

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP

Answers from the Elders of Redeemer Church of Abilene

Adopted July, 2021

1. Is baptism required for membership in Redeemer Church?

Jesus has commanded all believers to be baptized, and to disobey this command reflects a lack of submission both to Christ and His church. Therefore, only those baptized as believers by immersion are affirmed as members of Redeemer Church.

2. Does Redeemer Church affirm as members brothers or sisters who have not been baptized as a believer (including brothers or sisters who have only been baptized as infants)?

Redeemer Church does not affirm as members brothers or sisters who have not been baptized as believers. Though we realize that many brothers and sisters view their infant baptism as biblical baptism, we are thoroughly convinced that the clear testimony of Scripture is for believers to be baptized after their conversion and credible profession of faith in Christ. This conviction leads us as a local church to only affirm members who believe and model this conviction. We believe this preserves the unity of the local church as its members are in agreement on what a church is, i.e. a gathering of those baptized as believers.

Therefore, we encourage followers of Christ who do not share this conviction to join a local church that shares their baptismal conviction. At the same time, we gladly embrace friendship and partnership together in the gospel alongside such brothers and sisters as a part of the global church.

Additionally, Redeemer Church maintains this policy for brothers and sisters who have not been baptized because they believe that water baptism is no longer required after the New Testament Church or for those who believe that Baptism by the Holy Spirit is sufficient and thus reject the necessity of water baptism.

Though we can have warm fellowship and friendship with people who do not share our convictions, we cannot neglect what we believe to be the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus in this matter. (See Matthew 28:19-20 and Romans 6)

3. Does Redeemer Church affirm as members brothers or sisters who have not been baptized as believers by immersion (i.e., those who have been baptized as believers by pouring or sprinkling)?

We are convinced by the biblical evidence that baptism as practiced in Scripture is immersion. We are committed to practicing and affirming only what we see modeled

and taught in the Scriptures: baptism by immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Trinity in connection with the teaching of the true Gospel.

Therefore, every brother and sister who desires to become members of Redeemer Church ought to be baptized by immersion for various reasons: (1) as a church, we firmly believe baptism by immersion is biblical, and we exclusively practice and affirm baptism by immersion; (2) we believe it is good for every member of the church to be united together in a clear identification with Christ in his death and his resurrection — an identification which is most clearly illustrated in baptism by immersion; and (3) as we participate together in the Great Commission, making disciples who will be baptized by immersion, we believe it is beneficial for members of the church to have modeled such baptism in their own lives.

In light of these reasons, we expect all potential members of Redeemer Church to be baptized by immersion in obedience to the command of Christ as a portrait of the gospel of Christ for the fulfillment of the mission of Christ.

We acknowledge that some brothers and sisters have come to faith in Christ in other traditions and did not have immersion taught or made available to them as an option.

However, misinterpretations and misapplications of baptism by other denominations do not give us permission to forsake our convictions or make an exception where the Bible does not. We firmly believe that immersion in water is the only biblical mode of baptism. Therefore, we cannot affirm any other method of baptism (such as pouring or sprinkling) as a valid baptism.

Thus, Christians desiring to become members of Redeemer Church who have been sprinkled (etc.) as a believer must be baptized by immersion before they can become members.

4. Does Redeemer Church affirm as members brothers or sisters who have not been baptized in the context of a local church (i.e., those who were baptized either on their own with another person or in a small group of some sort)?

We believe baptism is a practice of the local church to be administered under the authority of local church elders, and we baptize believers in gatherings of Redeemer Church under the leadership of our elders. However, we are open to affirming as members of Redeemer Church brothers or sisters who were previously baptized in a non-church setting (i.e., outside of a gathering of the assembled church), provided that their baptism occurred in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, upon repentance and faith, in connection with faithful proclamation of the gospel. Such prospective members would need to affirm and support the church's position that we teach, model, and practice baptism in gatherings of the church under the leadership of our elders, and understand that their baptism is 'irregular' and outside

the normative practice of Redeemer Church.

5. Does Redeemer Church baptize brothers or sisters who are not becoming members of Redeemer Church (i.e., those who wish to be baptized but for miscellaneous reasons are not able to commit to membership at Redeemer Church)?

Redeemer Church sees a clear biblical link between baptism and church membership. (See Acts 2:41) Consequently, we are extremely hesitant to baptize any brother or sister who is not becoming a member of Redeemer Church. In such instances, we encourage brothers or sisters to be baptized in the local church of which they will become a member. We would only baptize such brothers or sisters if they were somehow unable to join a local church at that time, yet they are committed to joining a local church as soon as possible after their baptism. In most such instances, however, we would encourage such brothers or sisters to join Redeemer Church (even if it is to be a brief period of time) and then be sent out from among us to another local church.

6. Does Redeemer Church recommend and/or establish a particular age for children to be baptized?

Redeemer Church does not recommend or establish a particular age for children to be baptized. We do not want to discourage a regenerate child from being baptized, yet we also want to be extremely careful to avoid deception in a child's life by baptizing him or her before he or she is biblically regenerate and able to understand, articulate, and embrace the gospel, salvation, baptism, and the responsibilities of church membership. Since the Scriptural testimony is to baptize all regenerate believers who give evidence of a credible profession of faith, there is no reason for us to withhold baptism from children who meet that criteria.

The malleable nature of children and the nominalism of much American Christianity should give a parent caution in assuming the permanence of the often sincere but ill-founded decisions of children. Many have not continued to follow Christ into Adulthood. Thus, we believe that the normal age of baptism should be when the credibility of the child's conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community.

