the gospel, proclaimed, “*What prevents me from being baptized?*” It should be our joy, and we should eagerly anticipate our participation in the ordinance. While there are certain costs associated with baptism,⁵ the reward of obedience is always worth it (e.g. peace, joy, confidence, assurance and more).

The desire to be baptized should be motivated by a desire to glorify God in faithful obedience. Any other motivation (e.g. to join a particular local church, to please a friend or family member, etc.) should not be the ultimate reason for seeking to be baptized.

⁴ John 3 states that unless a person is “born of water and the Spirit” he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Many point to this as evidence of the necessity of baptism. However, nothing in the context suggests that Jesus is speaking of baptism. Rather, He is alluding to the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, which speaks of both “water” and “Spirit.” Therefore, Jesus is saying that “new birth” or “regeneration” is necessary for salvation, not baptism.

⁵ In certain cultures, those who are baptized open themselves up to public persecution. Even in our context, participants often face the ridicule of family and friends.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

MATTHEW 28:18-20 [18] “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The DCC Statement of Faith begins by stating that “***baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ’s atoning work, by faith, and become His disciple.***”

As a church, we practice what is called “believer’s” or “confessor’s” baptism (sometimes referred to as credobaptism), which means we only baptize those who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reading through Acts, we find baptism explicitly related to repentance, receiving the Word, believing and receiving the Holy Spirit.⁶ There is no explicit evidence to suggest that nonbelievers were baptized.

ACTS 2:41 “So those who received his word were *baptized*, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

ACTS 8:12 “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were *baptized*, both men and women.”

GALATIANS 3:27 “For as many of you as were *baptized* into Christ have put on Christ.”

ROMANS 6:3-4 [3] “Do you not know that all of us who have been *baptized* into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by *baptism* into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

SHOULD A PERSON BE RE-BAPTIZED?

For those who were sprinkled or immersed at an earlier age, it is important to understand that we should only be baptized once. If you trusted in Christ at that time, your baptism is valid and need not, indeed should not, be repeated. If, however, you experienced sprinkling with or immersion in water before being born again and trusting Christ, your experience was not baptism, and thus you should be baptized. *The question is therefore, “Was I truly trusting in Christ when I was baptized?”*

There should always be seasons of growth and greater periods of maturity in the life of those who have trusted in the gospel. Believers must not be re-baptized each time they experience greater joy and sanctification. However, if you believe that your original experience was prior to truly trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior, you should pursue obedience in this area by being baptized now.

⁶ See Appendix B: Paedobaptism for an extended look at the distinctions between believer’s baptism (credobaptism) and infant baptism (paedobaptism) and for thoughts on the referenced passages in Acts.

WHEN SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

ACTS 22:16 “And now why do you wait? Rise and be *baptized* and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

As soon as a person trusts Christ, he or she should be baptized. The Scriptures do not speak of a delayed baptism in which a regenerate believer refrains from obedience to the ordinance. In all the accounts in the Scriptures, baptism is rather immediate. This pattern of somewhat immediate baptism should be emulated unless there are convincing reasons to delay.

Baptism and Membership

Because baptism is an act of affirming one's profession of faith and union with Christ as a member of Jesus' church, baptism and membership should go hand in hand whenever possible. When we are baptized, we are baptized into God's family, the local church. In baptism, we are committing ourselves to God and his people, and simultaneously others are committing to us as part of God's family. Therefore, baptism is a requirement for membership with DCC, and for those wishing to be baptized, we ask that they be working towards membership with DCC.

WHEN SHOULD CHILDREN BE BAPTIZED?

We believe in God's faithfulness to the children of his covenant people. We believe that God has a special concern for the children of believers, and we welcome them into the life of the covenant community - the church - as expected heirs of God's covenant blessings. Further, the Bible teaches that very young children - yes, even infants - can be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel promised Zechariah that John the Baptist would be “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb” (Luke 1:15). Children raised in faithful, believing Christian households may “grow up never knowing a time when they weren't embracing Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel.”⁷

In an ideal world, parents would present their children for baptism whenever they are convinced of the authenticity of their children's faith. However, in the real world things aren't always so clear and it can be difficult to recognize the difference between mere mimicry and authentic faith. All faithful Christian parents want to see their children come to Jesus, and will therefore be tempted to see baptism as a validation of their own work as parents (despite good theological teaching to the contrary). For this reason, we are convinced of the need to set some basic standard for the baptism of children.

