

## **GRACE FELLOWSHIP'S DOCTRINE OF THE ORDINANCES**

We believe that the two ordinances of the Church are the Lord's Supper and Baptism. By the term "ordinance" we mean that they are used as symbols of the grace God has extended to us through Jesus Christ. We could also define these as "sacraments", but would not define them as others might (such as the Roman Catholic church). We do believe that both ordinances are very important in the life of the believer, and that they are a "means of grace" for believers. Anything that God uses to increase His dispensation of grace toward His church is a means of grace. Jesus Christ commanded that the church perform both of these ordinances, and it is the purpose of this statement to defend and define the practice of these ordinances at Grace Fellowship Church.

### **I. DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM:**

#### **A. Statement of Belief:**

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) It is clear by this statement that the Lord Jesus intended the disciples to take the gospel to every nation, baptize those who believe in His name, and make disciples out of every one who was redeemed. This passage is a clear command from the Lord to His followers. The word rendered in this passage baptizing is simply a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which means: to dip, to immerse, submerge, and then emerge; "to dip" is the verb baptizo. We find that the early believers were baptized upon their personal profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One example of believer's baptism is found in Acts 8:35-36, 38, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." From the teaching of Scripture we interpret and hold to the practice of believer's baptism by immersion at Grace Fellowship Church. It is important to add at this point that we in no way believe that this issue should be used to divide the body of Christ. It is our desire to seek fellowship with all Bible believing, Christ honoring, grace oriented churches.

#### **B. Definition:**

Baptism is the New Testament symbol and public testimony of the salvation of an individual. It is an ordinance of the New Testament church. This ordinance is reserved for those who wish to make a public profession of their faith in Jesus Christ, and it is correctly administered by immersion into water.

### **C. Guidelines for Baptism at Grace Fellowship Church:**

1. Baptism is to be administered to individuals who are publicly declaring faith in Jesus Christ.
2. The mode of baptism is water baptism by immersion.
3. Baptism should be practiced in the fellowship of the local church. Only in extreme circumstances should a baptism be done outside of a called meeting of the church body.
4. An approved leader should perform Baptism.
5. The mentoring process should be followed for those desiring to be baptized.
6. Baptism does not equal local church membership.
7. Baptism is not a means of receiving salvation.

### **D. Steps Leading Up to the Baptism Service:**

1. A personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. The candidate or guardian of the candidate notifies the Elders of their conversion and their desire to be baptized.
3. The candidate completes the mentoring process.
4. The candidate is questioned and approved for baptism by the Elders.
5. The candidate is baptized at a regular worship service in the presence of the church body.

### **E. Minimum Age for Believer's Baptism:**

At Grace Fellowship it is the belief of the leadership that children should be encouraged to wait to be baptized until they are ready and "adult" in a Biblical sense. (Based on Jewish culture during the New Testament times, it is generally understood that "children" were younger than the age of 12, and that they in effect became young "adults" at about age 12, and thus able to marry and act as such. Obviously our culture may have slowed down this maturing process significantly.)

There are many reasons for this stance. First, baptism is obviously not required for anyone to be saved and a true believer in Christ, and many children may be truly saved but just not ready to be baptized and make a public profession of faith. Second, the Bible never gives evidence of children being baptized, (although no prohibition is given either). Third, since it seems clear that baptism is an act of obedience and a public profession of faith, it should be for those who not only have clearly believed in Christ, but are also prepared to live out their faith publicly. Fourth, when children are baptized at a young age they often struggle with doubting their salvation. This could be because many of them are not truly saved, or others cannot remember their act of baptism and this causes them to doubt.

Finally, Grace Fellowship believes that baptism is the initial act of entry into the local church (although they may already be saved and in the body of Christ), and as such this places the new member under the church's authority and subject to its discipline.

Younger children may not be ready for such, and need to remain under their parents' authority alone. For these reasons and more we encourage baptism at a more mature point in their walk with Christ. Such an approach is more likely to produce baptisms of genuinely born again believers that will accept their "adult" roles in the local body, continue to grow, understand and appreciate its significance for their rest of their lives.

Therefore, there is no minimum age for baptism, but it should be based on the maturity of the child, and when the parents and elders feel is best for them. A parent may request that their child be baptized at any age, with the understanding that the baptism procedure must still be carried out prior to baptism (process is described latter in this article). But just to provide a general guideline, it is recommended that the child be at least 12 years or older. (Some churches even request that they wait until 18 or 21 years old.) It is important to note again that we are not saying that a child must be 12 years old to become a Christian. Baptism is not equal to salvation. There is no question that a child younger than 12 can be saved.

#### **F. Mentoring Process for Baptism Candidates:**

If the father is present in the home (and a professing believer), we encourage him to assume the role of mentor. In some cases parents have expressed a desire to be "co-mentors," but we would still emphasize the father's unique role and responsibility. If the father is clearly not a believer, is absent from the home, or is unwilling to be involved, we encourage the mother, a grandparent, or another mature believer to assume the mentor role. Single mothers of sons often see this as an opportunity to connect their son with a godly man, which may establish an ongoing relationship that will benefit the son and support the mother in her parenting role.

