



Baptism & Membership

Our positions on baptism and communion are grounded in the commands of God (Matt.28:18-20; Luke 22:19) and a reflection of our church's history. We take both seriously enough that all believers should take part in the sacramental meaning of both.

We believe that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is enough for our salvation from sin and restoration to God. We practice "credobaptism" which means that the believer publicly agrees with the foundational creeds about Christ and is fully immersed for baptism. This baptism of immersion has as its roots, Jewish immersion in a mikvah to symbolize cleansing. Likewise, communion has a connection to the Passover seder.

Baptism, by itself, is not a means to salvation, but rather a person's public proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. This moment of choosing to follow the commands of Christ before the church community has brought great joy to many, including those who watch the baptism. We encourage all believers who have not received credobaptism to do so in accordance with the Lord's command. We invite all who have received Christ and baptism as the visible sign of invisible grace, regardless of the type of baptism, to join us in worship and to partake in the community life of Calvary Church.

Holy Communion or the Eucharist is the regular "meal" that believers are to take part in to regularly remember Christ's sacrifice for them on the cross. The elements of bread and juice, representing the body and blood of Christ are partaken, symbolizing the believer's identification with Christ, that his death and resurrection have been fully accomplished. This affirms that the believer already stands justified before God. While the "substance" of the bread and juice do not change, the Lord's grace is made present giving the believer new and ongoing confidence in Christ apart from any performance. In the same manner as baptism, we invite all true believers in Christ to partake in communion, as it binds together all who share commonality in following Christ. We believe the command of the Lord is clear that we share in the meal as a foretaste of Christ's eventual return to bring us to his heavenly feast.

We believe that while baptism and communion are clear commands from our Lord, there is no corresponding command (and link) to becoming a member of a local church. The early church practiced both communion and baptism as prior and linked to church membership (catechism). However, at one point in history (post-Reformation) communion was separated out leaving only baptism as a prerequisite for church membership.

"Membership" into Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20) is a covenant relationship received solely by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Neither baptism nor communion have value in saving a person, but they only are a sign pointing to one's true faith in Christ. This is also true of earthly church membership as it is a living picture of the covenant relationship God has with His people.

Thus, we believe that in charity, only saving faith in Christ is required for church membership. Both baptism as immersion and communion are visible signs of invisible grace. Hence, both deserve serious consideration for the believer to follow. In light of this we strongly encourage believers not to treat our Lord's commands as negotiable in the observing the sacraments. However, in charity, then, our practice is to extend the invitation of membership to those who have been redeemed and not tie it to believer's baptism. For those who are members and attenders we will continue to invite them to follow all of the Lord's commands.