



# **baptism**

DYING WITH CHRIST & RISING AGAIN



## Let us sit and reason together

The elders of Damascus Road are charged with shepherding the flock. As shepherds, these men must protect the sheep from false doctrine, wolves that prey on the weak, as well as any individual or group that might seek to divide. It is imperative, therefore, to distinguish between issues that are primary, and those that are secondary in order to build security and preserve the unity (if only in agreeing to disagree) among the members and leadership within the church.

To help us in this endeavor, the elders have attempted to identify issues essential to join or lead our community and those considered non-essential. These definitions include:

Closed-handed issues are what Orthodox Christianity would consider essential or primary theological issues, doctrines, or church practices that *are not debatable and required* for membership at Damascus Road. These points are accepted as biblically non-negotiable. We are prepared to teach and defend any one of these points. Generally, to deny any one of these central doctrines is to deny what has come to define the necessary character of Christian Orthodoxy. In other words, one cannot be a Christian and deny these. Such issues include our belief in: one God, the Trinity, Jesus, the perfection and authority of the Bible, and salvation by grace and faith through Jesus alone.

Open-handed issues are what Orthodox Christianity would consider non-essential or secondary theological issues, doctrines, or church practices that we accept and respect difference of opinion on. This is to prevent constant and fruitless debate within the elder board on issues not of an essential nature. Allowing some level of diversity in the peripheral or non-essential issues should foster harmony in our community. In essence, we agree to accept *disagreement* on these issues but *not* divide over them. We ask those members and leaders in disagreement to study these issues and to agree to not be divisive. While these issues are not necessary for salvation, they exist in varying degrees of importance, and many Bible believing Christians disagree about them. They include issues such as speaking in tongues, different worship styles, and baptism.

The purpose of distinguishing between these two types of theological issues is to protect the truth and preserve the unity of the body. Our leadership is committed to truth and unity and, therefore, takes our positions of theology and practice seriously. Sometimes these two forces, truth and unity collide, leaving a path of destruction and pain in their wake. Our leadership wants to avoid any unnecessary divisions (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:25; Titus 3:10) recognizing, however, that they must give a confident account to God for the people in our church including their doctrine and resulting practices. The Bible commands those who choose to attend and join the church to obey the leadership of the church so that the leadership can fulfill their calling to shepherd to flock and not feel like they always have to beat the sheep into submission (Hebrews 13:17).

Lastly, the purpose of this paper is to explain our leadership's position on Baptism. When all is said and done, when all disagreements and arguments cease, regardless of whatever position we may take, let us agree to concern ourselves primarily not in the water baptism but in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which takes place when the individual accepts Christ as his or her one and only personal Savior.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Baptism

### What is baptism?

Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and receive the seal of our faith in the person of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible calls us to make our private commitment a public declaration. Baptism is not "magical", nor does it come before salvation. Simply, Baptism is a visible representation of the invisible change that has occurred in the individual as a result of belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer is someone who realizes that their sin separates them from God. They know they will never be good enough to reach God through their good works or religious activities. They depend on Jesus Christ's death on the cross alone to pay the debt for their sins, declare us innocent, redeem us from slavery, appease the wrath of God, and, ultimately, bring us back into right relationship with our Creator.

Baptism is a physical act with spiritual meaning. The act of Baptism is the literal immersing of a believer under water and then bringing him forth out of the water. Symbolically, the person being baptized is plunged beneath the waters and brought forth in the same way that Jesus was buried in the earth and raised on their behalf in forgiveness of their sins. It symbolizes our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. (Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 2:12).



In summary:

- First, Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have received His forgiveness and submitted themselves to His leadership (Matt 28:19-20).
- Second, Baptism is a symbolic representation of repentance and purification. In essence, Baptism is a public funeral symbolizing the individuals crucifixion with Christ and a public celebration of new life in Jesus Christ who now reigns as Lord and King in the life of the individual (Gal.2.20)
- Third, Baptism is public identification with Jesus. It provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church and the world (Acts 10:48; Romans 6:3; Gal. 3:27)
- Fourth, Baptism is a biblical rite of initiation into the universal church (1 Cor 12.13) as well membership in the local church (Acts 2.41)

### **Why should Christians be baptized?**

Jesus commanded that all Christians be baptized (Matthew 28:19). His apostles also commanded that all Christians be baptized (Acts 2:38). Therefore, Christians should be baptized because their God and His servants command it.

### **Do I need to be baptized to be a Christian?**

Salvation is a gift given to people whose faith rests in the grace of God to forgive their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–9). For example, when the Philippian jailer asked what was required of him to be saved, Paul did not mention baptism, but simply said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus...” (Acts 16:31). Likewise, the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus was promised by our Lord that, “...today you will be with me in paradise,” though he had not been baptized (Luke 23:43). So, someone can be “un-baptized” and yet be a Christian who is destined for heaven.

### **How should baptism be conducted?**

Arguing about the mode of baptism misses the meaning of baptism entirely. Damascus Road believes that the faith of the participant determines the value of the baptism rite (1 Peter 3:21) not the amount of water used or the way it's applied. Full immersion in water is our normal practice because we believe it best represents the symbolism of participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11, Col. 2.12).

