



POSITION STATEMENT:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND THE SACRAMENTS¹

Approved by Elder Board on 11/16/20

Biblical References

Matthew 26.26-28; 28.19-20; John 6.53-56; Acts 2, 8, 10, 11, 16, 18; 1 Corinthians 11; Colossians 2.11-12; 1 Peter 3.21

The Position of Hingham Church on the Relationship between Church Membership and the Sacraments

On the Relationship between Baptism and Church Membership

Baptism is the first official step into the life of Hingham Church.² This is how local churches operated in the early church period.³ There really is no such thing as an unbaptized Christian in the New Testament.⁴ This was an identity marker that indicated that you belonged to Christ, and that you belonged to a local body of believers. So, if a person wants to be identified with Hingham Church and wants Hingham Church to identify with him or her, the person needs to be willing to be credibly and publicly identified with Jesus Christ. *To actively refuse baptism is evidence of unrepentant disobedience to biblical commands.*⁵

*We believe baptism signifies official entrance into the specific community of God's people at Hingham Church.*⁶ Whether an individual holds to covenant or believer's baptism, this statement remains true. What Hingham Church believes is critical for church membership is that an individual has a credible, public profession of faith. This credible profession of faith may be evidenced either 1) through a credible, public profession of faith made in connection to his or her covenant baptism, or 2) through a credible, public profession of faith made in connection to his or her believer's baptism. The important elements are that the profession is both *credible* and *public*.

¹ For additional context, biblical discussion, and theological reasoning, refer to Hingham Church's elders' paper entitled "Theological Vision: Church Membership And the Sacraments."

² Note well: this is true regardless of one's position on either covenant or believer's baptism.

³ Cf., Acts 2.38-41; 8.12; 9.18; 16.33; 18.8; 22.16.

⁴ Paul assumes that everyone to whom he is writing in the church at Rome has been baptized.

⁵ Cf., Matthew 28.18-20; Acts 2.38; et al.

⁶ Whether one approaches baptism from a credobaptist or covenant baptist perspective, nowhere in the Scriptures is infant dedication is prescribed for the church as a ritual or practice to be observed. In order to avoid the addition of extrabiblical rituals and practices, we have determined to not employ this practice here.

On the Relationship between the Lord's Supper and Church Membership

If, as stated above, baptism is the front door to the house of church membership, then the Lord's Supper is the family meal.⁷ Just like a family meal, brothers and sisters join together in unity around the same food and drink. Like baptism, the Lord's Supper makes the *invisible* realities of the Gospel *visible*. It is important to notice from Scripture that the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated by each local church, as a local church, and that there are responsibilities incumbent on everyone who participates. It must be remembered that a local church is not a building, but an assembly of a group of Christians who are committed to one another for the sake of the Gospel. Every indication from Scripture is that the Lord's Supper took place *only* in local churches (i.e., "assemblies" or "gatherings"), and that it was when the church came "together."⁸ Whereas "baptism binds one to many,...the Lord's Supper binds many into one."⁹

Because the Lord's Supper is a family meal given by Christ to brothers and sisters in the family of God, it is really only intended for those who have publicly professed their faith. *We believe that, regardless of one's understanding of baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper should always be preceded by baptism and one's public profession of faith.* So, the celebration of Lord's Supper at Hingham Church is *primarily* intended for Hingham Church members. There are good exceptions to this general rule, but not every exception is intrinsically good.¹⁰ Taking the Lord's Supper seriously is of vital importance to the life of the church, and failure to do so has serious consequences (1 Corinthians 11.29-30).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf., 1 Corinthians 11.17, 18, 20, 33, 34

⁹ Jamieson, 122.

¹⁰ A good exception might be an individual who is a faithful member of another Christian church with the same understanding of the Lord's Supper (i.e., someone who may be regarded as a true brother or sister in Christ) who is visiting family in the area and who chooses to worship with our congregation. By contrast, an exception which we would not encourage could be an individual who lives in the area and who refuses membership at any church, including Hingham Church. This is akin to a houseguest who has decided to move in with the family, but who actively refuses any household responsibilities.