

## Why Immersion?

One of the most common questions that we get asked at Greenford Christian Church is this one - "Why Do I Need To Be Immersed?"

We know for some... you have questions: "What does baptism mean, what is it all about, and what role should it play in my life?"

First of all, let me assure you that you're not the only one asking those questions. A lot of people who attend Greenford Christian Church grew up in churches that do not immerse.

Now the challenge is, we have all been taught something. The denomination you grew up with said one thing. Your grandmother taught you what she believed. Your priest explained what he believes. In some shape or fashion... we are all in the same boat.

However, it's not about what the priest said, or what a particular denomination believed, or what a family member taught you. It's about what God wants for you today.

We want to start by saying that Greenford Christian Church doesn't believe baptism to be any more or less important than any of the other steps in accepting God's grace (i.e. faith, repentance, confession, belief).

Also, as a church we don't believe that water saves a person. We believe the only thing that saves a person is the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross.

**Romans 6:23 (NLT) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

God's grace is a free gift. However, we don't want anyone to miss the extreme importance of the covenant of baptism. It plays a huge role in our relationship with Jesus Christ. That is why we want to give you some of the reasons we believe it is so important to be immersed as a believer in Christ.

### 1. Immersion was the New Testament Practice.

The New Testament was written in the Greek language. The Greek word for baptism is baptizo, which literally means to "immerse." If the original writers had wanted to say "sprinkle," they would have used the word "rantizo." Sprinkling babies as a practice was not fully introduced until the Catholic Church made that decision in the year 1311.

So what about infants? Scripture teaches us that we all must make our own decisions. Until we reach that age of understanding, there is nothing to judge. So, sprinkling has nothing to do with the New Testament practice.

Since we are patterning ourselves after the New Testament, we feel it is important to do things the way they did them. So, who is a proper candidate for baptism?

1. Those who have heard the Gospel (Romans 10:17)
2. Those who have faith in Christ (Romans 10:17, Ephesians 2:8)
3. Those who believe in Christ. Who He is and What He's done (Mark 16:16)
4. Those who recognize their sin and repent of it (Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38)
5. Those who recognize their need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 5:8-11)
6. Those who confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10)
7. Those who respond to the Lord's command to be baptized (Matthew 28:19-20)

After digging into scripture, its obvious that infants couldn't do any of the things listed above.

## **2. Jesus was baptized by immersion.**

**Matthew 3:15** Jesus replied, Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, by immersion, as an example to us.

## **3. We are commanded to do it.**

In the book of Acts, Peter starts off the new church by giving a sermon where he talked to the people about Jesus being God's Son and being crucified on a cross.

The people believed whom Jesus was and that He was raised from the dead three days later. They also understood that they were partly responsible for His death.

**Acts 2:37** says, "When the people heard this (when they listened to the sermon), they were cut to the heart."

In other words, there is this conviction in their heart. And whenever there is conviction, it's a call to action, right? So they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, **Brothers, what do we do?**

We're convicted. What action should we take? And Peter gives them some very clear instructions based on this very simple question.

Now what we're going to see here is Peter doesn't say, I just want you to repeat this prayer after me. He doesn't say, look, I want everybody to just go sit back down on the hillside and if you have a decision to make then you raise your hand.

Here is what he says. **Acts 2:38** (a very clear response)... **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.**

The question is asked, what do we do? We know Jesus is Lord. We believe that. We recognize our sin. So what do we do? Peter says, "Repent and be Baptized." In other words, it's not a work that you're accomplishing; it's an act of obedience. It's an act of submission. It's something that is done to you. Peter parallels these two things, and connects it to forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now you'll notice this throughout the New Testament: That "be baptized" is putting yourself in a passive role... because you don't baptize yourself. You submit to being baptized.

Then in Acts 22, after Paul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus A man named Ananias came to see Paul and in verse 16 after Paul regained his sight, Ananias asked him...

