

The Ordinances

Mountain Brook Community Church's
Views on Baptism and the Lord's Supper



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Purpose

This document is designed to help the members of Mountain Brook Community Church better understand our beliefs concerning the ordinances that we practice. We also hope it will be a useful tool for parents as they faithfully prepare their children to participate in these ordinances at the appropriate time.

Introduction

All of the blessings we experience in this life are ultimately undeserved gifts of grace from our Heavenly Father. In fact, the entire Christian life is lived by grace. Within the fellowship of the church there are certain means through which the Holy Spirit works to bring blessings to individuals in the continual process of sanctification (being made holy). At Mountain Brook Community Church, we believe that the ordinances of the Church, given by our Lord, baptism (by immersion following conversion) and the Lord's Supper (communion), are two important means for conveying the benefits of His redemption to His people.

We use the word "ordinance" to describe these activities because they were instituted, or ordained, by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Some churches call them "sacraments" which simply means "sacred." Because the word "sacrament" is often used by certain groups within Christian culture to describe events or works that they believe provide salvation, we have chosen not to use it. We instead use "ordinance" because we know that salvation comes as a gift from God by grace alone through faith alone.

We continue to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper because they were instituted by Christ. We also know that these acts were faithfully maintained by believers in the early churches as evidences in the New Testament. They also serve as a connection to all followers of Jesus Christ past, present, and future. Most of all, we continue to participate in these ordinances out of faithful obedience to the Word of God, allegiance to Christ, and in remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin and hope of salvation for all who believe.

Concerning Baptism

At Mountain Brook Community Church

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith in Jesus Christ obediently express their union with Him in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin. (Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:26-27; Acts 18:8; Matthew 3:6; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 8:36-39; Matthew 28:19)

Who should be baptized?

We believe baptism is for everyone who, in repentance, have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and who now want to publicly profess their faith and identify themselves with Christ.

Mode of Baptism

Since baptism is an outward sign of the inward work of grace for salvation, we believe that this sign should represent the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and portray our death to our old self and being raised to a newness of life. We believe that the best modal expression of this is baptism by immersion.

When should one be baptized?

We encourage every believer who has an understanding of the meaning of baptism and personally desires to declare their allegiance to Christ, to take this step of obedience and pursue baptism.

Concerning Young People

Faithfully preparing a young person to follow the Lord in the obedience of baptism is an important responsibility entrusted to Christian parents and to the church. We believe that parents are responsible for instructing their children and overseeing their spiritual development. The church leadership is responsible to sustain and guard the ordinance of baptism and to faithfully “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

We believe this “faithful shepherding” includes preparing our young people well. Therefore it is fitting for leaders of the church and parents to work together in preparing young people for baptism.

We encourage families to have their children wait to pursue baptism until they are truly prepared for the event. We ask that parents take the initiative to lead their children toward a fuller understanding, more independent thinking, and a mature outlook on faith and baptism before participating in the ordinance.

Understanding

Children can confess faith in Christ when they are very young but they will likely not be able to understand the significance of the baptism until they are older. Because baptism is a personal statement of faith, not an act of tradition, it is important for children to understand the meaning of the ordinance and the active obedience it requires.

More Independent Thinking

It is not uncommon for those who were baptized during their pre-teen years to feel a need to be “re-baptized” when they are older. Memories of the first decade of our lives are often fuzzy at best. Even if we do remember a decision or an event like baptism, we usually cannot recall any reasoning behind the decision or event. Once a young person has the capacity for reasoning and for more independent thinking they are more likely to embrace the decisions and commitments they make as their own. Therefore it is reasonable that we refrain from baptizing a child until they are more likely to remember the experience and more fully embrace the commitment that is represented by this public declaration of faith.

Maturity

The process for preparing a young person for baptism is designed to instruct and encourage young people in their faith. It is also designed to help parents and church leadership to discern the candidate’s readiness for baptism. This process can be a stretch for many ten-year-olds and most children younger than this simply lack the maturity they need to satisfactorily complete the process.

Because we long for individuals to possess these things, we strongly encourage families to have their children wait until they can clearly articulate their testimony of when they trusted Christ for their salvation, adequately understand the meaning and significance of baptism, and demonstrate their own desire to be obedient in this ordinance. For these reasons, we recommend that children be at least ten-years-old before pursuing baptism at MBCC. We hope that families will take this as an opportunity to instruct their children in the Scriptures and help lead them into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Steps to pursue baptism at MBCC

We have baptism opportunities every few months. All who wish to be baptized must complete the MBCC baptism process. First, all candidates are required to attend MBCC’s class on baptism. Following the class, each candidate must complete a baptism application and interview with a representative of the church. Once the candidate is approved for and has chosen to pursue baptism they will schedule their baptism video which will be played in the morning service in which they are baptized. Please contact the church office or look for announcements in the worship guide for more information on the next baptism class.

