

## CASTLEREAGH FELLOWSHIP

### BAPTISM POLICY

This document sets out the position of Castlereagh Fellowship (CF) on baptism (by water).

- **WHAT is baptism?**

Baptism is the outward symbol of an inward reality; namely that the believer has died to their old nature and now lives in the power of a new life. This has been accomplished by faith in Jesus Christ: their old nature has been put to death in Christ's death, and they now possess the resurrection life of Christ. The old nature has passed under God's judgment, their sins have been forgiven, and they have become a new creation in Christ.

Romans 6 vs 3-4: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life".

- **WHY get baptised?**

1. Baptism is an explicit command of the Lord Jesus Christ – therefore it is a step of obedience in the life of a believer:

Matthew 28 vs 19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

2. Baptism is a public act of witness – it is a way of nailing of your colours to the mast. It declares that you now belong to Jesus and are taking your place among those who love and follow Him:

Acts 8 vs 12: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women".

- **WHO should be baptised?**

Baptism is only for believers. It is for those who have obeyed the gospel: that is, those who have repented of their sin, exercised personal faith in Christ's death and resurrection and have committed to living under His Lordship:

Acts 2 vs 41: "Those who accepted his message were baptised".

- **WHEN should I be baptised?**

Once a person has accepted the gospel, that person is faced with the command to be baptised:

Acts 8 vs 12: "But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women."

- **WHERE should I be baptised?**

A person can be baptised wherever there is sufficient water!

Acts 8 vs 36-38: "As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" And he ordered the chariot to stop. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him".

- **HOW should I be baptised?**

Whilst it is accepted that Christians differ over the method of baptism, CF encourages believers to undergo baptism by immersion. There are good reasons for this including:

1. The term "baptism" comes from the Greek word "baptizo" which was used to refer to immersion, as with the sinking of a ship or the pickling of vegetables in a jar of vinegar.
2. When Philip the Evangelist baptised the Ethiopian Eunuch, we read of them "going down into the water" and "coming up out of the water".
3. Only immersion fits the symbol to the reality. When someone accepts Christ as their Saviour, it is not part of their old nature that has died with Christ but all of it – hence the person being baptised is completely submerged in water.

Colossians 2 vs 12: "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead".

- **What baptism is not!**

There are a number of misconceptions regarding baptism:

1. *Baptism is not conversion*

Baptism does not make you a Christian. Conversion must precede the act of baptism.

2. *Baptism is not an infusion of grace*

Baptism does not make you immune to spiritual weakness; God will bless you for your act of obedience, but there is nothing in the water or in the ceremony itself that protects against the temptations of sin.

3. *Baptism is not a target*

You do not have to reach a certain level of Christian maturity before you submit to baptism. It is not to be thought of as a reward for attainment.

4. *Baptism by water is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit*

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an invisible phenomenon whereby, at the moment of conversion, a person is placed into the body of Christ and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It precedes water baptism but is separate from it.

5. *Baptism is not for infants*

While it is acknowledged that many faithful brothers and sisters in the Lord do subscribe to the baptising of infants, CF does not adhere to this practice. Among the reasons are the following:

- a. Baptism is for believers and infants are incapable of making a conscious choice to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord.
- b. On each occasion where the Bible refers to members of a household being baptised, there is no evidence to suggest that this included infants. To maintain that infants were baptised on these occasions is to argue from silence.
- c. The proposition that infant baptism is the New Covenant counterpart of circumcision in the Old Covenant is unconvincing. Under the New Covenant, membership of the body of Christ is secured through a spiritual transformation (the new birth), evidenced in a person's faith. In the sole New Testament passage where circumcision is linked with baptism (Colossians 2:11-13), it is used to illustrate how believers have been cut free from their old life in the flesh (the sinful nature) and given new life in Christ. This is a spiritual operation performed by Christ ("the circumcision of Christ") and pictures God's work in salvation. This passage does not lend support to the practice of infant baptism. Rather, it reinforces the teaching that baptism is only for those who have experienced the transformation the Apostle describes.

- **Baptism and Membership**

CF understands the Bible to command baptism by immersion for all believers. The teaching and practice of believers' baptism is a requirement for Eldership. Whilst CF expects and encourages all Christians to be baptised, we do not insist upon it as essential for membership. We acknowledge that some Christians sincerely believe that infant baptism is a valid expression of obedience to the command to be baptised. We hold that this alternative understanding of baptism falls within the category of important but secondary matters, and should not prevent a brother or sister in Christ from being accepted as a member of CF. Where a prospective member holds to such an understanding, this will be discussed with the Elders who will explain the Biblical case for believers' baptism and answer any relevant questions. The decision as to whether to be baptised will ultimately be left to the conscience of the prospective member.

CF, however, completely rejects baptismal regeneration – the erroneous belief that baptism itself contributes to an individual's salvation.

- **CF's process of baptism**

The commandment to be baptised is upheld in CF by the regular teaching of God's Word on this subject.

Where someone requests baptism, they will be interviewed by the Eldership who will ask the person to briefly tell of how they came to know Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and will seek to ensure the person understands what baptism represents. They will also explain the practical arrangements for the baptismal service.

If appropriate, the candidate for baptism will be encouraged to input into the baptismal service through testimony or the selection of a Bible reading or song(s). They will be encouraged to ask family and friends to the service to maximise the opportunity for public witness.

Baptisms will occur in the Main Hall of the church building and be conducted by two of CF's Elders.