



Key Questions:

*What are the Ordinances of the Church and
Who May Participate in Them?*

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The point of this booklet is to describe the relationship of communion to baptismal mode from the perspective of the LBC Elders. A number of books, papers, and articles have been written on this subject which are much more in depth than what is contained herein. We encourage all brothers and sisters in Christ to do their own research into this area, understanding that there are a variety of perspectives that exist. This work will summarize several of the major perspectives, however, the main goal is to articulate clearly the position of LBC's Elders about the specifics of participation in the ordinances at LBC.

Defining Terms

There are two ordinances in church life: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. An ordinance is understood as a remembrance of what Christ did for us. They are a visual aid, or a re-enactment, if you will, of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They have no saving value. A proper understanding of the ordinances helps us see them as a memorial celebration, not a ritual required for salvation.

In Roman Catholicism, however, these rituals are salvific, meaning saving significance is attached to participation in these rituals. Thus, they tend to refer to them as sacraments rather than ordinances, with sacrament referring to the means through which grace flows and by which we are saved. Eastern Orthodoxy and a few Protestant denominations also use the term sacrament, although they typically don't attach saving significance to them. In addition to baptism and communion, Roman Catholics also recognize five additional sacraments, making seven total. Those who views these acts as sacraments believe God's grace is received and they are saved by the sheer fact of their participation in the ritual.

It is important to distinguish these terms and refer to baptism and communion properly. They are ordinances, not sacraments. We are not saved by participating in them. We participate in them because we have been saved by grace, through faith, in the finished work of Jesus upon the cross. It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone that saves us and makes us a child of God.

The Priority of Immersion as Baptismal Mode

As noted, baptism is one of the two ordinances that Jesus gave His church. Essentially, Christian churches have practiced three modes of baptism:

- A. *Sprinkling* – Where a small amount of water is poured over the head of the baptismal candidate. While this is the predominant mode among paedobaptists (those who baptize infants), it is also present among some faith groups that baptize older children and adults. Sprinkling, as a mode, is irrespective of one’s perspective on believer’s baptism.

- B. *Pouring* – Sometimes called “affusion,” this mode consists of pouring a larger amount of water over somebody without plunging them completely under the water. Ironically, this was the mode that some of the early forerunners of Baptists practiced. The earliest Baptists arrived at the perspective of believer’s baptism, but it was some years after that before they came to understand and practice immersion as the biblical mode.

- C. *Immersion* – This is where a baptismal candidate is placed completely under water. All those who practice immersion as a mode are credo-baptists (those who baptize only believers), although, as mentioned above, not all credo-baptists practice immersion. Many biblical passages can be cited to support immersion as the biblical mode of baptism, but there are none clearer than Romans 6:4-5: “Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.”

As a historic Baptist church, and more importantly because we believe it is the picture consistently shown throughout Scripture, LBC practices immersion as our mode of baptism.

The Meanings of the Lord's Supper

The second ordinance that Jesus gave His church is the Lord's Supper. Historically, it has gone by a number of names, most notably, Communion, the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. We are using the terms Communion and Lord's Supper interchangeably, and we will refrain from using the term Eucharist because of the sacramental overtones often attached to that term by the Roman Catholic Church.

Some faith groups hold to a "real presence" of Christ in the Supper, including Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans. The significance of this can vary as well. As noted in the "Defining Terms" section, for Catholics, this becomes salvific, whereas that is not the case for Anglicans or Lutherans.

Some faith groups consider Christ to be "spiritually present" in the Supper. Most Reformed churches today follow the lead of John Calvin in this regard, as this was his perspective. There are Reformed Baptist churches today that hold to the spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper.

Most Baptists, however, including LBC, would hold to a "memorial view" of the Supper, recalling the words of Jesus that we should observe this ordinance "in remembrance of Me." When we partake of communion, we are remembering the sacrifice of Christ and what He willingly did for us at Calvary. We use the celebration to express our gratitude and thanksgiving for the great gift of salvation that He bestowed upon us through His broken body and shed blood.

Order – Baptism Precedes the Lord's Supper

When LBC celebrates communion, the Elder who leads that Sunday will make a statement that one should be a baptized believer before they partake. That is both because of what these ordinances symbolize and because of the explicit statements of Scripture.

