



Gap Community Church

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Baptism: Marking Your Commitment to Follow Christ

We would love to know the story of how you came to make the most important decision of your life. Below are some prompting questions for you to use to write out what led you to the point of deciding to open your heart to Christ. Take time to thoroughly read and think through the passages, write your responses in the space provided, and describe your story. Your answers will help the Gap Community Church pastor/leader, who will meet with you before our next baptism event, better understand your story. We hope this study will prove to be an invaluable exercise for you as you prepare for baptism.

Our Need for Grace

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don't need any special help from God. How would you put in your own words the message of the following verses to those who think themselves morally "acceptable"?

Romans 3:10-18, 23: As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all." For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Galatians 3:22: But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

Tell us your story. What realization, event or understanding led you to the place where you realized that you needed God's forgiveness and leading in your life?

Sometimes, we can be too proud to make such an admission of moral failure. How would you describe the relief God stands ready to offer so that we do not have to shy away from being utterly honest admitting our sinful condition?

1 John 1:8-9: If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. (See also Matthew 11:28-30, Isaiah 1:18, and Romans 8:1)

Sometimes, we're afraid to admit our sinfulness because to do so feels so hopeless. Many of us react to the sense of despair and decide to become "religious" – we try to change our behaviors so we feel (and appear) better. The truth is, though, that we can't save ourselves by our own good works. Read the following passage and re-phrase what it means to you personally in your own words.

Titus 3:4-7: But—"When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

To forgive someone literally means to release that person from indebtedness. But if you forgive a debt, the money must then come from somewhere else – usually you, the debt-forgiver. In the spiritual realm, God's forgiveness means we're released from spiritual debt. But our sins don't just vanish into thin air. How are our sins taken away according to these verses?

1 Peter 2:24-25: He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. (See also Hebrews 10:10-14)

Our Response to God

Once we're at the position where we've been honest about our need for God's help and forgiveness, what does the Bible say is the next step? Rephrase these passages in your own words.

Romans 10:9: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Galatians 2:16: Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.

Tell us your story. When did you decide to ask Christ to be your forgiver and the leader of your life? How did you do this? How did you become a Follower of Jesus (FOJ)? (If you're not sure if you have, just indicate that below)

Tell us your story. Is there any particular person who has led you to accept Christ as your forgiver and leader, and if so, who?

Tell us your story. What have you experienced since making the decision to follow Christ? How have you seen God at work in your life?

Baptism: The Outward Sign of Grace Received

At GCC we believe in marking and celebrating certain spiritual milestones in the lives of people who are seeking God. The most significant milestone that anyone can reach is the decision to appeal to God for His grace and to begin a new life in Jesus Christ. **Baptism is a way of marking** this very important decision that a follower of Christ makes. We want you to be informed about the biblical meaning of Baptism, and nothing would give us greater pleasure as a church than to celebrate your Baptism with you as a symbol of a spiritual change that has happened in your life.

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commands his followers to “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...” **Baptism is the means by which disciples of Christ are identified.** And because Christ Himself commanded it, all Christians ought to be baptized.

In other passages like Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48 it is evident that the act of **Baptism came after an individual’s decision to trust Christ for salvation.** It was an outward sign of something that had occurred in a person’s life. No one should be baptized unless they have made a decision to identify with Christ, and no one can make that decision for another person. The New Testament records the Baptism of adults who are believers, but never infants. Baptism can’t give a person anything, spiritually speaking. It can only signify something that has already happened.

Romans 6:1-11 is a passage about Baptism. In these verses, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of **Baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Going under water pictures Christ’s death. Coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection. At GCC, we baptize people by immersion because of its symbolism and because it is the biblical model through the New Testament.

A good illustration of Baptism has to do with **marriage.** In a wedding, a bride and a groom stand side-by-side in front of a group of people. They make solemn vows to one another, each one pledging their life to the other. To signify the unseen union that these two have with one another, they **exchange rings.** These bands of gold tell the world that they are now married, that a permanent change has happened to them. The marriage depends on a commitment, not on the bands of gold that people wear on their fingers. The same is true of becoming a Christian. **You can’t go through the symbol of being baptized without having made a commitment to being a Christian.** The symbol would mean nothing. And, **you don’t have to be baptized in order to have Christ,** anymore than you must exchange rings in order to be really married. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone has been made, then the outward sign of Baptism should be as valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed’s finger.

What about infant Baptism? In the Bible, we read stories of parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and blessed them...but he never baptized them, nor did he tell anyone else to. Baptism is appropriate only for **those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ** alone for their salvation. If you were baptized as a child, it was no doubt the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as **the fulfillment of your parents’ wishes.** It in no way cheapens or nullifies the ceremony of Baptism that you received as a child.

To sum up, we believe that the Bible makes the following points about Baptism:

- Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ.
- Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.
- Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.

Tell us your story. Have you been baptized before? Under what circumstances? Briefly describe your reasons for wanting to be baptized.

Tell us your story. From this day forward, what do you want your life and your relationship with God to look like? And what steps are you planning to take so you can grow in your relationship with Christ?

Once you have completed this study, please submit it to Buck Mowday at the Gap Community Church Office or email it to: receptionist@gapcommunitychurch.com. You may also fax it to (717) 442-8467. If you desire, you may check out our website at www.gapcommunitychurch.com and click on Baptism.