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West Side Church Position on Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The Ordinances and the Local Church

Jesus never asked His disciples to remember His birth. But He did instruct them to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols we call "ordinances" as reminders of His death. These two ordinances are *believer's baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*.

Believer's Baptism

New Testament baptism had its origin in the command of Christ to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19). The membership of West Side Baptist Church understands the Scripture to teach that only professing believers in Christ qualify for believer's baptism. While the New Testament doesn't explicitly prescribe how baptism is to be practiced, we as a church family have chosen to express it as follows:

We believe Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water to symbolically demonstrate our faith in the crucified, buried and risen Savior, which has resulted in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life [from the Articles of Faith].

Scriptural teaching on believer's baptism may be summarized as follows:

1. Baptism is **an act of obedience** to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have humbly subjected themselves to His sovereignty (Matthew 28:19). To ignore this first command to new believers is to be disobedient to Christ. Thus, the New Testament consistently connects believers and baptism. An unbaptized believer is simply unnatural to the story of the New Testament.
2. Baptism **symbolizes** spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-4). Baptism is a public profession of one's faith, not a means to salvation (Acts 10:43-48).
3. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change and thus provides an opportunity for believers to make a **public profession** of their faith before the church and those who know them (Acts 2:41). As such, believer's baptism is normally practiced in the local church family as an expression of our identification with Christ and one another as His spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12:13).

For Those Baptized as Infants

Baptism as an infant, while a meaningful ceremony for many families, is not the same as believer's baptism. We see no command, ordinance, illustration or even mention of this in the Bible. Although the old covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes offered as a basis for infant baptism, the biblical definition of the

functions of circumcision and of baptism shows that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The Bible never equates the circumcision of male infants in the old covenant with the baptism of born-again believers, much less of infants, in the new covenant.

Instead, West Side Baptist Church encourages Christian parents to present their children for the ceremony of dedication, asking God's blessing upon the children, and the parents themselves publicly committing themselves to raise the children in accordance with the teachings of Scripture. This act of dedication is highly encouraged but is not a specific command or ordinance.

So, children should wait to be baptized until they demonstrate a full grasp of its significance. Readiness for believer's baptism is not an issue of chronological age, rather of spiritual understanding.

For Those Baptized by Sprinkling or Pouring

Baptism is practiced by various churches in three primary ways: sprinkling (aspersion), pouring (affusion), and submerging (immersion). The mode used is the result of a church's beliefs and traditions. In spite of these differences, it is generally agreed that the early church immersed the people coming for baptism. The Greek word for *baptize* normally means "to immerse" and has been used historically in this sense: "to sink a ship," "to sink (in the mud)," "to drown," and "to perish." This basic meaning agrees with the emphasis of Scripture. In addition, the Greek has words for *sprinkle* and *pour* that are not used for baptism. Immersion also best illustrates the spiritual significance of death and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:1-4).

For Those Baptized by Immersion Prior to Attending West Side

The membership of West Side Baptist Church hold to immersion of the believer as the normal, biblical pattern for demonstrating one's identification with Christ and His body of believers. So, all those who have been immersed upon a profession of faith in Christ as the New Testament describes, regardless of the location of that baptism, will be received as baptized believers at West Side.

The Lord's Supper

While baptism is a one-time experience, Jesus gave us another action that is intended to continue throughout the life of the Christian. It's called the Lord's Supper, or communion, and is a powerful way for Christians to remember and celebrate what God did for us in the life of Jesus. While the New Testament doesn't explicitly prescribe how the Lord's Supper is to be practiced, we as a church family have chosen to express it as follows: *[from the Articles of Faith]*

Scriptural Teaching on the Lord's Supper May be Summarized as Follows:

1. The Lord's Supper is **an act of obedience** to the command of Christ to remember His death until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:26). Jesus did not give us an elaborate ceremony, but a simple reminder of His death to be practiced regularly by the Church He was establishing. As such, it is proper only for the true believer in Christ and is a remembrance for those believers to share together in community as local churches.

2. The Lord's Supper **symbolizes** the death of Christ and its immense spiritual significance (1 Corinthians 11:23-34). The bread represents His sinless body which qualified Him to be an acceptable sacrifice for our sin. The cup represents His blood which was shed on the cross to remove the believer's guilt for sin and establish a new covenant based on God's unfailing promise.
3. The Lord's Supper is a **statement of faith** for the believers and not a sacrifice of Christ or a means to some mystical power (1 Corinthians 11:26).
4. The Lord's Supper is **precious**, an exercise worthy of self-examination and careful practice. It is to be done in decency and order, carefully preserving its symbolism, meaning and the accurate presentation of the gospel. Because of this, some kind of oversight by the church is needed to insure the integrity of the remembrances as Jesus gave them, and as instructed by the apostle Paul.

For Those Who Don't Feel Worthy

It is open to all true Christians. There may be times when a believer knows his or her heart isn't right when it comes time to participate in the Lord's Supper. While it may be necessary to prayerfully abstain from participation at that time, the better response is to remedy whatever is wrong. This accountability created by observing the supper should produce action, not passivity; change, not continued sin. When a believer deals with sin honestly before the Lord, His promise is that His death has already paid for the error. You are forgiven! Think and act like someone who's been forgiven! *See 1 John 1:9.*

For Those Who are Often Unable to Attend

Jesus never said when or how often believers should observe The Lord's Supper. He just said, "as often as you do this." Jesus instituted it on a Thursday night. Our practice is to celebrate it two times per month—on the first Sunday morning—and also on special occasions throughout the year. What matters most is that (1) we observe the supper, and (2) we participate with our church family when the supper is observed. A trend among believers today is to view the Lord's Supper as just another optional program which they may or may not attend. This attitude toward this clear command of Christ is alarming! When the local church family agrees to gather to observe the Lord's Supper, every able-bodied individual should make this a matter of highest priority as an act of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For Those Who Think it Unimportant

Jesus instituted this practice, not simply to launch a ritual, but because He intended that the people who comprise His spiritual family on earth might have continued opportunities to deal with sin, reconcile wronged relationships, put right that which is wrong in each individual's personal relationship with Him, and enjoy the unity of our mutual relationship to Christ. To take this lightly is to denigrate what He saw fit to give His life for.

For those who wish to remember the Lord privately

The Lord's Supper is a corporate celebration and should be celebrated by some portion or all of the church gathered. The Lord's Supper is not merely a personal observance, it is more importantly a church observance which unifies us, the community of faith. In smaller group sessions, the group should request permission of the Elders to give them the opportunity to make sure that the celebration is appropriate. This might mean that an elder attends. An elder might be assigned to meet with those who will be doing the serv-

ing to instruct them. The elders might simply give permission, having assured the proper procedures with the person(s) requesting.

Additional questions regarding Believer's Baptism and The Lord's Supper are answered in a related document, "FAQ about the Ordinances."

Approved by the Elder Council – 04-24-07