Therefore, DCC recommends that parents wait until a child is at least ten years old before presenting him or her for baptism. Please note that this is a recommendation and not a mandate. There is nothing magical or biblical about the age of ten. However, all children will be interviewed and their readiness for baptism considered on a case-by-case basis. Parents should see this as a blessing and not a challenge. We are not interested in performing religious rituals to appease religiously inclined family members. Rather, we want to help parents teach their children the gospel, shepherd them to genuine faith, and shape them as faithful, obedient disciples of Jesus.⁸ While we do not wish to withhold baptism from those who are genuinely born again, we do recognize the need to exercise caution with children and therefore err on the side of waiting. There is no reason to rush and we want our children to look back on their baptism as their decision and not something that was imposed on them nor naively entered into.

On this note, we also ask parents to wait until their children are baptized before allowing them to take communion.⁹

⁷ Stephen Smallman, *How Our Children Come to Faith*, 21.

⁸ Bob Thune, *Toward a Biblical Understanding of Baptism*, Coram Deo position paper.

⁹ Throughout the history of the church, baptism has been considered an initiation rite. That is, baptism celebrated one's entrance into the believing community. The Lord's Table, on the other hand, was the community meal open to all who declared their unity with the believing body through baptism. Thus, the church throughout history has held that baptism should precede one's participation in the Lord's Table. For this reason we ask parents to wait until their children are baptized before allowing them take communion.

IMPROPER MOTIVATIONS FOR DELAYED BAPTISM:

1. FEAR

One of the most common reasons for delaying baptism is fear, but such anxiety should not hinder our obedience. It is important to know that fearing obedience is a sin and thus should not be passively accepted. Confronting sin is an essential aspect of discipleship, and a person's obedience in this area is an excellent way to begin the process of sanctification in the area of the fear of man.¹⁰

2. NOT BEING "GOOD ENOUGH"

Jesus came to save sinners, not those who are "good enough" for baptism. There will never be a time where a person will be "good enough" for baptism. Our right to enter the baptismal waters is grounded upon Christ's righteousness, not our own. If we have been united to Him, we should confidently draw near in obedience to His command and example.

THE PRACTICE OF DCC

As a church, we ask believers who wish to be baptized to temporarily delay for a brief season while they go through a baptism class and wait for a celebration service.¹¹ First, this practice allows us to discuss the gospel and the meaning of baptism and to teach our theological convictions regarding both. Second, it allows the church the opportunity to celebrate together as a congregation, thus sharing in the joy of a person's obedience, and agree to walk with him or her in fellowship. Finally, it allows the person being baptized to invite family and friends who will have an opportunity to celebrate and hear the proclamation of the gospel.

HOW SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Though other denominations and theological traditions baptize by pouring or sprinkling, DCC practices baptism by immersion.¹² We do so in light of the following considerations:

1. *The Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizo) literally means to plunge, submerge or immerse.*

Our English word *baptism* is a transliteration of the Greek *baptizo*. *Baptizo* was used in Greek literature to describe the act of immersing something in water or another liquid. It later became a technical term that referred specifically to the Christian ordinance of baptism.

2. *The representation of union in Christ's death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion.*

Whether buried below or above ground, the symbolism of burial is still that of being placed under something. Likewise, resurrection is accomplished by coming out of something (whether grave or tomb). Immersion best symbolizes this reality by actually placing the believer under the water and bringing them out.

In addition, it is interesting to note the use of water to symbolize judgment in the Scriptures (e.g. the flood of Genesis 6-7 and the destruction of Egypt in the Red Sea of Exodus 14). Thus, by passing through the waters of baptism, the believer expresses trust that God's judgment has been satisfied by Christ.

COLOSSIANS 2:12 "Having been buried with him in *baptism*, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

¹⁰ An excellent resource on this topic is *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.

¹¹ Celebration services are regularly scheduled services in which we baptize and receive the Lord's Supper.

¹² Except in those rare cases in which immersion is impossible or impractical. For example, baptism by sprinkling is certainly to be practiced in the case of a person who is physically unable to be immersed.

ROMANS 6:3-4 [3] “Do you not know that all of us who have been *baptized* into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by *baptism* into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

3. The surrounding context of baptisms in the Scriptures suggests baptism by immersion.

MARK 1:5,10 [5]” And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being *baptized* by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins... [10] And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”¹³

JOHN 3:23 “John also was *baptizing* at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized” ...

