

# This We Believe

## “Baptism & Communion”



### Statement 7

Statement of faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America

**“We believe that water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during this present age. They are, however, not regarded as a means of salvation.”**



# His Place

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Tapes and/or CD’s of the sermon, “Baptism and Communion” are available at His Place Church by calling 208-777-9654 or toll free at 800-574-1855.

Unless otherwise noted all scripture quotes are from the *New International Version* of the Holy Bible.

In our study on the doctrinal statements we have finished what I would consider to be the foundational truths. They are the truths that are absolutely indispensable to our faith. A clear and accurate understanding of the nature of the Bible, who God is, who we are, and salvation are the absolute non-negotiable aspects of what we believe. The Apostle Paul was very adamant about the nature of these foundational truths that comprise the gospel. In **Galatians 1:6-9** he states,

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” Galatians 1:6-9*

These truths are so important because what we understand about the character of God and the eternal destiny of individuals is at stake! In addition to these essential truths of the Evangelical Free Church there are a few other items in the EFCA Statement Of Faith that I would like to share with you.

The first of those are Baptism and Communion, our subjects for this chapter. It is interesting to me that while by far the most significant topics are the first 6; by far the greatest number of questions that come are on these later topics. Remember that our Statement Of Faith begins with “This we believe”, speaking of the EFCA. It is not intended to be a statement exhaustively describing orthodox Christianity like the Apostle’s Creed.

Perhaps that is because there is significant agreement on the foundational truths within evangelical Christianity or perhaps it is because sometimes we tend to major on the minors. Unfortunately much of the controversy and division between denominations, churches, and individual believers has come over these non-foundational teachings.

One of the great statements of the Evangelical Free Church of America is, "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ". from a quote attributed to John Chrysostom, a 4th century church leader. I pray that is true in our lives and experiences. Article 7 says,

*"We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church."*

We believe that baptism and communion are ordinances of the church as opposed to sacraments. Although these two words historically have been used interchangeably, in actuality there is a significant difference. Most people would use the word "sacraments" to mean "having to do with receiving salvation" while "ordinances" have to do with "common practice of the church instituted by Christ." Obviously those two interpretations are very significant because they affect the nature of salvation itself. Let us now look further at baptism and communion.

## BAPTISM

There has been much controversy over the years surrounding the concept of baptism. This controversy centers around three issues.

### PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

Some of the confusion stems from the fact that the word baptism is used in a variety of ways in the Bible. It can mean "to identify with". It also is used of the coming of the

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## QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a Sacrament and an Ordinance of the Church? Is that difference significant?
2. Why would you encourage a believer to be baptized?
3. What is the significance of communion?
4. What has it meant in your life as a believer?

Spirit of God, to refer to ceremonial cleansing, to be washed with water, or to be immersed in water.

First, let's deal with the baptism of the Spirit. As we discussed in Booklet 4, being baptized in the Spirit is synonymous with receiving the Holy Spirit. **1Corinthians 12:13** makes clear that every believer is baptized into Christ by the Spirit.

The word baptize can also refer to a variety of ceremonial washings. It is in fact translated that way in **Heb. 9:10**,

*“They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”*

In **Luke 12:50** Jesus described a baptism that he had to undergo describing his death, burial, and resurrection. It was the experience that He would go through. We use the term “baptism” in much the same way when we talk about a “baptism by fire” as we begin a new situation that is particularly difficult or consuming of time and energy.

In addition, the term “baptism” is used to describe water baptism, which is our primary discussion here. Some would say that water baptism is a necessary part of a person's commitment to Christ. They believe that through baptism our sins are washed away (known as Baptismal Regeneration). If that is the case, then salvation is contingent on being baptized.

There are a number of significant objections to this interpretation. Adding anything to salvation by faith alone, makes salvation in some way dependant on our works. The Bible is very clear, primarily in **Ephesians** and **Romans**. Salvation is based on grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one*

*can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*  
**Ephesians 2:8-9**

*"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* **Romans 3:22-24**

There are many passages which speak of salvation without including the command to be baptized. If baptism is part of saving faith, or an additional condition for salvation, then those other passages give an incomplete gospel. The most famous would include **John 3:16**,

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

*However, there is also **John 1:12**, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

-- See also **John 6:29** and **Acts 13:39**.

We have no record of most of the apostles being baptized. If baptism is indeed a necessary condition for salvation, then it would seem that we would have a record of the baptism of the disciples and certainly some record of, or discussion of, Paul's baptism, since he is so thorough of his discussion of the gospel.

The thief on the cross, who responded to Christ in simple belief never had the chance to be baptized. If baptism is necessary for salvation, how could Christ promise this believer that he would be with Christ in paradise?

Finally, passages used to support baptismal regeneration may be translated somewhat differently...

That does not minimize the significance of either. Many believers experience a very special presence and movement of God in their lives both at their public confession of Christ in baptism and at the regular celebration of communion.

In fact, in some cultures where believers are persecuted it is quite acceptable to be a "Christian" on your own, but making a public declaration of your faith by being baptized or receiving communion will bring persecution even disownment by families. Jesus did not call us to be, "secret service" Christians, but to be living ambassadors of the Good News.

If you have committed your life to Christ, please consider the Biblical injunction to publicly declare your faith in the celebration of baptism, and make it an ongoing habit of remembering all that Christ has done in the celebration of communion—until He comes again.

