



Gospel Community Church

BAPTISM PACKET

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the global body of believers, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

In addition, we believe that baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's association with the Triune God; faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior; the believer's death to sin; the burial of the old life; the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus; and a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead.

– Statement of Faith on Baptism –

HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL:

This booklet is designed to give an overview of the theological convictions of Gospel Community Church (GCC) on the topic of baptism. For those who wish to be baptized at GCC or simply desire to learn more about our beliefs, we offer a quarterly membership 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. You can also schedule a meeting with an elder to discuss baptism, and work through this packet with them. 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 GCC Statement of Faith describes baptism "as an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's association with the Triune God; faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior; the believer's death to sin; the burial of the old life; the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus; and a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead."

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 GCC 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.”

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.

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.

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 ones 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 at GCC, and for those wishing to be baptized, we ask that they be working towards membership at GCC.

To learn more about membership at GCC, visit <http://www.gcceugene.org/membership>

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 CHILDREN BE BAPTIZED?

The short answer is that children can be baptized after they confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9). Therefore, everyone who gets baptized needs to understand what the gospel is. Hence, we encourage parents to have conversations like this:

Parents: "What is the gospel?"

Child: "The good news."

Parents: "What makes it good news?"

Child: "We sinned against God, so he sent His Son to live an obedient life and die on the cross for our disobedience. After that, he rose from the dead. When we trust in him, we are forgiven for our sins and are restored to God."

We don't expect them to answer these questions precisely like this, but we are listening to hear if they understand the gospel. Parents, refrain from trying to answer for your children or telling them exactly what to say. It's more important they know this at a heart level than trying to force their answers so they can get baptized. Remember, baptism is not salvific, and the elders aren't wondering why your child hasn't been baptized. Once you feel your child understands the gospel, one of our elders will meet with you and your child to ask similar questions.

There is wisdom in holding off on baptism if you are unclear about their proclamation of faith. As a church family, we will come alongside you to examine your child's life to see if it is consistent with their profession. Scripture calls us to examine the lives of those inside the church family (1 Cor. 5:12-13, 2 Thes. 3:6, 14-15), and as parents, this is objectively difficult to do at times. Sadly, we hear countless stories from people who were baptized at a young age and admit they had no clue what they were doing and likely weren't a Christian. In addition, we have had parents tell us they wish their children were not baptized young because they don't believe they are Christians. Therefore, slowing down and taking some time is a wise decision.

Church membership is another point to consider when holding off on baptism until your child is older. After baptism, would your child become a member of Gospel Community Church? Since baptism is a public proclamation of faith and you are baptized into the universal church, your faith is lived-out inside the local church. Membership is how we hold the baptized believer accountable to their faith. We recognize parents hold their children accountable to live consistent with their new identity as a child of God, but we also recognize the church comes alongside you in raising a child. Would you feel comfortable with your child becoming a member at GCC, where we equip you as parents and hold your child accountable to their proclamation of faith?

On this note, we also ask parents to wait until their children are baptized before allowing them to take communion.⁷

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.⁸

⁷ 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.

⁸ An excellent resource on this topic is *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.

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 GCC

As a church, we ask believers who wish to be baptized to reach out to an elder and express interest in being baptized. You will be sent this packet and then asked to schedule a meeting with an elder. After a conversation with an elder, you will be baptized at one of our quarterly baptism services. First, this process 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, GCC practices baptism by immersion.⁹ 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.”

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.”

⁹ 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.

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.”¹⁰

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.”¹¹

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 individual being baptized 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 of 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.¹²

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² See Chapter 49, “Baptism” of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* for more.

APPENDIX A: HOW WE BAPTIZE

MEET WITH AN ELDER

1. We ask those wishing to be baptized to meet with an elder so that he can explain the gospel, core Christian beliefs (articulated in our “Statement of Basic Beliefs”) and our theology of baptism.
2. During this meeting, we ask those wishing to be baptized to share their testimony (story of conversion) so that there is confidence that one’s profession of faith is genuine and they are truly alive in Christ.
3. This meeting is also a good time to discuss membership at GCC, and talk through whether or not the person desiring baptism is on track to becoming a member.

BAPTISM SERVICES:

1. We have regular (roughly quarterly) baptism services in which the church celebrates baptisms together. We encourage those wishing to be baptized to do so within the context of these gatherings¹³ 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. Before an individual is baptized, the person performing the baptism will ask, “Do you confess and believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?” to which the individual being baptized will respond, “Yes” or “I do.”
3. The baptizer will then immerse and subsequently raise the individual being baptized 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.”¹⁴ [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, a towel, and a 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 baptistry.
4. Arrive 30 minutes prior to the service where you are being baptized and be prepared to go over logistics with an elder. You will receive an email the week before with further details on when and where to arrive.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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?” GCC 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.¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁵ 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”).¹⁶ 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).¹⁷
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.”

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.”

¹⁸ 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.

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.

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 individual being baptized is submerged under the water

SPRINKLING: a mode or form of baptism in which the individual being baptized 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>
- *Why Should I Be Baptized?*, written by Bobby Jamieson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Much of the original content and layout of this booklet was adapted from content provided by our friends, and fellow Acts 29 members, at Downtown Cornerstone Church (Seattle, WA). Please note that this material will continue to be refined as we are able to dedicate time and resources. If you have any questions and/or clarifications please do not hesitate to contact us at gceug@gmail.com.