

## STATEMENT ON BAPTISM

### Meaning

The picture of baptism depicts the drama of the gospel. Baptism is the public confession of faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins—an outward *profession* of an inward faith. Baptism provides a *picture* of a believer's union with Christ. Believers have been buried with Christ in his death and raised to live a new life. It is also a sign of being cleansed from the stain of sin and becoming part of the people of God, the church. Baptism, then, symbolizes a believer's identification with Christ, purification through Christ, and incorporation into the body of Christ.

Given the meaning and symbolic nature of baptism, we affirm that the act in and of itself does not produce forgiveness of sins or cause salvation. Rather, baptism is a testimony of God's grace and saving faith already present in a person's life (*Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:41; 22:16; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21*).

### Proper Subjects & Time

Baptism is exclusively reserved for those who profess faith in and commitment to Christ. The Scriptures clearly indicate that baptism should follow repentance of sin and profession of faith in Christ. Therefore, it is our practice to only administer and accept baptism after conversion for membership.

Although there is not an explicit biblical command regarding the timing of baptism post-conversion, we believe there is wisdom in delaying baptism until confirming, as best as one can assess, that genuine faith is present. In regards to children, we believe God can save a child whenever he chooses. At the same time, the church should be judicious as to when it endorses the reality of a child's decision. So, while there is not a definitive minimum age before a child can be baptized, we believe that prior to baptism children should show evidence of genuine faith independent of parental control.<sup>1</sup>

This cautious, yet optimistic approach preserves the purity of baptism, ensures a proper comprehension of baptism's significance, and safeguards against a false understanding of salvation. The biblical precedent for believer's baptism is clear, whereas the case for immediate baptism is not as strong (*Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-13; 10:44-48; 16:29-33; 18:8; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:12*).

### Proper Mode

We believe baptism by immersion best fits the Scriptural references and alone encapsulates the symbolism of identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. If you get the *meaning* right, you should get the *mode* right. In addition to Jesus' example of being baptized by immersion, the Greek word translated baptism (*baptizo*) literally means "immerse". Therefore, it is our practice to only administer and accept baptism by immersion for membership. This helps preserve the unity of our church and collective witness to the transforming work of God in the gospel (*Mark 1:10; Acts 8:39; Romans 6:3-4; Ephesians 4:1-6*).

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<sup>1</sup> In general, biblical scholars give a number of reasons to indicate twelve as an age where children begin transitioning to adult responsibilities (see John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 272-273). This does not mean we would not baptize a child before twelve, but that we would only do so with serious reflection and caution.