ACTS 8:38-39 [38] “And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he *baptized* him. [39] And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.”¹⁴

WHERE SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Although there are no prescriptions in the Scriptures that specify a particular location for baptism, we prefer to practice the ordinance within the context of the gathered local church in order to corporately celebrate an individual’s act of obedience and submission. This preference is primarily due to the theological conviction that baptism is a sign of entrance into the family of God, seen and experienced most clearly in the local church, and therefore it seems most appropriate for this ordinance to be performed within the context of the gathered church whenever possible.

WHO CAN PERFORM BAPTISM?

The Bible gives no prescription for the requirements of those who perform baptism. Contrary to some traditions, there seems to be no explicit biblical reason to restrict the duty to men who have been ordained to vocational ministry. However, since baptism is a sign of entrance into the family of God, seen and experienced most clearly in the local church, it does seem appropriate for this ordinance to be performed within the context of the gathered church whenever possible. Additionally, in order for the baptizee to have a right understanding of what is actually happening in baptism, it is right for the church to safeguard the ordinance and keep it from abuse. Lastly, in light that, it seems most appropriate for church leaders to administer baptism whenever possible. However, again, there is no explicit reason why the church may not designate other mature believers, as appropriate, to baptize new converts.¹⁵

¹³ The prepositions here are crucial. Verse 5 has the Greek *en*, not another preposition meaning beside or near. Verse 10 has *ek* not *apo* which would have been used for merely going away from the water.

¹⁴ It is important to note that this verse speaks of both Philip and the eunuch going down into and coming up out of the water, but the significance is found in the fact that they actually entered into the water which would have been unnecessary if baptizing by sprinkling or pouring. Surely the caravan would have had sufficient water for those modes had they been a preferable practice.

¹⁵ See Chapter 49, “Baptism” of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* for more.

APPENDIX A: HOW WE BAPTIZE

PARTICIPATE IN A BAPTISM CLASS

1. We ask those wishing to be baptized to participate in a baptism class (currently taught on a quarterly basis) in which we explain the gospel, core Christian beliefs (articulated in our “Statement of Basic Beliefs”) and our theology of baptism.
2. After taking the class, we ask participants to submit a testimony of conversion in which we look particularly for evidences of grace and a proper understanding of the gospel. For instance, we want to make sure a person does not articulate that he or she was born a Christian or thinks that Christianity consists merely in moral improvement.

PREPARE TO SHARE YOUR STORY

Your testimony is your account of how you came to know and follow Jesus, and how Jesus is continuing to unfold His story in your life. It can often include life events that helped shaped your view of God, but the crux or center of any testimony should always center around the Gospel, Christ’s work on your behalf.

As you think about writing down your testimony, consider modeling it after Paul’s conversion story to King Agrippa in Acts 26:4-23. In this section you will see that Paul’s story includes:

I. Who he was before he met Jesus (vs. 4-11)

- What was your life like ... what characterized you? How did you think of the Lord?
“My family, friends, interests were ...”
“My most important value was ...”
“My religious background and attitude about Christ were ...”

II. How he met Jesus (vs. 12-20)

- Describe the world around you that drove you to consider Christ, whether it was circumstances or time.
“I was awakened to my need by (people, books, circumstances) ...”
“What I thought or noticed (about myself, God) at this point was ...”
- Share the specific steps of how you became a Christian (e.g. scripture, word, person, church, etc.)
“The aspects of the gospel that touched me were ...”
“I came to understand that Christ ...”
“I saw my need was ...”
- Explain the gospel clearly. For example:
#1 “I saw that I was a sinner fully deserving of God’s wrath.”
#2 “But, I then understood that Jesus died in my place, bearing the wrath of God, on the cross for me.”
#3 “When I repented of my sin, turned from my old lifestyle, placed faith in Jesus’ sacrifice, I was forgiven of all my sin, became a child of God and received the gift of eternal life.”

III. How his life has changed after becoming a Christian. (vs. 21-23)

- What difference has Christ made in your life? In the way you act? Think? In the way others see you?
- Don’t be afraid to share that you still have struggles, but how Christ helps you with these struggles.
“What changed was ...”
“My desires now are ...”
“I’m now doing ...”
“A difficult area of obedience is ...”

