

# Baptism at City Church

The generosity and diversity of opinion on the issue of baptism at City Church is one of the unique ways we show our desire to live and work together despite good disagreement on issues of secondary importance.

Most of you will be reading this document because you wish to form your own opinion on baptism either for yourself or for your child. In doing so we want to assure you that the elders stand over the statements in this document and encourage you, whichever conclusion to you draw, to do so prayerfully and to hold that conviction with the same humility and generosity we hope to foster in City Church.

The following is a basic articulation of both views of Baptism, first of *credo-baptism* (Baptism of believers on profession of faith) and *infant-baptism* (Baptism of the infants of believing parents as a sign of covenant promise). If after read thing these two views you wish to speak to an elder you can contact us by email [church@citychurchdublin.ie](mailto:church@citychurchdublin.ie)

## What does Credo-baptism mean?

Credo simply means 'belief', which in relation to baptism signifies the essential nature of someone's belief in Jesus Christ before being baptised.

It is important to note that this is **not** saying that brothers and sisters who hold an infant baptist position are not believers. We may differ on our view of baptism, but we are united in Christ and our call is to seek to strive for unity as Paul encourages in Ephesians 4:2-3, "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*". Therefore, though we disagree on baptism we want to hold a posture of humility and gospel generosity "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*".

## What is Credo-baptism?

Simply, credo-baptists believe baptism is a sign of our salvation, it is a display of what God has *already* accomplished in us through faith in Jesus Christ by the work of the Spirit. Paul writes in Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that *all of us* who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in *newness of life.*"

The view of credo-baptists is that just as Paul explains here baptism is a display of what has happened to us. David Mathis helpfully explains; "Not only does the image suggest immersion, rather than sprinkling or pouring, but more importantly, "*newness of life*" testifies to new birth and its effects, not mere first birth. An "*old self,*" into which we were born (Ephesians 2:1-3), has been

crucified (Romans 6:6) or put off (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). And Paul says such is true of “all of us,” all the baptised. We all now “walk in newness of life,” not in the oldness of our first birth.

### **Baptism In the New Testament:**

There are many things that could be said and argued from a credo-baptist position when considering the New Testament. Here are 5 significant points that have been made when we consider what the New Testament says about Baptism. *\*The following exert is taken from Desiring God, “How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?*

1. In every New Testament command and instance of baptism the requirement of faith precedes baptism. In that sense it is an outward sign of an inward reality.
2. There are no explicit instances of infant baptism in all the Bible. In the three "household baptisms" mentioned (household of Lydia, Acts 16:15; household of the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:30–33; household of Stephanus, 1 Corinthians 1:16) no mention is made of infants, and in the case of the Philippian jailer, Luke says explicitly, "they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32), implying that the household who were baptised could understand the Word.
3. Paul (in Colossians 2:12) explicitly defined baptism as an act done through faith: "... having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God." In baptism you were raised up with Christ through faith—your own faith, not your parents' faith.
4. The apostle Peter, in his first letter, defined baptism this way, "... not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." It is an outward act and expression of inner confession and prayer to God for cleansing, that the one being baptised does
5. When the New Testament church debated in Acts 15 whether circumcision should still be required of believers as part of becoming a Christian, it is worth noting that not once in that entire debate did anyone say anything about baptism standing in the place of circumcision. If baptism is the simple replacement of circumcision as a sign of the new covenant, and thus valid for children as well as for adults, as circumcision was, surely this would have been the time to develop the argument and so show that circumcision was no longer necessary. But it is not even mentioned.

### **Why Does This Matter?**

We have made clear that baptism is not central to salvation but it would be an error to believe that it is therefore unimportant. Both positions maintain that salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus. Moreover both positions believe that salvation carries with it outward signs that Christ gave to his people in the Lord's Supper and baptism. However we have divergent understandings of how, when and to whom the sign of baptism is administered. Central to our understanding of credo-baptism is that a profession of faith *precedes* the sign of baptism.

### **INFANT BAPTISM**

#### **Welcoming newborns at City Church.**

One of the greatest joys of life is welcoming a newborn into the world. At City Church we celebrate life and we want to support those who have become parents again or for the first time. We believe that children are a gift from God and a blessing for which we we render him thanks and praise. It is natural to want to celebrate those new arrivals with your church family and to be upheld in prayer and you begin the daunting task of parenthood.

City Church is a church which practices both infant baptism and the "dedication" of children of credo-baptist parents. We realise that for some of you the practice of infant baptism will seem foreign, do not agree with that position or simply aren't sure how best to proceed. This document outlines what we believe, how to proceed and the options for those who think differently to us.

#### **What is NOT happening at an infant baptism:**

We do not believe that there is anything magical about the water, nor do we believe it washes away original sin or save the child. We do not presume that this child is regenerate (though he/she may be!), nor do we believe baptism is necessary to ensure that babies go to heaven if they die. We baptise infants not because of traditions or superstitions, rather we baptise infants because they are covenant children and should receive the sign of the covenant.