In some situations the father may profess to be (or actually be) a believer, but may have doubts about his ability to mentor his child (due to spiritual weakness, immaturity, struggles with personal faith, unconfessed sin, etc). Such men may feel uncomfortable with this process. However, these situations should not *necessarily* prevent a man from assuming responsibility for the spiritual care of his children. If, in the process, the man is clearly unable to mentor his child, then the process may be suspended until the father is ready. This may help encourage the father in the impact that his spiritual condition has on his children.

We recommend that mentors have multiple one-on-one sessions with their candidate. A recommended resource is *Preparing Young People for Baptism (Mentor's Guide Booklet)* by Children Desiring God ([www.children-desiring-god.org](http://www.children-desiring-god.org)). The Mentors Guide suggests how to structure the sessions. The mentors should feel free to contact their leadership to update their progress and ask for any help.

At the end of the mentoring sessions a meeting with the mentor and candidate is held. It is during this meeting that the candidate shares their personal testimony, and the candidate is also asked to give the meaning and significance of baptism. The session should also take time to talk with the candidate(s) about church membership.

After both the candidate and the mentor feel the candidate is ready to move ahead with baptism, the candidate is presented as ready to the Elders. When the Elders recommend the candidate for baptism, a baptism service is scheduled.

### **G. Adult Baptism & “Re-Baptism” of Believers:**

The above reasons for taking such a serious approach to believer’s baptism may also help to indicate when adult believers may desire or need to be baptized or “re-baptized.” (“Re-baptism” is simply referring to the person being physically baptized in water again after a previous “baptism” earlier in life. But, from the perspective of this ordinance, we acknowledge *real* “believers” baptism as occurring only *after* one becomes a true believer.) When believers feel that their previous baptism was not remembered or understood, or that they may have not been truly believing and trusting in Christ alone when that testimony was made public, or (having come to Christ some time previously) they wish to join as a member, or just that they wish to make a more serious public declaration of their faith in Christ following a significant (even if not “saving”) work of the Spirit in their life, then such “re-baptism” is not only allowed, but encouraged.

Adults who may be considering if they need to be baptized or “re-baptized” are encouraged to discuss this with the Elders and others. The above Mentoring Process for children may be used as a general guide and help in these cases also, with a parent or mature believer in Christ, to confirm their understanding and decision.

We believe that all truly born again believers should publicly declare their faith in the act of believer’s baptism, and pray that the Spirit of God would lead both prospective members and the leadership to know when someone should be baptized to precede their membership in the local body of Christ. This is not to say that “baptism by immersion” is a requirement for membership in Grace Fellowship. But we trust that the above explanation would help indicate our beliefs on believer’s baptism and encourage it. Other beliefs (relating to “covenantal baptism”) will be considered on an individual and case by case basis for those wishing to become a member without believer’s baptism.

### **H. Summary Philosophy of Baptism:**

It is our hope that everyone who reads this article understands the serious nature of baptism. We believe that it is our responsibility to enter into the baptism process with careful investigation and examination. It is not our goal to discourage anyone who truly believes in Christ from baptism, but it is our hope that giving baptism such a weighty significance in our church will discourage those not yet believing from taking part in this holy ordinance and increase its meaning for believers. May God bless this church with many believers to baptize for His glory!

## **II. DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:**

### **A. Statement of Belief:**

We believe that the Lord Jesus Himself implemented the Lord's Supper as an ordinance of the Church at the Passover preceding His crucifixion. Matthew records the event in Matthew 26:26-29 when he writes, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" With these words the Supper was started as a symbol of the great sacrifice given by Christ for the salvation of the Church. Luke records the event with these words, "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.' (Luke 22:19-20)" Because we were commanded to observe this ordinance in remembrance of Jesus and His sacrifice, it is necessary for Grace Fellowship to define and observe the Supper in accordance Scripture and give guidelines for the implementation of the doctrine in our local congregation.

### **B. Definition:**

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church that is to be carried out by the Elders of the church on a regular basis, assisted by others as they see fit. The elements to be used in the Supper are bread and fruit of the vine. Everyone who is in faith and fellowship with the Lord Jesus shall be given the invitation to participate in this service.

### **C. Guidelines for the Lord's Supper:**

1. The Supper shall be offered on a regular basis at a worship service of the church (Luke 22:19-20).
2. The Supper shall be open to all believers who are in good standing with the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 11:23-26).
3. No one who is under active church discipline shall be allowed to partake in the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:27-29)
4. The elements of the Supper shall always be bread (leavened or unleavened) and fruit of the vine (grape juice or wine) (Matthew 26:26-29).
5. The church may also wish to participate in church discipline, foot washing or other worship activity as deemed necessary during the Lord's Supper.

**D. Purpose of the Lord's Supper:**

1. The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the gospel and the death of Jesus Christ in obedience to the Father and for the redemption of the Church (I Corinthians 11:26).
2. The Lord's Supper is an opportunity for confession, repentance, and revival among the people of God (I Corinthians 11:27-34).
3. The Lord's Supper is an opportunity to worship the Lord for His great sacrifice on our behalf (Matthew 26:26-29).
4. The Lord's Supper is to anticipate His return and continue our participation in this ordinance until we share it anew with our Lord in His coming Kingdom (Matthew 26:29)
5. The Lord's Supper is both a symbol of and a means of God's grace being dispensed into the lives of believers. It is both symbolic and real communion with Christ our Lord, and as such, a mystery.