IV. Conclude by sharing that you now know you have eternal life in Jesus (cf 1 John 5:11-13)

COMMON TESTIMONY TRAPS

- “I don’t have an interesting testimony” - Since we were all enemies of God, there’s no such thing (Rom 5:8-10)
- “People won’t understand or they’ll misunderstand me” - Jesus understands you completely (John 10:20)
- Because we forget that Christ makes all things new, we can see our stories our identity, instead of remembering Jesus is now our identity (Col 3:3-4)
- Because we forget the Gospel, we can tend to make our stories religious (went to church, prayed the prayer, etc.) and not relational (God saved me) - (Luke 18:12-13)

WRITE YOUR TESTIMONY

We encourage everyone to write out their testimony in something you can share in 3-5 minutes. If you already have your testimony written, does it need updating? Does it follow a pattern that others can resonate with? Does it show the magnificence and beauty of Christ redeeming work in your life? Ask yourself, does my story paint a adequate picture of what Christ has saved me, and is saving me from, and who I now am in Him?

BAPTISM SERVICES:

1. We have regular (roughly quarterly) celebration services in which the church celebrates baptisms together. We encourage those wishing to be baptized to do so within the context of these gatherings.¹⁶ Your baptism is a profound display of God’s grace making it a great opportunity to invite friends, family, neighbors and/or coworkers to celebrate with you. This could be their first time hearing the gospel.
2. Participants are asked to personally share their testimonies if possible or, if unable, to have a friend or family member share for them.
3. After the testimony, the person performing the baptism will ask, “Do you confess and believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?” to which the baptizee will respond, “Yes” or “I do.”
4. The baptizer will then immerse and subsequently raise the baptizee out of the water while saying, “I baptize you, my (brother or sister) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ [Some will choose to also say, “Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life” which is taken from Romans 6:4, “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”]

HELPFUL TIPS:

1. Wear dark shorts and a dark shirt to maintain modesty.
2. Bring a change of clothes, towel and bag to hold your wet clothes after you change.
3. A row of seats will be reserved for everyone who is being baptized, but if you prefer to sit with visiting family and friends, ask them to save you a seat near the baptistery.
4. Arrive 30 minutes prior to the service where you are being baptized. You will receive an email the week before with further details on when and where to arrive.

¹⁶ We should remember from the “Where Should a Person be Baptized?” section that this is a preference, though we would argue theologically defensible, and not a prescription.

¹⁷ Following the formula of Matthew 28:19, we baptize using the Trinitarian confession. In Acts, the apostles typically baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” but this should not be viewed as differing in meaning from Matthew’s prescription. The context of Acts is concerned with testifying to the resurrection of Christ, and thus He is distinguished among the persons of the Trinity, but all that is true of the character (“name” often represents character in the Scriptures) of Christ is true of the Father and Spirit, as well.

APPENDIX B: CREDOBAPTISM VS. PAEDOBAPTISM

As discussed in the section on “Who Should be Baptized?” DCC only baptizes those who profess to be believers in the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, not all denominations and traditions follow this practice. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Anglicanism and a number of mainline Protestant denominations practice infant baptism (called *paedobaptism* from the Greek *paidon* meaning infant or child). While all practice the same form, the underlying theologies of each are quite distinct. Without going into detail regarding each, we will look briefly at the two most common in our particular context, Roman Catholicism and Protestant paedobaptism (e.g. Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, etc). For further study on this topic, see the recommended resources in Appendix D.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Roman Catholicism teaches that all infants should be baptized at which time the child is regenerated or born again. In the case of infants, who are unable to exercise saving faith, the faith of the church is effective to remove original sin and bestow saving grace.

OUR RESPONSE:

The faith of another person will not substitute for a person’s own response to the gospel, and the baptismal waters hold no magical powers of regeneration. While God’s grace is certainly present in the waters, it is the grace of sanctification, *not* regeneration or justification.

The Roman Catholic understanding of baptism is precipitated upon the same system of works-righteousness which stands in utter contrast to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Galatians, a gospel of works is ultimately “another gospel” to be corrected or condemned.

PROTESTANT PAEDOBAPTISM

Protestant paedobaptism is similar to Roman Catholic infant baptism *in form only*. According to Protestant theology, faith alone is the instrument in justification, and therefore saving grace is not bestowed in the waters. Therefore, those who practice infant baptism in the Protestant tradition are our brothers in the faith in regards to the essential elements of orthodox Christianity. Without diminishing our overwhelming agreement on the fundamentals of the faith with those who practice infant baptism, it is nevertheless important to highlight this area of disagreement.