#### **Children of the promise (covenant):**

In the story of the Bible, God makes promises to his people and these promises or "covenants" come with a covenant sign or ritual which confirms and remind people of that promise.

In Genesis 15 God made just such a covenant (promise) with a man called Abraham and this covenant was sealed with the **sign** of circumcision (Genesis 17). God's promise was to bless Abraham. Specifically this meant two things in offspring and land but the heart of the covenant was God's promise that he would be a God to Abraham and his children (Gen. 17:7, 8).

So while the sign (Circumcision) was a physical thing it was full of spiritual significance. The circumcision of the flesh was always meant to correspond with circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:25-29). It pointed to humility, new birth, and a new way of life (Lev. 26:40-42; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:25).

Remarkably, though, this deeply spiritual sign was given not just to Isaac (the son of the promise) but also to Ishmael - even though only Isaac was the continuation

of the promised line. **The spiritual sign was not just for those who already embraced the spiritual reality.** It was to be administered to Abraham and his sons. Circumcision was not a simple equation. It didn't automatically mean the recipient of the sign was in possession of the thing signified. Circumcision, like baptism, pointed to belonging, discipleship, covenant obligations, and allowed for future faith that would take hold of the realities symbolised. Just as there were some in Paul's day who were circumcised (in the flesh) but not really circumcised (in their hearts) (Rom. 2:25-29), some children of Abraham who were not truly children of Abraham (Rom. 9:6-8), so in our day there are some who are baptised (physically with water) who are not truly baptised (spiritually dying to self and being raised to newness of life). Children should be marked as belonging to the covenant, but unless they exercise saving faith, they will not grab hold of the covenant blessings.

Children today are baptised based on this same covenant with Abraham. Paul makes clear in Galatians 3 that the Abrahamic covenant has not been annulled. Because sons were part of the Abrahamic covenant in the Old Testament and were circumcised, we see no reason why children should be excluded in the New Testament sign of baptism. Admittedly, there is no text that says "Hear ye, hear ye, circumcision replaces baptism." But we know from Colossians 2:11-12 that baptism and circumcision carried the same spiritual significance.

### **In the New Testament**

- 1) Nowhere in the New Testament are we taught that the covenant sign should now be withheld from Children. If children were now outside the covenant it is presumed that such a significant change would have been dealt with in the New Testament.
- 2) There is a movement throughout the Bible towards more and more inclusion, infant baptism follows that line in that now female infants can receive the sign not just males.
- 3) Children are told to obey their parents "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1), that is, the rationale for their obedience is their allegiance to Christ. Children in the church are not treated as non-Christians to be evangelised, but members of the covenant who owe their trust and obedience to Jesus.

### **What are we symbolising?**

One of the beautiful things about God's working in history is that he works to save those who are weak and have not yet reached out for him. The father stands looking intently for his prodigal son long before the son decides to come home. So it is with infant baptism. It is a sign of God taking the initiative to act while we are still weak and helpless. For instance, during the baptism service we pray the following prayer for the children of believers:

*For you Jesus Christ came into the world;  
for you he lived and showed God's love;  
for you he suffered the darkness of Calvary  
and cried at the last, 'It is accomplished';  
for you he triumphed over death  
and rose in newness of life;  
for you he ascended to reign at God's right hand. All this he did for you, [name],*

*though you do not know it yet.  
And so the word of Scripture is fulfilled:  
"We love because God loved us first."*

This is the essence of infant-baptism. It is a sign that Christ came for those who do not yet know it.

### **What if I would prefer to dedicate my child?**

We believe that godly, thoughtful Christians can come to different conclusions on the question of baptism. The leaders of city church leaders have sincere and deeply held convictions about baptism which are different but their overarching desire to maintain unity, show charity and express generosity.

Many parents who do not accept the practice of infant-baptism will prefer to opt for what is commonly known as a "dedication" and reserve baptism until their child is able to make a public profession of their faith. In dedication we seek to reflect the welcome of Jesus who took the children in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:14). Moreover we acknowledge that the infant is a gift from God and we pray that their life might ultimately be dedicated to his service. We also commend the parents to the care of God as they seeks to nurture to the child. What makes this distinct from infant baptism is that no covenant sign is given in the pouring of water. This is because parents with cedeo-baptist convictions tend to emphasise the decision of individual believers and their affirmation of faith prior to receiving the covenant sign. Like baptism we encourage believing parents to affirm their faith and their commitment to raise their child in the fear and nurture of the Lord. In this regard we do not baptise or dedicate the children of unbelieving parents. As with baptism it is our earnest prayer that in dedicating a child they would come to know, love and confess the name of the Lord Jesus.

If you have any questions about anything you have read prior to your child's baptism or dedication please do not hesitate to contact church leadership.