

Baptism and The Lord's Table – Who is ready?
by Ed Conway, pastor

Introduction and Purpose

As a non-denominational Evangelical Christian church, we recognize, individuals and families come into relationship with us from diverse church and theological backgrounds. We affirm that Baptism and the Lord's table are not the means of salvation, but are the obedient response to having experienced spiritual new birth in Christ. Our collective heart is to point people to Jesus Christ, to grow in Him, and to build a solid community of faith. This document is written with the intent to inform, encourage reflection, and provide pastoral guidance regarding Baptism and The Lord's Table. We write and pastor with grace, and a humble theology.

One of the responsibilities of pastors, and elders [and in the case of children, parents] is to determine who is ready to be baptized and/or to receive the Lord's Table. The decision is not based on age, but on the spiritual condition of the person. Baptism and the Lord's Table are more than a rite of passage, but flow from the spiritual new-birth and maturity of the individual.

Baptism

In the Bible and in the apostolic period, baptism served as the outward sign of a person who expressed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In the apostolic period, believer's baptism preceded participation in the Lord's Table. As a bare minimum, the following qualities need to be present to be baptized or receive the Lord's Table.

- A belief in the Triune God of the Bible (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit).
- A belief in Heaven and Hell.
- Loving the Lord Jesus and trusting in Him alone for salvation.
- Believing that Jesus was crucified for their sins and that God raised Him from the dead.
- Conviction of sin, a repentant spirit, yielded to the lordship of Christ.
- The ability to give a simple testimony of faith in Christ to a pastor or elder.

The Lord's Table

The Lord's Table or the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Christ. It is a commemorative ordinance, a memorial of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. It is a feast of living union of believers with the Savior; it is the communion of believers with one another as members of the mystical body of Christ; it is a Eucharist or thanks-offering for all Christ has done for the believer; and it nurtures an expectation of Christ's second coming. In the apostolic period, it was celebrated daily along with a simple "agape" meal affirming love among believers. The bible is very specific in who can and who cannot participate in the Lord's Table or Lord's Supper. To receive the Lord's Table there are certain requirements:

- The person coming to the table must be a participant in a local church. 1 Cor 11:18ff
- The person must be able to profess faith in Jesus Christ; a believer. 1 Cor 11:26
- The person must be capable of self-control in coming to the table. 1 Cor 11:21-22
- The person must be able to "discern the Lord's body" in the elements. The elements should be more than an ordinary snack of bread and wine, rather the person should be capable of understanding that they represent the body and blood of the Lord and that they who partake of the Lord's Table in faith spiritually feed on Christ. 1 Cor 11:29
- The person must be capable of self-examination; determine the condition of their soul.

Baptism, The Lord's Table, and Children

In regards to children, a child will not understand these concepts to the same degree as an adult, and even adults grow in their understanding as they progress in faith. For instance, the faith of a child need not be as doctrinally developed and sophisticated as the faith of an adult to be sincere. Neither will a child usually be able to articulate their faith in anything but a simple manner. But just because their faith is simple does not mean that it is not sincere. As a practical guideline, children under the age of twelve, may not have developed sufficiently to make a mature confession of faith. Parents are urged to allow time for a mature confession of faith to develop in their child, and let it be expressed in believers' baptism prior to participation in the Lord's Table. There are some key questions to ask prior to guiding a young person toward baptism:

- Have they made a personal and sound profession of faith in Jesus?
- Do they display and express love for Jesus?
- Do they show a determination to follow and obey Jesus?
- Do they acknowledge their sin, confess sin, and generally reject sinful ways?
- Can they give a simple testimony of faith in Christ to a non-family member?

Exceptions

This document is not law, but an encouragement to wait for maturity, and rejoice in a mature confession of faith. One exception, frequently encountered, is when a child or adult has been previously baptized, and after years of growth and/or a significant experience with Christ; the person requests to be baptized a second time. We fully embrace these exceptions as part of the ongoing grace that every believer experiences with Christ throughout the process of sanctification. We fully support a parent's responsibility to direct the affairs of their household.

Support

All the pastors, elders, and ministry staff are available to help you move forward in your relationship with Jesus Christ. We are here to help you. If you would like to have a conversation, need some guidance in the decision-making process, please reach out to us after any service or give us a call.

Resources

- "Your Child's Profession of Faith" by Dennis Gundersen
- "Baptism: The Demonstration of Devotion" by Max Lucado
- Pastor Ed's teaching on Baptism (6/15/14): <http://www.chapelhelmsford.com/media.php?pageID=47>
- Pastor Ed's teaching on the Lord's table (7/15/14): <http://www.chapelhelmsford.com/media.php?pageID=47>
- "Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem - good clear discussions on baptism (pp. 966-987) and the Lord's table (pp. 988-1002.)]
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/divided-by-communion.html>
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/early-christian-eucharist.htm>

Updated 1/7/17