

# THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

*Elders' Summary Statement – Final (2/19/12)*

## **BAPTISM**

Christian baptism is the public act of being fully immersed in water by an individual who desires to confess his or her genuine belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, it is an outward witness of an inward faith in Christ alone for salvation.

Baptism by immersion symbolically pictures the believer's spiritual union with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. As such, baptism is a means by which the believer chooses to publicly identify with Him. By submitting to baptism, believers demonstrate that they have died to their old way of life through the death of Jesus, and now live a new life through the resurrection of Jesus, having been cleansed from their sin in the same way that water cleanses from filth. Christian baptism was commanded by Jesus and by His apostles, and is for all true believers in Christ. Furthermore, Jesus indicated that it is always to be done 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'

New Life practices 'Believer's Baptism' (sometimes called *credobaptism*) which means that only true believers in Jesus Christ are to be baptized. As such, we would not condone infant baptism, or baptism of any individual who has not yet repented of sin and expressed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also do not believe that being baptized in any way contributes to an individual's salvation, but rather is an outward and visible sign that salvation is already an inner reality. True salvation is received only through repentance from sin and believing the Gospel, and not through the merit of any good works.

Scripturally, there do not appear to be restrictions on who can baptize (other than the implication that the baptizer is himself a baptized believer). At New Life, the elders have determined that baptizing will typically be performed by those occupying spiritual shepherding roles, including elders, pastors, ministry leaders, and small group leaders.

## **COMMUNION/"THE LORD'S TABLE"**

Communion is an observance by believers that commemorates the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and brings the grace of His presence in a special way.

During Communion, true believers partake of elements that represent the body and blood of Christ while remembering His death as the substitutionary atonement for their sins. Jesus Himself instituted this practice with his disciples in the Upper Room on the night He would be betrayed. During the traditional Passover meal, Jesus in effect updated the meaning and significance of that meal by presenting Himself as the fulfillment of everything the meal symbolized. He Himself would be the ultimate Passover Lamb who, though completely innocent, would be slaughtered for others and whose blood would be the salvation of

His people, earning their deliverance and causing the just wrath of God to “pass over” them.

In the New Covenant era, true believers are instructed to participate in Communion with a clean heart and clear conscience, having examined themselves and repented of known sin, and to treat other participants with dignity and familial love. In Communion Jesus is spiritually present with His people, and those who participate in accordance with His instructions receive great spiritual benefit.

At New Life, Communion is observed in a variety of settings. The elements can be served in weekend Celebrations, small groups, and in the homes of those who are unable to attend public worship gatherings. The Scriptures do not define how frequently it should be observed in public worship, but appear to leave that decision up to the elders of each local congregation. As such, New Life observes this ordinance in Celebrations on a regular basis as the Spirit leads.

New Life practices ‘open communion’ which encourages participation by all professing believers who are present (vs. limiting it to New Life ministry partners). Parents with young children are encouraged to use Communion as an occasion to instruct their children in the basic truths of the Gospel story, while waiting until there is evidence of saving faith before encouraging their children to participate.

**We believe that these two ordinances dramatize and re-present the Gospel story, and should be observed regularly by believers until Christ returns, for the honor and glory of God.**