Protestant paedobaptism prescribes baptism of adults who convert to Christianity but differs in practice from those who perform believer’s baptism by additionally prescribing infant baptism *for children of believing parents*. This view is founded upon three main arguments:

1. Infants were circumcised in the Old Covenant.
2. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant as circumcision was the sign of the Old.
3. There is essential continuity between the Old and New Covenants.

This discussion centers on the degree of continuity between the Old and New Covenants.¹⁸ Within the Old Covenant, Israel was commanded to circumcise their sons on the eighth day as a sign and seal of their being included within God’s covenant with the nation. Protestant paedobaptism interprets baptism as analogous to circumcision (using Colossians 2:11-12 as a reference) and thus teaches that the sign and seal should be performed for children of New Covenant believers, as well. As Acts 2:39 states, “the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.”

¹⁸ In contrasting the Old and New Covenants, it is recognized that there was not simply one old covenant, but indeed various covenants appear throughout the context of Genesis through Malachi.

OUR RESPONSE:

1. The Old Covenant community was primarily entered into physically (by birth), whereas the New Covenant is entered into spiritually (by rebirth – being “born again”).¹⁹ Whereas Protestant paedobaptism prescribes baptism for those in *physical* infancy, credobaptism (believer’s baptism) insists upon the baptism of those in *spiritual* infancy, having been “born again” through the Holy Spirit.
2. The Old Covenant community was a mixed community composed of both believers and unbelievers (Romans 2:29, 9:6). The New Covenant community is technically a congregation of believers (Jeremiah 31:34).²⁰
3. Though there is a great degree of continuity between the covenants, there is also substantial discontinuity. The Old Covenant consisted of shadows which pointed to the substance fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). We need to be careful about directly applying elements of the Old Covenant without recognizing the essential distinctions.
4. Passages such as Acts 2:39 do not affirm the paedobaptist position. The “promise” affirmed is the promise of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4 and 2:33), and it is specifically applied to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” The fact that the promise is for “your children” should no more lead us to thinking that all children are covenant community members as the fact that it is for “all who are far off” should lead us to conclude that all people everywhere are. The passage teaches that the Holy Spirit will be given to all whom Christ calls to Himself, not that we should baptize children.
5. Lastly, rather than seeing Old Covenant circumcision as analogous to New Covenant baptism, it seems more appropriate to see Old Covenant circumcision as analogous to New Covenant *circumcision of the heart* by the Holy Spirit. As Paul states in Romans 2:29, “Circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit ...” (see also Col 2:11) In this way, circumcision under the Old Covenant was the shadow, while circumcision of the heart by the Spirit under the New Covenant is the fulfillment.

Our theological conviction regarding believer’s baptism is confirmed as we look in the book of Acts. Here are the baptisms in Acts and the descriptions given of those who were baptized.

ACTS 2

In chapter 2, we find Peter preaching the word in the midst of the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The crowd cries out in conviction, “Brothers, what shall we do?” to which Peter responds, “repent and be baptized.” In verse 41, we read that those who were baptized were “*those who received his word.*”

ACTS 8

There are two accounts of baptism in chapter 8. The first occurs in response to the preaching of Philip (one of the seven selected in Acts 6 to assist the apostles) in Samaria. In verse 12, we read that many were baptized: “*When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.*”

The second account again involves the ministry of Philip as he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. After preaching Christ from Isaiah 53 to the eunuch, he requests baptism, and Philip obliges. The text itself does not specify the conditions for such baptism; although, some manuscripts record the eunuch stating, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

¹⁹ Note the relationship between Jesus’ mention of “water” and “spirit” in John 3 in the context of being “born again” with the promise of “water” and “spirit” in the New Covenant prophecy of Ezekiel 36. See John Piper’s *Finally Alive* for a helpful theology of regeneration in general and for a discussion of its role in the fulfillment of the New Covenant in particular.