Therefore, our elders work diligently with parents (and potentially other church leaders) to ensure a child (before being baptized) is able to understand, articulate, and embrace the gospel, salvation, baptism, and church membership, and bears the fruit of regeneration. A child will not be baptized until his or her parents (if they are believers), church officers (specifically, the elders), potentially other church leaders, and the congregation together agree that the child is ready to be baptized. Then, upon a child's baptism and subsequent membership, the members of Redeemer Church will work together in an intentional discipleship process for such children to grow in Christ

as members of the church.

7. What is the process of baptism and church membership at Redeemer Church? How does it relate to baptism? How does this impact the baptism of children?

Our expectation is that anyone being baptized at Redeemer Church will become members of the church connected with their baptism. Our belief is that all members of the church universal ought to be connected to a local church, and thus no one ought to be baptized by Redeemer Church and remain unconnected to us or any other local church. All prospective members would follow our normative membership process: (1) attend Redeemer 101, (2) have a membership interview with the Elders, (3) sign our church covenant, and (4) be voted into membership by the church. In this process a prospective member who has already been baptized as a believer by immersion, would be affirmed into membership at our regular Member's Meeting by nomination of the elders and affirmation of the church body. If during the membership process we are made aware that a prospective member has not been baptized then we will make the church aware and the church will vote them into membership contingent on their baptism. They do not become actual members of the church until their baptism. Both the vote and baptism are required before they become members.

Redeemer Church does not have a separate process for baptism from church membership. We believe that all those baptized into Christ are not done so generically, but directly into a specific local church, that applies for children who have come to faith as well. We do not believe that regenerate children who are part of the church universal should be separated from the responsibility and privileges of local church membership. Children coming to faith in Christ would go through the normal membership process, with a preliminary meeting between the Elders and the parents of the child to hear of the parents' perspective of the evidences of grace in the child's life. Subsequently, the elders having heard that testimony and being especially aware of the child's age and need for baptism would interview them (with one or both parents present) specifically focusing on their understanding of baptism as part of the elder interview. If further discussion or teaching on baptism is necessary, it would be done with child and parents prior to elder recommendation to the church. After church approval, the child would be baptized and brought into full membership in Redeemer Church – meaning that they would participate in every aspect of membership, including being subject to church discipline for unrepentant sin.

(Note: We recognize that there are potential difficulties with young believers and membership in the local church. We believe that all believers, regardless of age, are part of the church universal and no aspect of the Christian life, including membership, the Lord's Supper, discipleship, or discipline should be withheld for them, for their own spiritual good. We believe that Jesus has committed the authority to protect the Gospel (Galatians 1) and the purity of the church (Matthew 18) to every

member of a local church regardless of age. Knowing that these tasks may involve the hearing of difficult subject matter, we are committed to working with parents to make sure that young members are prepared for what they may hear in members meetings and how they may be called to respond. We do not wish to create a secondary category for young believers. If the Father has saved them, if the Son has died for them, if the Spirit indwells them, then they are a part of the church as full members.)

8. What is the relationship of baptism to the Lord's Supper? (Can an unbaptized believer participate in the Lord's Supper at Redeemer Church?)

All those who have been baptized as believers by immersion who are following Christ in repentance and faith, and are members in good standing at a gospel believing church are welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper at Redeemer Church. Preceding the Lord's Supper in the church, we encourage one another to examine ourselves, prayerfully confessing our sin and willfully repenting in obedience to our Savior. Because baptism is a biblical step of obedience to Christ, and because refusal of baptism reflects disobedience to Christ, we continually exhort every believer who has not yet been baptized to be baptized as soon as is prudent and/or possible under the leadership of a local church, and to not participate in the Lord's Supper until they have been baptized.

9. Who is permitted to baptize believers at Redeemer Church?

We believe that, though Scripture does not forbid any followers of Christ to perform baptism, it is prudent, because of the tie between baptism and local church membership, for baptism to be performed by the elders of Redeemer Church.

10. Will Redeemer baptize and bring into membership those who have a mental handicap?

Redeemer will baptize and bring into membership those who have a mental handicap so long as the elders and the church are able (as best as we can) to verify a credible profession of faith, sufficient understanding of the gospel and the ability to examine oneself to take the Lord's Supper. The church would still maintain its normal membership process in this situation.

For cases where the mental handicap is significant enough where the church cannot ascertain these things, the church would not baptize and bring them into membership but we would work alongside the individual and care for them in every possible way we can.

11. Does Redeemer Church require “rebaptism” for brothers and sisters who were not believers when they were “baptized” or for those who were baptized by some other method than immersion(i.e. sprinkling, pouring)?

Redeemer Church does not practice “rebaptism”. Any brother or sister who was not converted when he or she was “baptized” has not been baptized according to the command of the scriptures. The same is true for those who have been sprinkled or poured but not immersed. They have not been baptized according to the command of scripture. Thus the church would need to baptize them for the first time.

The person being baptized should affirm and support this conviction as well. They must agree that they need to be baptized for the first time. Redeemer Church will not baptize someone merely because they are willing to “go through the motions” of getting immersed in order to satisfy our requirement.

12. Does Redeemer Church accept a Baptism performed by a church that is not like-minded?

Redeemer Church accepts the baptisms of believers which are done in the name of the trinity, with the preaching of the true gospel. If the “church” does not affirm these truths, we would not consider it a biblical baptism. And neither would we consider that group a biblical church.

This policy includes the doctrine of churches that believe in baptismal regeneration (the belief that people are saved THROUGH baptism, common within the Church of Christ) as well as other more blatantly heretical churches that might practice immersion (ex., Mormons/Latter Day Saints). We believe that a “baptism” in such a “church”, even if the person were a true believer at the time, is not a valid baptism.