

# White Paper: Baptism

## Arise Church

### I. Mere Christianity Preamble

Scripture was written in and for diverse contexts and situations. Accordingly, within the New Testament there exist affirmations of “mere Christianity”— a focus on the core proclamation of the Risen Jesus while simultaneously allowing for freedom when it comes to non-essential beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup> We see this applied to various issues, including baptism, communion, eschatology, leadership structures, how to interpret the Old Testament, and the like. In each of these areas, there is a core idea that allows for a relatively diverse expression of practice. Following the New Testament model for the Church today, then, is not so much about discerning *the* single way to understand what Scripture says, so much as discerning what is core to faith in the Lord Jesus. Put another way, gospel freedom, when properly focused on the Good News of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of creation, allows for a certain amount of diversity on non-essential issues. Thus, an appropriate guiding principle for Christians is, “In necessary things, unity; in unnecessary things, liberty; in all things, charity.”

### II. Baptism in Scripture

The New Testament teaches the importance of baptism in the life of every believer. Jesus instructs his disciples to baptize all who follow the Lord Jesus “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28.19). On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter directed the Jerusalem crowd to repent and be baptized (Acts 2.38). In baptism, disciples profess their belief in the forgiveness of sins made possible by the death of Jesus Christ (Acts 22.16). By re-emerging from the waters of baptism, disciples demonstrate belief in the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s coming (Romans 6.4) and the forthcoming restoration of all creation (Isaiah 43.18-19; Revelation 21.5). In the New Testament, baptism is often accompanied with the manifestation of God’s Spirit given as a gift to all his people (Acts 2.38, 10.44-48; 1 Corinthians 12.13). Perhaps most centrally, baptism marked the unity of a believer with the whole Church. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all....” (Ephesians 4.3-6)

### III. Forms of Baptism

Throughout church history, the practice and theology of baptism has often been marked by disagreement and even violence. Two central approaches have emerged: *paedo-baptism* (also known as infant baptism or covenantal baptism) and *credo-baptism* (also known as believer’s baptism or decision baptism). Paedo-baptism emphasizes biblical themes of covenant and grace, effectively viewing baptism as a non-gendered replacement for the practice of circumcision. Thus, anyone regardless of age or intellectual capacity may be baptized into the covenant family of God. On the other hand, credo-baptism emphasizes biblical themes of conversion and declared loyalty to God, effectively viewing baptism as an outside sign or confirmation of the confession of Jesus as Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> [1 Corinthians 15.1-34](#); [Romans 14.1-23](#). See also C.S. Lewis, [Mere Christianity](#).

#### **IV. Baptism at Arise**

As a mere Christian church, Arise recognizes as valid all Christian baptisms, whether *paedo* or *credo*. In practice, this means that we understand people to have been baptized whenever they have been “washed in water” in a biblical manner (typically in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and in line with orthodox Christian theological norms. At the same time, Arise is committed to the normative practice of baptizing disciples by immersion upon their public confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Those who were baptized as infants or children oftentimes consider rebaptism after rediscovering their faith in a greater light. This is a personal decision that should be made with prayer and wise counsel, with the understanding that just as a person’s initial baptism was a sacramental sign that carried with it no inherent salvific weight, so also a person’s rebaptism does not save them. If even child-like faith in Christ was present at the initial baptism, it is the recommendation of the Arise elder team that a person not be re-baptized, but rather make a public recommitment to faith in Christ.

#### **V. Summary Statement**

As a mere Christian church, Arise recognizes and celebrates as valid all Christian baptisms done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the same time, Arise is committed to the normative practice of baptizing disciples by immersion upon their public confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.