



WHAT WE  
BELIEVE  
ABOUT  
BAPTISM

commonground  
church

## **WHAT COMMON GROUND BELIEVES ABOUT BAPTISM**

Getting baptised in water is the first step of obedience for a person who has committed their life to Christ. Here is why: Jesus and the early church leaders commanded that all believers must be baptised in water as a form of initiation into the adventure of following Christ. See Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:37-38, and Acts 10:48. We do not get baptised because we feel like it, but rather because we take Christ's leadership seriously.

## **WHAT BAPTISM SYMBOLISES...**

### **The baptismal waters are like a press release.**

Although choosing to follow Christ is a deeply personal decision, it is not a private matter. Jesus instructed us to go public with our choice (Mark 8:38). Baptism is how we visibly reflect what has happened on the inside.

### **The baptismal waters are like a bath.**

In Acts 22:16 it says "Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Baptism displays the spiritual cleansing from the guilt of sin that we have received as a result of Jesus' death.

The baptismal waters are like a graveyard.

Romans 6:4 says that 'we were buried with Christ in baptism'. Baptism reflects an inward decision to die to 'the old you' that rejected and ignored Christ's leadership over your life. Baptism is a break from your sinful past.

### **The baptismal waters are like a maternity ward.**

Baptism also reflects how we were united with Christ in his resurrection. We have a new life. 'If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.' [2 Corinthians 5:17].

## **THERE ARE FOUR COMMON REASONS CHRISTIANS OFTEN GIVE FOR NOT BEING BAPTISED.**

### **1. I was sprinkled as an infant.**

Infant sprinkling is not what Jesus speaks of when he says that we need to get baptised. Infant sprinkling may have been meaningful to the parents, but it has no spiritual benefits in the life of an infant according to the Bible. Baptism in the Scriptures always, with no exception, follows a person's choice to trust in Christ. Infants are not capable of making this choice. If you want to know more about this, please refer to the document on this.

## **2. I will do it when I feel God telling me to do it.**

We agree totally! But has not God already told us to do it in the Scriptures? When we wait for some personal message from God to do it, we dangerously elevate our own thoughts and emotions over what God has spoken so clearly in his Word. Isn't that a kind of disobedience?

## **3. I see my confirmation, catechism, or some other moment as my public profession of faith, and thus don't need to 'duplicate' this with baptism.**

It is true that many believers stood up in front of a congregation and made a public profession of faith, often with much intent and sincerity. While this moment is often very meaningful and God-honouring, it is not what Scripture calls us to in terms of baptism. While confirmation/catechism are a membership moment in front of a congregation, indicating that somebody is ready and informed around the matters of membership. Baptism is something different - a profession of having entrusted your life to Jesus, and becoming a believer.

## **4. I agree with what you're saying about believer's baptism, but my parents would be really upset if I got baptised again.**

Although we understand the complexity of this reality and we are not in any way trying to cause relational strain, nor undermine or disrespect others' beliefs, the reality is that Christ's call to be first in your life will result in many sacrifices and tough moments of followership. In Matthew 10: 37 Jesus says "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." We would encourage you to sensitively but courageously consider the call to follow Christ in obedience.

## **GETTING BAPTISED.**

Once you have repented of your sins and put your trust in Jesus to give you the gift of salvation, we suggest you speak to your small group leader or an elder about getting baptised. It can happen anywhere, at any time, and any Christian can baptise you. It is also a great opportunity to invite friends and family. In Common Ground, people sometimes choose to be baptised in or after a Sunday meeting, whilst others choose to invite friends and family and Small Group members to another moment that they organise.

Usually, before getting baptised, a person should be prepared to give some basic background to their story of coming to faith, simply as a helpful profession of their faith commitment to Christ before those present. This proclamation usually includes: the circumstances leading to faith, briefly describing the moment or journey of

placing faith in Jesus, and the difference he's already made to the person being baptised. Most importantly, however, this profession includes a clear declaration of faith that Christ is the Lord and king of the person's life.

### **WHAT MAKES A BAPTISM LEGITIMATE?**

For a number of reasons, some people may wonder if their baptism was legitimate. Some wonder because their baptism was such a long time ago. Others wonder because they had such a long lapse of faith after their baptism. Others tend to confuse an important 'coming of age' ceremony with baptism and wonder if it was or was not their baptism. So what makes for a so-called legitimate baptism?

*There are essentially only 2 ingredients for a baptism to have the basics of what scriptures describes:*

**First, faith in Christ.** Baptism isn't about personal moral performance, but trust in Christ as saviour and king - before much or any transformation happens. One should not get baptised by coercion or social momentum, without faith in Jesus' work on the cross. This does not mean that a person has perfect understanding of all the complexities of the gospel, but rather genuine belief that Jesus is who he says he is in his word, and did what the word says he did on the cross.

**Second, submersion under water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** As mentioned, sprinkling doesn't seem to do justice to the original word 'baptizo'. A real submersion by another believer who baptises in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the second ingredient for baptism.

Baptism is legitimate when; a person is submerged\* under water because of their obedience and faith in Christ, who he says he is in his word, and that he did what the word says he did on the cross.

One need not get baptised a second time if the above two ingredients were present. Rather, our baptism should be a reminder of God's covenant commitment to his children, even when they doubt.

Once baptised, a person may have had a lapse of faith at some time. This too should not serve as a reason for a second baptism. Their baptism should rather serve as a wonderful reminder of the fact that it's Christ's faithfulness, and not our faith, that saves us. When Christ saves us by faith, we may wonder, doubt or even run, but Christ remains faithful. We need not get baptised again if we were once saved, just like we ought not to ask our parents to call us their kids; even if we doubt them at

times - our identity remains.

(\*As a church we believe in, love, and are committed to doing full immersion baptisms, but the amount of water/ mode of baptism is not what makes the baptism real. If someone gets baptised as an adult, after becoming a believer, and had water poured over them, this is still a form of baptism. It is not the mode of baptism that is important, but rather a genuine faith which makes it spiritually significant.)

## **IS BAPTISM A PREREQUISITE FOR MEMBERSHIP?**

The short answer is: no. However, although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, at Common Ground we do see it as vital to following Jesus and obeying his word and the commands therein. As leaders, we will always teach and encourage all followers of Jesus to get baptised in obedience to Christ - even if they have been following Christ for some time.

***Although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, there are a few things worth noting:***

**1. The journey.** The leaders in Common Ground will always encourage and teach all Christ followers to get baptised as adult believers for as long as they are members of the church. Despite the meaningful moments of christening and or confirmation that one may have had, we will continue to encourage this step.

**2. The Word.** Baptism is motivated by obedience to Christ and his Word. Therefore, the leadership finds conviction for adult believer's baptism, not primarily in past experiences or even positive sentimental feelings, but from what Christ has told us to do, and what he has modelled to us. Therefore, discussions with leaders on the topic will never discard the significance and meaning of previous commitment experiences, but will always revert back to finding conviction in what Scripture teaches.

**3. The leaders.** Although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, it does have implications for some forms of leadership involvement within Common Ground. Because the word of God is central to leadership unity and vision in our church, and baptism is central in Scripture, there will be limitations to leadership involvement for those unwilling to get baptised. That will need to be worked out with your congregational leadership team. (This will be dealt with relationally rather than with a form of generic church policy.)