Each ordinance has a distinct symbolic significance. Baptism pictures symbolically our entrance into the kingdom of God. To be clear, it isn't the cause of our entry into God's kingdom. Nobody becomes a Christian simply by being baptized. We become a Christian by faith in the finished work of Jesus upon the cross and His subsequent resurrection. Baptism, however, is a symbolic picture

that our hope is in His death, burial, and resurrection. Really, immersion baptism pictures two things. When we are plunged under the water we are reminded that Christ died and was buried. We are also saying that we have died to our old way of life and are burying, or putting to death, the old person we once were. Likewise, when we are raised from the waters of baptism we are saying that we believe Christ rose from the dead. We are also saying that we believe we have been made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); one who, as we saw earlier in Romans 6:4, has been raised to “walk in newness of life.”

The Lord’s Supper, however, pictures symbolically our continuation in the kingdom of God. We are told in 1 Corinthians 11:26 that “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Thus, the Lord’s Supper pictures our ongoing trust in the atonement of Christ as our only hope for being a part of the kingdom of God.

So, theologically, the order of participation in these ordinances is significant. Baptism pictures entrance, and Communion pictures continuation. If one has not even entered into the kingdom, they cannot continue in it. Again, baptism doesn’t cause us to enter the kingdom, but it does picture that we’ve entered it through faith. In the same way that baptism doesn’t cause us to enter the kingdom, the Lord’s Supper doesn’t keep us in the kingdom. The power of God does that. Nobody will snatch us from the Father’s hand, Jesus said. So, we don’t maintain this order because our salvation is dependent upon it, but we maintain this order because it rightly pictures our salvation and how it is worked out in our lives.

Perhaps even more importantly, we stress baptism preceding the Lord’s Supper because this is what the Bible proclaims. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus called us to “Go ... 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 everything I have commanded you.” One of the things He has commanded us to observe is the Lord’s Supper. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you ... For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:23, 26). But notice clearly the order specified in the

Great Commission. First there is belief. We are to “make disciples.” This is followed by baptism; “baptizing them.” Baptism is the initial sign that one has believed; they’ve become a disciple. Finally, there is the “observ(ing) everything that I have commanded you,” the Lord’s Supper being among those things we’ve been commanded to observe. Baptism comes before the Lord’s Supper.

Then we should also consider Acts 2:41-42. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, and 3000 souls came into the kingdom. Again, we see the distinct order of belief, baptism, communion. Verse 41 says “those who accepted his message were baptized.” The first thing to occur is that the 3000 who were saved had to believe; they accepted his message. Next, they were baptized. This was then followed, verse 42 tells us, by them being devoted to “the apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.” One of the New Testament designations of communion is “the breaking of bread.” Thus, we see once again this biblical order of belief, followed by baptism, followed by communion.

Understandings Of The Practice Of Communion

It is important to understand the ways people understand communion. We will look at the three predominant understandings. There are other perspectives, but typically, most churches hold one of these views of communion.

- A. *Closed Communion* – This is sometimes called the “Local Church Only” view. In this view, the celebration of communion is an ordinance reserved only for those who are members of a particular local church. This is a strict form of what’s known as “fencing the table,” a practice intended to keep from participation those who are not viewed as proper recipients of the Lord’s Supper. What matters is that all people taking part must be baptized members of that local congregation.

- B. *Open Communion* – This is, as the name suggests, where communion is opened up to anybody. It is the other extreme of the spectrum that defines communion practices. In open communion, anybody is welcome to participate.

Not only is a person's baptism irrelevant, but so are issues of faith. Even those who profess no faith are welcome to take part. In fact, an antagonistic atheist would be welcome at the table, if for some reason they wanted to take part in receiving communion.

C. *Close Communion* – This is sometimes called consistent communion by others. This is the perspective of the Elders of LBC. In close communion, the biblical order of baptism preceding the Lord's Supper is maintained. In addition, adherents of close communion believe it is important that one who comes to the table to partake also be one who has made a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and exhibited that through baptism. Thus, we typically tend to say that if you are one who has believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and you have expressed that faith through your baptism subsequent to that profession, you are invited to participate with us, whether or not you are a member of LBC.