We also believe that immersion was most likely the mode used by the New Testament church (Mk 1:10; Acts 8:39). The Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament means to plunge, dip, or immerse in water. The New Testament is replete with examples of immersion baptism. They include John the Baptizer immersing people in water (Mark 1.5), Jesus himself being immersed (Mark 1.10), and Philip baptizing the Ethiopian by immersing him (Acts 8.34-39). Even in the Old Testament, conversion to Judaism underwent an immersion Baptism cleansing them from their sin and completing their conversion.

### **Who should conduct a baptism?**

The Bible does not command exactly who should perform a baptism. In Scripture we notice that Jesus authorized his disciples to do the baptizing (John 4:2). Jesus did not baptize anyone but delegated the authority to perform this rite to leaders in his church. Even these disciples, however, occasionally ordered others to baptize and who exactly is baptizing is not clear (Acts 16:15, 16:33). The passages appear to descriptively teach that most, if not all baptisms were done under the care and authority of church leaders, but not exclusively by them. Typically, the elders will perform baptisms as they fall under the responsibilities of the leadership. We do, however, encourage participation of other individuals who are genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have played an integral role in the faith of the person being baptized.

At Damascus Road, the elders have chosen to baptize people as a public church event for the following reasons: so that new Christians may be welcomed into the church, so their unbelieving friends and family can hear their testimonies, and so fellow Christians may rejoice with them regarding God's work in their lives.

### **Who should be baptized?**

Baptism is reserved solely for people who have “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, only those who are Christians should be baptized. The Bible is also that clear that baptism does not cause salvation but is simply an indication of what has already taken place, namely, repentance of a life of sin and faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38–41; 2:41; 8:12; 9:18–19; 10:44–48; 16:14–15, 40; 16:29–36; 18:8; 19:1–7; 22:16). Therefore, only Christians who have repented of sin should be baptized. Further, baptism represents a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, only people who have trusted in Jesus' death on the cross alone for their salvation should be baptized.



In summary, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus are the marks of a Christian. And all Christians are commanded to be baptized in order to identify themselves with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Subsequently, no one but a Christian should be baptized, and this excludes non-Christians and children who are too young to demonstrate repentance and articulate faith.

### **How may I be baptized?**

If you are a Christian who has repented of your sin and trust in Jesus for your salvation, but you have not yet been baptized, you should email [life@damascusrOADchurch.org](mailto:life@damascusrOADchurch.org) and request to be baptized. We will ask you to attend a pre-baptism gathering where one of the elders will meet with you to hear your testimony, explain how we conduct baptisms, answer any questions you may have, pray for you, and schedule your baptism.

### **May I be baptized if I have previously been baptized?**

Once someone has been baptized there is no need for him to be baptized again (Ephesians 4:5). The only exception to this is if someone was baptized as a non-Christian and desires to profess his faith and be baptized as a Christian (Acts 19:1–5). This exception would include people who were baptized in cults and heretical churches, as well as those baptized as infants at the request of their parents. Damascus Road not require that those who were baptized as children be re-baptized as believing adults, but leaves this decision to the conscience of each Christian.

### **How does Damascus Road recognize infants?**

Infants of Christian parents who are members of Damascus Road are welcomed into the church and counted as members in conjunction with their families. As a church, we partner with parents to help all of the children in our church know and love Jesus from a very early age. Paul said that Timothy had known the Scriptures since his infancy, which shows that it is possible for even young children to learn Scripture, love Jesus, and be vibrant Christians (2 Timothy 3:15).

We trust the parents to help the child decide when to be baptized. We expect that every child requesting baptism can articulate the gospel and understand the meaning of baptism. We do not expect some theological dissertation; rather, we hope each child will share his or her testimony to the church, explaining in his own words his relationship with Jesus. This is an encouragement to the church and an example to other young children that they too can walk with Jesus from a young age. As early as possible, we encourage parents to have their young children sit through the church service. We do not provide childcare for children over the age of ten, as we believe it is important for children to be integrated as vital and full members of our church as early as possible.

Lastly, our Gospel Class is, at this time, the basic theological education class required for official membership at Damascus Road. We hope that even our youth will elect to take the class with the approval of their parents, going on to make their own declarations of faith and covenanting to be active church members. Obviously, the maturity and individual personalities of the children will dictate when this happens. Quite simply, until that time we welcome our children in as members of the church with their families, but reserve their baptism until a time when there is evidence of repentance of sin and faith in Jesus; this often occurs at a young age.

### **Does Damascus Road ever baptize young children?**

Damascus Road Church will baptize any adult or child (usually as witnessed by his or her parents) who is able to demonstrate repentance of sin and to express faith in Jesus Christ. Damascus Road does not baptize anyone (including infants) unless there is evidence that they are Christians.

### **Why does Damascus Road dedicate children?**

As an infant, Jesus was not baptized, but was dedicated to the Lord by His parents (Luke 2:21–23). Likewise, at Damascus Road, we dedicate the children born into our church in an effort to rejoice with the parents as members of their spiritual family, welcome the child into the church, and commit ourselves to prayerfully supporting the family and the child in hopes that he will grow to love and serve the Lord.

### **How can I have my child dedicated?**

If you would like to have your child dedicated, please email [life@damascusrOADchurch.org](mailto:life@damascusrOADchurch.org) to schedule that event. There is a form you can download from the website at [www.damascusrOADchurch.org/gather/kids-road](http://www.damascusrOADchurch.org/gather/kids-road) to help you prepare for the event.