Concerning the Lord's Supper

At Mountain Brook Community Church

We believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance instituted by the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in His blood. We do this to commemorate His death for the remission of our sins until He returns. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner celebrate the benefits of His redemption to our spiritual nourishment, growth in grace, and unity with other believers who participate in this reflective act of worship. (Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 2:46-47; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 21; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; Titus 3:4-7; Revelation 22:17)

Administration of the Lord's Supper

Because the death of the incarnate Son of God for our salvation and His resurrection from the dead are the most important of all events, they should be held in perpetual remembrance. Therefore we administer this ordinance to affirm that His body was broken and His blood shed for the remission of sin, and celebrate the hope of salvation we have by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

At MBCC, the Lord's Supper is administered monthly in the elements of bread and drink, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him. The elements are physical signs symbolizing the death of Christ to proclaim the spiritual truth that it is only by His broken body and shed blood that we can be saved. In addition, the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the great banquet table of the King of kings at which believers are assured a place.

How should we participate?

Those who receive the Lord's Supper should prepare themselves to participate through self-examination for the acknowledgment of their sorrow for sin and their hunger and thirst after Christ. This examination should lead to the reverent waiting upon God, and affectionate meditation on his death and sufferings. Participating in this ordinance communicates that one is a disciple of Christ and thus proclaims trust in His merits, rejoicing in His love, thankfulness for His grace, and testifies a mutual love and fellowship with other participants, as members of the same spiritual body. Failure to take the Lord's Supper in proper regard leads to the profaning of the body and blood of Christ, and judgment for those participating in an unworthy manner. Therefore, we should participate in remembrance, with humility, repentance, and in unity with one another.

Who should participate?

We believe the Lord's Supper is for those who, in repentance, have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Participation is a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign to profess that we are His disciples, and that we are committed to continue in a life of fellowship with Christ.

This ordinance is not for perfect people, but for the weak and broken as an exercise of faith and love. It is an act of remembrance and of thanksgiving for the work of Christ by which we are justified, and for the process in which we are being sanctified. Therefore, any person professing faith in Jesus as Savior, who understands the reason for the ordinance, the significance of the act, and who has undergone appropriate self-examination is welcomed to participate.

Concerning Young People

Faithfully preparing a young person to participate in the Lord's Supper is an important responsibility entrusted to Christian parents and to the church. We believe that parents are responsible for instructing their children and overseeing their spiritual development. The church leadership is responsible to sustain and guard the ordinances of the church and to faithfully "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:1-3). We believe this "faithful shepherding" includes preparing our young people well. Therefore it is fitting for leaders of the church and parents to work together in preparing young people for the Lord's Supper. So, we ask that parents take the initiative to lead their children toward a fuller understanding of the ordinance, more independent thinking, and an appropriate level of maturity before participating in the ordinance.

Understanding

Children can confess faith in Christ when they are very young but they will likely not be able to contemplate the significance of the Lord's Supper until they are older. Because this ordinance is an act of remembrance, a declaration of faith, and requires self-examination, it is important for children to understand the meaning of the ordinance and the reverent obedience it requires.

More Independent Thinking

Participating in the Lord's Supper is an individual act within corporate worship. Partaking of the elements is a proclamation that one is a follower of Christ. Thus it requires that individuals have a personal faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord prior to participation. When a young person has the capacity for more independent thinking they are more likely to embrace the decisions and commitments they make as their own. Then and only then can they truly partake of this meal "in remembrance" of what Christ has done for them and in them personally. Otherwise, this ordinance could become a mere ritual instead of the corporate act of remembrance it was intended to be.

Maturity

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 Paul warns us of the perils of eating and drinking in an "unworthy manner." We believe that individuals should understand the meaning of the ordinance and also have enough maturity to do the self-examination called for in this passage. Otherwise, we would allow them to profane the body and blood of Christ and eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Because of these things, we strongly encourage families to have their children wait until they can clearly articulate their testimony of when they trusted Christ for their salvation, adequately understand the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper, and demonstrate their own desire to truly participate in this ordinance. However, we should not wait to teach them about the meaning of the ordinance.

There is no test or class designed to help establish a young person's readiness for this ordinance. We trust parents to decide when their children are ready. For this reason, we recommend that parents take the opportunity to instruct their children in the Scriptures and help lead them into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ as they prepare for the right time to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Scripture References

Full Scripture references for "Concerning Baptism"

Colossians 2:12 "... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

1 Peter 3:21 "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Galatians 3:26-27 "... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Acts 18:8 "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized."

Matthew 3:6 "... and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

1 Corinthians 12:13 "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Romans 6:3-4 "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Acts 8:36-39 “And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Matthew 28:19 “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...”

Full Scripture references for “Concerning the Lord’s Supper”

Matthew 5:23-24 “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 26:26-29 “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Mark 14:22-24 “And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Luke 22:19-20 “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

Acts 2:46-47 “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

1 Corinthians 10:1-4, 11 “I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ... Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

1 Corinthians 11:23-29 “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

Titus 3:4-7 “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Revelation 22:17 “The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”