The Evolution In The Baptist Confessions

This brings us to the reason for this paper. As articulated earlier, we believe immersion is the biblical mode of baptism, thus LBC practices baptism by immersion. So, should those who have been baptized as a believer by a mode other than immersion take part in the celebration of communion? To understand this, let's first explore what our historic Baptist confessions of faith have said over the years.

The first modern Baptist confession was written by the General Baptist John Smyth in 1610. Titled simply, *A Short Confession*, Smyth said, "The Holy Supper, according to the institution of Christ, is to be administered to the baptized; as the Lord Jesus hath commanded that whatsoever he hath appointed should be taught to be observed (Article 31)." Notice that the statement refers to "the baptized" with no reference to mode.

A contemporary of Smith was Thomas Helwys. He authored a confession in 1612 entitled, *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion*.

This is what Helwys said about the relationship between baptism and communion in his confession: “That in the outward supper which only baptized persons must partake, there is presented and figured before the eyes of the penitent and faithful, that spiritual supper, which Christ maketh of his flesh and blood ... (Article 72).” Again, we see a reference to “only baptized persons,” with no distinction about mode.

The Orthodox Creed of 1678, a General Baptist confession, said much the same thing as these: “The supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed...and no unbaptized, unbelieving, or open profane, or wicked heretical persons, ought to be admitted to this ordinance to profane it (Article XXXIII).”

Calvinistic Particular Baptists were no different than their Arminian General Baptist brothers in their perspective. The first widely-used Particular Baptist confession was the First London Confession, published in 1644 and revised in 1646. The 1646 edition of the confession explicitly says: “That Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized and after to partake of the Lord's Supper (Article XXXIX).” Once again, that baptism precedes communion is clear; what that mode of baptism should be is not. This was also true with other Baptist confessions of faith as well such as The Midland Confession (a 1655 Particular Baptist confession).

However, it was with the New Hampshire Confession, written in 1833, that we begin to see a bit of a change. It is the New Hampshire Confession that serves as the basis for the Southern Baptist Statement of Faith, The Baptist Faith and Message. With the New Hampshire confession, we see communion beginning to be restricted to immersed believers. The confession states, “We believe that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost; to show forth, in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life; that it is prerequisite to the privileges of a Church relation; and to the Lord's Supper, in which the members of the

Church, by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination (Article 14).”

The Abstract of Principles was another Southern Baptist confession that took the same approach. Written in 1858 by Basil Manly, Jr., The Abstract remains today the confession of faith that professors at both The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, must affirm by signing. It echoes the words of the New Hampshire confession, saying, “Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus, obligatory upon every believer, wherein he is immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of his fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up to God, to live and walk in newness of life. It is prerequisite to church fellowship, and to participation in the Lord's Supper (Article XV).”

This same perspective can now be seen in The Baptist Faith and Message. Article 6 says explicitly, “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.”

The LBC Elder’s Perspective

We believe that immersion remains the proper biblical mode of baptism. Thus, for one to become a member of LBC, they should have experienced believer’s baptism by immersion. Those who have never been baptized, or who have the theological conviction that their non-immersion baptism was valid, will always be welcomed and be valuable friends of LBC, however, they will not be able to be received as members of the church body.

When it comes to Communion, however, the Elders welcome the participation of any who’ve made a personal commitment to Jesus and expressed that through subsequent baptism, irrespective of mode. We believe the Scriptural teaching that baptism precedes communion is clear, however, we believe there’s enough ambiguity in the historic Baptist position, as well as enough flexibility in the interpretation of Scripture, to allow for non-immersed people to participate

in Communion, so long as they've experienced some form of Christian baptism after their commitment to Christ as Lord. This should not be interpreted as compromise on the priority of immersion as the Scriptural mode of baptism, but rather as an intention not to be dogmatic and inflexible on a matter that is not a primary doctrine of faith. The Elders stand always ready and willing to speak about this issue with any who would wish to discuss it further. In this, as in all things, may we seek to honor Him through our words and actions.

“Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
Ephesians 4:3

All Scripture quotes are taken from the Christian Standard Bible.