However, communion, like baptism, is a significant symbol. While it does not result in salvation, it is none the less, very important. In **1 Corinthians 11** Paul is very clear in his instructions to the Corinthians, and to us, about taking communion too lightly. He says that we are not to participate in an *“unworthy manner”* or we will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ.

I believe he is saying that we will be guilty of making a mockery of Christ’s sacrifice. And there are consequences for those actions. Paul says some were sick and some had even died because of taking lightly what Christ had done.

Communion is a consistent graphic reminder of the cost of our salvation and it serves as a time to remember all that Christ did to pay the price for our sin. It also becomes a time to search our hearts and make sure that we are not living our lives as a mockery to Christ’s death. So it becomes a time of confession and recommitment.

It also reminds us that we are part of the body of Christ. It is indeed a time of communion together with other believers and reminds us that we all stand together equally undeserving of God’s amazing grace and gift.

Another question often asked is, “How often should we celebrate communion?” The Bible does not specify. Some churches celebrate weekly, some monthly, some annually, and some at other intervals. The key is that we celebrate often enough to be consistently reminded of what Christ did for us, and in a way that does not become an empty ritual.

Within the Evangelical Free Church there are a variety of beliefs and practices regarding both method and style of baptism and communion. The key is to understand that both are ordinances—practices of the church with significant meaning and purpose although neither is the means of salvation.

For instance, there are a number of meanings for the Greek preposition translated “for”. One of those possible meanings is “because of”. Therefore, **Acts 2:38** could legitimately be translated *“...be baptized because of the remission of sins.”* It then becomes a testimony to what has happened.

**Acts 22:16** also testifies to this. It could very well also be translated, *“...arise, having been baptized, and wash away your sins, having called on the Lord’s name.”* If that is an accurate translation, then the meaning of the imperative phrases is not causal. That makes the sense of the last phrase, *“...washing away of your sins, is due to having called on the Lord’s name.”*

The position of the EV Free Church is that salvation is not found in baptism. Many people then ask the question, “Why should I be baptized?” There are a number of answers.

The Bible does speak about baptism. The great commission states that we are to make disciples by going out, teaching to obey Christ’s teaching and baptizing. Although Paul states that he did not baptize many, he did baptize some. (**1 Corinthians 1:14-17**) Even Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Obviously he did not need to get saved. The water did not wash away His sin because He was sinless. Water cannot and does not wash away sin. Only the shed blood of Christ can do that.

Water baptism then, is a symbol or identification with Christ. It is an act of obedience in following Christ as a public and graphic symbol of identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

## **METHOD OF BAPTISM**

Again there has been much debate on the proper method of baptism. Is baptism only valid if a person is totally immersed? Some have gone so far as to say that bap-

tism is only valid if one is totally immersed in running water because the Jordan River is running water. Some would say that sprinkling or dipping are the proper method or at least adequate methods of baptism.

This question becomes less significant once the issue of the nature of baptism is settled. If water baptism is necessary for salvation, then the method or mode of baptism might be more significant. Since we believe that baptism is a symbolic act of obedience, and the water does not actually wash away sin, the method becomes somewhat less significant. At His Place Church we practice baptism by immersion, because we believe it best symbolizes identification with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

## RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM

Still again, there has been much disagreement and even heated fighting over the question of who should be baptized. This debate particularly rages over infant baptism.

Infant baptism is practiced by some churches as a means of “saving” children. Other churches would say that it is simply an identification of the infant with the faith of their parents, which the child later will “confirm” as his own faith.

Since we believe that baptism is an outward sign or symbol of the inward reality of salvation, resulting from a person’s individual choice to receive Christ by faith, we do not baptize infants. We encourage believers to take a public stand after they have made a personal commitment to Christ.

## COMMUNION

Another practice of the church which unfortunately has been used to stir significant controversy is the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or communion. Jesus first instituted the Lord’s Supper at the celebration of the Passover

the night he was betrayed. And it is that instance around which the controversy stirs.

Like baptism, the primary question is, “What is the nature or purpose of communion?” Is it where we receive forgiveness or is it a symbolic remembrance? There are those who believe that one actually receives forgiveness by receiving communion. They believe that when Jesus said, “This is my body and blood” He meant it literally and the communion elements miraculously become the actual body and blood of Christ. The theological term for that is transubstantiation. Because a person is receiving into themselves the actual body and blood of Christ, these people teach that one actually receives forgiveness at the point of receiving communion. Communion then becomes a sacrament or means of receiving salvation or forgiveness.

Again, I believe there are serious difficulties with this interpretation. It is not borne out in the text. When Jesus said, “*This is my body and blood*” it obviously was not true at that point in time. He still had His body and He had not shed His blood. Christ’s sacrifice was yet future. He went on to say, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” The Lord’s Supper or communion is a remembrance of what Christ did.

Another difficulty with this interpretation is that transubstantiation would mean there is a continuing of the sacrifice of Christ’s body. **Hebrews 10:10-14** teaches us that Christ’s sacrifice was made once for all, and it was accepted by God the Father. There is no need for an ongoing sacrifice.

Receiving communion is an act of obedience and remembrance. But neither that act, nor any other, is required for forgiveness of sins or salvation.

Communion, like baptism, is an ordinance of the church instituted by Christ—something to be practiced and celebrated—not a sacrament through which we receive salvation.