²⁰ This is not to deny that there are those who are unregenerate within the visible church but simply that the true community of the Church consists of those who have been born again to the living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

ACTS 9

Chapter 9 contains the baptism of Paul *immediately after* his experience on the Damascus road. Within the context, we read that Ananias was specifically sent to minister to Paul that he might receive sight (having been blinded by the vision of Christ in 9:3-9) and “be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 10

The 10th chapter includes the baptism of Cornelius and, presumably, his household *following their belief in the gospel*. After Peter preached the gospel to those who were gathered, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.” Peter describes this as having “received the Holy Spirit.” When Peter recounts the experience to the church in Jerusalem, their interpretation of the event is that it evidenced that “God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

ACTS 16

Like chapter 8, this chapter also includes two distinct accounts of baptisms. The first involves Lydia and her household. Though nothing is specifically stated about the condition of her household (see below “What About Household Baptisms?”), Lydia’s baptism is related to the reality that “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul,” and her subsequent appeal is based upon her perceived faithfulness (16:15).

The second account in chapter 16 involves the jailer and his household, who heard the “word of the Lord” that was preached to them by Paul and Silas (vs. 32). As in the case of Lydia, no explicit mention is made as to the spiritual condition of the jailer’s household, but his own is specifically included as vs. 34 indicates that they rejoiced “that he had believed in God.”

ACTS 19

The final account of baptism in the book of Acts is found in chapter 19. In this context, Paul discovers some “disciples” who had been baptized into John’s baptism of repentance but had not yet received the Holy Spirit. In response, Paul baptizes them, lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSEHOLD BAPTISMS?

Though the explicit mention of the baptism of an entire household is only made in the two accounts in chapter 16, the narrative of Cornelius’ conversion probably implies the same. Proponents of infant baptism (paedobaptism) believe that such baptisms can be used as implicit justification for infant baptism.²¹ If households were baptized and if those households included infants, we have biblical evidence of paedobaptism. What are we to make of these claims? Here are a few thoughts:

First, it must be noted that the entire argument is founded upon the presumed presence of infants within the household. The text itself does not necessitate such a reading. There is no convincing evidence of infants in the households (though to be fair, there is no explicit statement otherwise either).

Second, the texts in question have clues which at least suggest that all who were baptized had been converted.

1. Acts 10 explicitly states that Cornelius “feared God *with* all his household.” In other words, all in his household were described as fearing God. Those who were baptized were those who “feared.”
2. Acts 16 describes the baptism of the jailer’s household. In verse 31, Paul or Silas says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Surely this does not mean that if the jailer believed, his household would be saved as Protestant paedobaptists would agree. The best interpretation of this text is that those who believed would be saved and that those who were baptized were those who believed. In addition, the word is spoken to his entire household, (32) and his entire household rejoiced together (34).
3. Additionally, consider the relationship between 1 Corinthians 1:16, which states that Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas” and 1 Corinthians 16:15, which states that his “household” consisted of devoted converts.

²¹ It must be noted that household baptisms are not a major line of defense of the paedobaptist position. See the relevant section on paedobaptism for the typical theological defenses of infant baptism.

SUMMARY

While the timing and mode of baptism are not absolutely essential to the Christian faith, they are nonetheless important theological convictions that we hold firmly. We love and respect our Protestant brothers and sisters who disagree with believer's baptism, but we believe and subsequently teach it as the biblical form of baptism.

NOTES:

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CREDOBAPTISM: the view that only those who have been regenerated and trust Christ as Lord and Savior should be baptized, also known as believer's or confessor's baptism

PAEDOBAPTISM: the view that infants of believing parents should be baptized

IMMERSION: a mode or form of baptism in which the baptizee is submerged under the water

SPRINKLING: a mode or form of baptism in which the baptizee is sprinkled with water, also known as effusion or pouring

REGENERATED: to be "born again," regeneration refers to the event in which God grants new life to His children, and they subsequently exercise faith and love toward Him

JUSTIFICATION: the term for the declaration of righteousness that God credits to our account. It is often distinguished from "sanctification"

SANCTIFICATION: a progressive work of God in which believers are continually conformed to the image of Jesus Christ

APPENDIX D: FOR FURTHER STUDY

RELEVANT PASSAGES IN THE SCRIPTURES:

- Matthew 3, 21, 28
- Mark 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 16
- Luke 3, 7, 11, 12, 20
- John 1, 3, 4, 10
- Acts 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22
- Romans 6
- 1 Corinthians 1, 10, 12, 15
- Galatians 3
- Ephesians 4
- Colossians 2
- Hebrews 6, 9
- 1 Peter 3

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright
- *Desiring God* baptism resources: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/topic-index/baptism>

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