



The Sacraments

Sacraments are a visible, tangible means by which God makes himself known to humankind. When God reaches out to us, he reaches out with his love and grace and reveals himself and his salvation to his people. The sacraments are given to us to enable us to better understand the gospel and to strengthen us in our faith. There is general agreement within the church of Jesus Christ that baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM

Jesus commanded his disciples to *“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* Matthew 28:19. Our desire is to be obedient to this command. New Life practices both believers baptism and infant baptism.

Believers Baptism

In Acts 2:38-39 Peter was asked in response to the gospel message what people should do to be saved? He stated, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

The Bible teaches that we are sinners from birth. Our sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. When we believe and trust Jesus Christ as the only answer to our sin problem and look to the cross and his blood as our cleansing from sin, we

receive new life. In many ways the sinful self dies and Christ becomes alive in us. Repentance means to change - to change from our way which leads to death to God's way. The Holy Spirit is given by Jesus to help us build a God-honoring life.

Believers baptism is a powerful symbol of this reality. It is the outward symbol of this inner change. As surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly Christ's blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity. Going under the water symbolizes death and coming out of the water symbolizes life.

Believers baptism is also a symbol of our baptism (immersion) into the family of God. The new believer is no longer alienated from God, but becomes immersed in his family - the church. *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body."* I Corinthians 12:13

New Life encourages people who have repented and found life in Jesus Christ to publicly acknowledge this through profession of faith and believers baptism.

Infant baptism

New Life also practices "infant baptism", or, more accurately, the baptism of children of Christian parents. God has always included the children of believers in his plans to redeem the world. In Genesis 17:7 when God established a relationship with Abraham and promised to be his God, he also promised that *"I shall be your God and the God of your children."* Circumcision was the sign of God's intention to keep his promise. Jesus welcomed children into the inner circle of his relationships. *"Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them"* (Mark 10:16). Jesus rebuked those who tried to push the children away. He said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* (Mark 10:14). The apostle Paul made clear that children of believers are holy in the eyes of God (I Corinthians 7:14). In Acts 2:38-39 God once again includes the children of believers in his plan of salvation. The Church from its earliest records has practiced infant baptism.

When children of believers are born they become part of a family, but they also become part of the family of God. Members of the church family make a commitment to love them, encourage them, train them and help them

grow to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. God himself takes them under his wing and shepherds them. They are literally “immersed” or “baptized” into the body of Christ and the love of their heavenly Father. We understand this as a beautiful sign of God’s grace. Baptism is the symbol of their inclusion or immersion into the family of God.

New Life encourages believing parents to bring their children forward publicly for baptism. These children are encouraged as they grow to acknowledge Jesus personally as their Lord and Savior. When they reach an age where they are capable of making a personal and informed decision to follow Jesus and have done that, they too are encouraged to make a public profession of their faith.

Dedication

Because New Life has made an attempt to encourage diversity, to incorporate people of different theological backgrounds, and to expose ourselves to other traditions in the broader Christian community, we have attracted people who have a variety of ideas concerning infant baptism in our church family. Not all agree that children of believers should be baptized. Some prefer to “dedicate” their children to God and allow them to be baptized later at the time of their personal profession of faith in Jesus. New Life has tried to remain flexible and to respect those who hold a different view on these matters. From time to time you will see “dedications” of children in our worship. These children are every bit as much a part of the family of God. We eagerly anticipate the day when they will profess their faith and be baptized in public worship.

Rebaptism

From time to time we also get requests for rebaptism by those who may have been baptized as infants but would like to be baptized as believers. Some seek to celebrate their new found life in Christ. Others may have been baptized by parents who showed no commitment to raise them as Christians and feel that their baptism as infants meant little or nothing. Others simply desire to personally experience their baptism. Still others feel that they must do this in straight forward obedience to Jesus command to repent and be baptized. New Life seeks to celebrate the Lord’s saving work and not judge a person because of this desire. We seek to be open to the spiritual needs and unique journey of each person who becomes part of our church family. These requests are handled by the pastors in conjunction with the elders.

Summary

Baptism is meant for the building up of the church family. It is meant to be a blessing to the body of Christ - a sign of God's grace and love. It is meant to portray the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is meant to celebrate the inclusion of people into the church family and the kingdom of God. In New Life we are committed to keeping this positive focus. We will not become narrow or legalistic on questions regarding baptism. We will not allow what God has meant for our blessing to become an opportunity for dissension.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

It is interesting that Jesus never told his followers to remember his birth. Yet he did instruct them to remember his death. He asked them to do this in a very meaningful, powerful, and visible way:

"On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." I Corinthians 11:23-26

What is the Lord's Supper?

1. It is a remembrance of Jesus death. It is a means by which we remember His death on the cross in payment for the entire sin of the world.

2. It is a fellowship with God himself. *"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" I Corinthians 10:16.*

3. It is a fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. *"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." I Corinthians 10:17*

4. It is food for eternal life. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world."* John 6: 48 & 51

5. It is a witness. It is a public proclamation of Jesus death.

May children participate in the Lord's Supper?

We encourage families to come forward together for communion. Parents are to take primary responsibility for whether their children take the bread and the juice. We would expect that any child participating has a good understanding of what they are doing. If a child desires to participate and is showing a genuine interest in the things of God, we encourage them to take a special class that is geared to help them gain a deeper understanding of these matters.