

## On Baptism and the Lord's Supper

In an effort to clarify our position and to avoid unnecessary confusion, the Elders at Grace Fellowship of South Forsyth are publishing this document on the importance and relationship of the two ordinances that the Lord has instituted in the New Testament—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that these two ordinances are a conduit of spiritual blessings from the Lord to bring followers of Christ into deeper and richer communion with Him, while acknowledging that they are not prerequisites to justification which is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Believer's baptism is the act whereby a repentant person, who has come to faith, publicly identifies themselves as a follower of Christ. A person is baptized on the basis of his or her profession of faith in Jesus Christ. At Grace Fellowship, our conviction is that the method of baptism is to be by immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a "sign of belonging to the covenant community of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin" (GF, Statement of Faith, Article 12.3). It was commanded by the Lord that His people go into all the world to make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).

The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Savior the night before He was crucified as He partook of the Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:14-20). Participants in the Lord's Supper are those "who test the attitude of their own hearts and actions and are aware of the significance of the Supper, gather to eat the bread and partake of the wine, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood" (GF, Statement of Faith, Article 12.4). This is done in remembrance of the Lord and what He has done for those participating in the ordinance (1 Cor 11:23-26).

It is important that the relationship between these two ordinances is clearly understood. Baptism is the public proclamation and identification of a person as a follower of Jesus Christ. As such, we believe that it should precede participation in the Lord's Supper. Both Peter (Acts 2:38) and Jesus teach that baptism is an act that closely follows conversion and is part of the disciple-making process. There are numerous times in the book of Acts where baptism immediately follows a verbal profession of faith (2:41; 8:12-13; 8:36-38; 10:45-48; 16:30-33; 18:8). The Scriptures are silent concerning any conversion followed up initially by participation in the Lord's Supper without there first being a baptism. Because of this silence, we believe that the wisest course to follow is that a convert's first Lord's Supper should be preceded by water baptism. Wayne Grudem makes this case from the nature of the ordinances themselves, saying, "Baptism is so clearly a symbol of beginning the Christian life, while the Lord's Supper is clearly a symbol of continuing the Christian life" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Bits & Bytes/Accordance electronic ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

As has been taught from the pulpit at Grace Fellowship, there is a measure of difference among the Elders in regards to when is the most appropriate time for children who have professed faith in Christ to be baptized. Many parents believe that a child can make a credible profession of faith at a relatively early age (five to seven years) and that this profession should be followed almost immediately by water baptism. Others choose to wait until the child is of the traditional Jewish Bar Mitzvah age (12 or 13) or have sufficiently demonstrated fruit of salvation before they should participate in the ordinance of baptism. Other parents may choose to wait even longer. Grace Fellowship has no official position on the most appropriate age for the baptism of professing children raised in a Christian home. That decision is best left up to the prayerful judgement of the parents and in concert with counsel from the Elders. Regardless of when the time is, Grace Fellowship's position is that the child's participation in the Lord's Supper should wait until after the baptism occurs given baptism is the public profession of one's salvation and the Lord's Supper is the remembrance of one's salvation.

Likewise, if a situation should arise where an adult has made a profession of faith, and the Lord's Supper is offered before they've had the opportunity to be baptized, we recommend they wait until they are baptized before participating. If a baptism service is not scheduled, we will make every effort to baptize them as quickly as possible so that they can participate as soon as possible.

In all these situations, the Elders at Grace Fellowship would love to discuss any questions, or provide any additional information as needed. Please contact any of the Elders and they will be happy to assist you.