#### **Acts 22:16**

**16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.**

Now to be very clear, water doesn't forgive our sins. Baptism doesn't forgive our sins. Jesus forgives our sins. We express our faith and trust in Jesus Christ by believing in our hearts, confessing with our mouth, and by committing our lives to Him through Christian baptism.

#### **Can A Person Be Saved Without Being Immersed?**

We will in no way tell you that a person can't be saved without immersion. God alone is the judge... we will never take that place, and we don't want to. God sees the heart and judges what is inside. And He is the God of Grace and Mercy.

However, the Bible is very clear on the subject, that each of us should respond to the truth of scripture. As a church we want to be obedient to His word!

#### **4. Baptism is an act of obedience.**

This is really what it comes down to. It's simply an act of obedience. If God asked us to do this, then this is what we do.

The challenge is that we have turned this into a tradition. We've turned it into a religious ritual instead of a command of Christ.

**Matthew 28:18-20**

**18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

**19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

We talk to people who will say, I've been a Christian for years... do I really need to be baptized? And the answer is yes if you want to obey God.

It comes down to an issue of relationship and responsibility! If we are going to be in a Covenant relationship with God, we have a responsibility to follow what He commands of us.

**5. It's a covenant with God!**

The last remnant of Covenant making in our society is in the marriage ceremony. Two people's independent identities are given up and they find a common identity that they share together forever. Shared name, shared families, shared home, and shared bank account.

Marriages are an excellent example of the nature of Covenant relationship. When a man and woman exchanged vows they are making a covenant promise to a special relationship that no one else could take part in. They are becoming dedicated to one another for life.

Like the act of marriage, the act of baptism is the first step to one's commitment to a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ.

Like the commitments made in marriage, the act of baptism, is the visual sign of our commitment to Christ, not only of our love and faithfulness to Him, but also of our time, talents, and energies.

Like any good marriage, it starts with two individuals committed to each other for life. So it is with baptism, it is only the first step in our life long relationship with God through Christ.

## 6. We are given the Holy Spirit

In any wedding there is also the exchange of rings. The wedding rings are a visual reminder of the vows made to each other on that day. They are the seal that binds them together.

In the act of baptism, we too are given a seal, which also serves as a reminder of our promises made to Christ, and that seal, is the Holy Spirit.

That is why Paul says in **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** **Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

And it is God's Holy Spirit, which is spoken of as a seal that is given to those who believe, at the very moment of their baptism.

### **John 1:32-33**

**32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'**

John made an interesting note in this passage that is often times overlooked. He pointed out that the Holy Spirit "remained" on Jesus when it came down from Heaven.

The great leaders of the Old Testament had known the Spirit to come and go. However, this event was very different...

The spirit came and stayed on Jesus symbolizing when we enter into a covenant relationship with Him... the Spirit will remain in us as well.

Peter confirmed that when he preached in **Acts 2:38** saying these words: **<sup>38</sup> "...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.**

## 7. It's a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

### **Romans 6:3-7**

**3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

**5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.**

When we go under the water, we die to our old self. When we rise up, we are "New Creations."

### **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)**

**17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!**

The great news about this is that once you have died, you can never die again. Your shell of a body will someday fade away, but your soul will live forever with God.

If you have come from another denomination that does not immerse, please don't think we are looking down on your tradition, or your family's ideals.

We are simply trying to restore things to the New Testament pattern. It is a shame that baptism has caused so much division among churches. Our goal is unity, not division.

We want to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture as much as we can. We consider it to be a very important act of obedience to God.

The bottom line is, God said that we should be immersed. That is all the reason we should ever need.

## **8. Who Can Perform A Baptism**

A baptism does not have to be administered by a "professional pastor". If you have a friend or family member who is an immersed believer who helped you get to know Jesus better, we would love to see him or her baptize you, instead of one of us.

Remember, Jesus commanded **ALL OF US** to go out and teach, make disciples, and baptize.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at (330) 533-3278.