



Baptism Position Paper

This statement of Baptism and its practice is the result of prayerful consideration by the elders and staff of Emmaus Community Church and is intended to present a biblical view of the issue involved. In the history of the church, Baptism has caused conflict, dissention and grumblings among the people of God. Baptism is one of the sacred ordinances practiced at Emmaus and needs to be understood by those who call Emmaus home and those who desire to be baptized within the church. The elders, staff and Emmaus community affirm the importance of Baptism as an outward symbolic action, declaring to the world and community of believers, an inward change perfected in Christ.

Our heart is to be clear and understood on the position of Baptism we hold to. Our heart is not to challenge or antagonize other beliefs or practices of Baptism. We feel theologically responsible and scripturally persuaded to form this statement for the strengthening of the body of believers as well as the larger church community. We recognize many arguments exist surrounding the mode of Baptism. Supreme to those arguments, we do realize the greater argument is our desire to see men, women and children place their faith in Christ.

This statement is necessary for several reasons:

- Church leadership is responsible to shepherd the flock of God.¹
- Our aim is to guard the doctrinal integrity of the Scriptures.
- The Bible tells all believers to make a public declaration of their faith in Jesus by being baptized.
- Jesus Himself was baptized as an example for believers.
- The believer symbolically identifies himself/herself with the community of believers through the practice of Baptism.
- The local church body is encouraged and strengthened by the witness of Baptism.

The following represents the biblical position of “Baptism and practice of the ordinance² in the life of Emmaus Church” and should be used to guide those involved in the upholding of this sacred institution.

What is Baptism?

The word Baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip or immerse. In the Old Testament and Jewish writings there are four types of Baptism mentioned: purification, initiation, repentance, and identification. In the New Testament there is one primary type of Baptism mentioned. It is a Baptism that symbolizes identification into a community of followers

by immersion under water. Commonly, in the New Testament, Baptism immediately followed conversion of an individual who place his/her faith in Christ. Baptism is symbolic of new life in Christ. In every New Testament command and instance of Baptism, repentance and faith precede Baptism.³ We strongly encourage all those who profess faith in Christ to be baptized as a sign of obedience.

- In all four Gospels it is recorded that Jesus was baptized.⁴ The reasons for Christ's Baptism were to fulfill all righteousness⁵, for empowerment⁶, and signify to His acceptance by God.⁷ What John tried to prevent, Jesus allowed, so we might have an example to follow.
- Arguments exist for baptismal regeneration, which when defined states that Baptism is necessary for salvation of an individual. We believe Baptism is not necessary for a person to be saved. Salvation occurs once through faith in Christ, the repentance of sin, and belief in the gospel.⁸

How does Emmaus practice Baptism? (What is the mode of Baptism?)

Baptism is a symbol of a transformed life that was dead to sin and is now alive in Christ. As Christ was buried in the sealed grave and rose out of the tomb to new life, so we practice Baptism by complete immersion under water. Symbolically we are buried with Christ in death and raised to walk in newness of life.⁹ Therefore we practice Baptism by immersion or submersion of the individual under water and the raising of the same out of the water.¹⁰ Emmaus does not adhere to the mode of sprinkling.

What if I have already been baptized?

This diversity can make obedience to the ordinance of Baptism a very personal and potentially controversial issue. For those who have been baptized as an infant or who have participated in some sort of Baptism experience previous to their personal salvation through Christ, we would highly encourage them to consider being baptized as a public profession of faith in Christ. However, we would recognize a high call of unity and respect within the family and would respect an individual's desire to preserve peace as well. For some, their conscience is pierced, and regardless of the impact on familial relationships, they feel compelled to be baptized again. For others, their familial connections would be irreversibly severed, and thus the opportunity to share Christ would be lost. We encourage everyone to prayerfully consider which decision is best for them and their specific context, and to make a personal decision that would further the opportunity of sharing Christ with their family.

Who is eligible to be baptized?

Individuals who have placed their faith in Christ are eligible for Baptism.

What about children?

We believe parents are the primary overseers of their children and ultimately responsible for their children's spiritual development. The Church leadership is responsible to guard, initiate, and uphold the ordinance of Baptism. Together we work to help young people take steps of faith and grow in their spiritual development. This issue of age is one that causes tension in homes and churches. We strongly believe the decision for Baptism needs to be birthed from within the young person and not declared by the parent (see note on [Acts 2:37-38](#) from page 1 of this document). We want to partner with the parents and child to help ensure biblical readiness for Baptism. As a matter of policy, we do not set an age requirement. The Bible does not give us a precise age at which people should baptize children. Therefore we depend heavily on the parents and pastors involved to make a godly decision and discern through prayer and counsel when a young person is ready. We would desire to see the child clearly communicate on his or her own initiative what the gospel is, who Jesus is, and what their faith in Him means.

Footnotes

^[1] [1 Peter 5](#)

^[2] Christian rite (as Baptism or the Eucharist) that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality

^[3] [Acts 2:37-38](#), [41](#) (We believe an individual needs to be mature enough to articulate and understand faith, repentance, and the gospel.)

^[4] [Matthew 3](#), [Mark 1](#), [Luke 3](#), and [John 1](#)

^[5] [Matthew 3:15](#)

^[6] [Matthew 3:16](#), [Mark 1:10](#), [Luke 3:22](#), and [John 1:32](#) (The dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit as was given throughout Scripture as anointing and provision of power cf [Acts 10:38](#).)

^[7] [Matthew 3:17](#), [Mark 1:11](#), and [Luke 3:22](#)

^[8] [Titus 3:5](#), [Ephesians 4:4](#), [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), [15:2](#), [Romans 1:16](#)

^[9] [Romans 6:3](#), [Galatians 3:27](#)

^[10] We validate and affirm individuals who have helped the spiritual influence of the person desiring to be baptized. We also reserve the right to allow or deny individuals to partake in our Baptism process.