Position Paper on Communion

Ordinance—A physical act, which is ceremonial in nature, that symbolizes a spiritual reality expressly taught in the Scriptures and is commanded by Christ for all believers. We believe there are two ordinances commanded by Christ for all believers to follow: baptism and communion.

Three-Fold Communion—There are 3 elements which make up the Communion service. 1) Foot Washing. 2) Love Feast. 3) Bread and Cup.

The ordinance of Communion is expressed and celebrated in a variety of ways across the landscape of Evangelical Christianity. This position paper highlights the beliefs and convictions of The Family @ Grace Brethren Church regarding Communion.

We celebrate Communion in three parts: 1) Foot Washing. 2) Love Feast. 3) Bread and Cup. As with the ordinance of Baptism, Communion is a physical act that symbolizes, or pictures, a spiritual reality. We believe Three-Fold Communion best pictures, and celebrates, the spiritual realities these physical acts represent.

Foot Washing
Exemplified by Jesus with his disciples in John 13 foot washing represents the need for cleansing from indwelling sin. As Jesus said in John 13:10, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” 2 In 1st century culture feet would become very dirty. The absence of paved roads coupled with leather sandals being the primary footwear of the day would lead to some dirty toes. So while the disciples would have taken baths, merely walking outside would cause their feet to become very dirty again.

The spiritual reality that Jesus is illustrating by washing his disciples feet is the continual need for confession and repentance of sin. Foot washing represents the ongoing, progressive, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives whereby he convicts of sin and leads us to confession and repentance. While one has been “spiritually bathed”, “…by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit…” (Titus 3:5) we still war and battle against sin. Foot washing is a picture of the cleansing forgiveness that all believers continually need and that God has graciously promised to extend. This physical act also serves to remind us of our spiritual role and responsibility as a fellowship of believers. In humility we “…stir up one another to love and good works…” (Heb 10:24) and hold one another accountable to guard from being “…hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13).

1 John 1:8-9 states, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Confession and repentance, however, is not only to be done at a Communion Service. Martin Luther rightly concluded in the first of his ninety-five theses that “all of the believer’s life is one of repentance.” All believers are to be actively confessing and repenting of sin. Foot washing is a beautiful reminder of the “spiritual bath” we have received and the gracious mercy and forgiveness that God continually gives his children.

Love Feast
The Love Feast pictures and celebrates the future Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Apostle John writes in Revelation 19:6-8,

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

The Love Feast represents God’s future work of glorification. The real and imminent eternal reality of all believers whereby they will be united with Christ (Rev. 19:7), and spend eternity with Him. Far more than just a meal that will be shared with Jesus, and all the redeemed (and this meal will be glorious), the Love Feast is a physical symbol that represents a tremendous spiritual promise. God will complete what he has begun (Phil. 1:6)
and our hope, while not yet fully realized, is that will one day be forever with our Lord (Rom. 8:24-25, 1 Thess. 4:17).

Bread and Cup (Eucharist)
The bread and cup pictures the body and shed blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It was on the Cross that, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).”

The bread and cup represent the work of justification, whereby believers have not only been forgiven of their sins but also justified and declared righteous in the sight of God. The Apostle Paul declares in Romans 3:23-26, …for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

We remember and celebrate the work of Jesus Christ on the cross by partaking of the bread and the cup as Paul instructs in 1 Cor. 11:23-26,
For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed 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 also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

We eat and drink to proclaim the Lord’s death and to remember our salvation that has been made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Frequently Asked Questions
1. Do I have to participate in all three parts? Foot washing seems a little weird to me. No you do not, and it seemed weird to us the first time too. We are not for legalism, we are for grace! If you feel more comfortable not participating in foot washing that is fine. You may accompany someone to the foot washing part and observe, or stay in the large room.

2. Can I wash my children’s feet? We absolutely celebrate the moments when a Mom or Dad gets the privilege of washing their child’s feet. Those precious moments are ordained by our gracious and loving God who gives parents a chance to demonstrate their faith and lead their children through the biblical truths of confession and repentance of sin.

3. Why do you only have Communion a few times each year? While we do not participate in Communion every Sunday we do reflect on the gospel, Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, every Sunday. The gospel is not just for un-believers and is to be first and foremost preached to ourselves every day. We specifically choose 3 or 4 times a year to be moments where we stop everything and deeply reflect, remember and celebrate the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, the ongoing work of cleansing from indwelling sin, and the promise of a glorious eternity with Christ.

4. How long does a Communion Service last? Typically a Communion service will last about 2 hours.

5. Is it wrong for another church to celebrate Communion every Sunday and only have the bread and cup? No, not at all. It is our conviction from careful study of the Scriptures that Communion is rightly observed in three parts. However, we know many godly men and women who love Jesus deeply but only observe Communion as the bread and cup. While our conviction is for Communion to be Three-Fold we do not wish to divide ourselves from those brothers and sisters. What unites us in Christ is far greater than what distinguishes us.

6. Will there be child care provided for my children who are too young or not believers? Yes, our deacons will find qualified adults to care for our little ones and those who are not believers.
7. **Does the pastor always lead the entire Communion service?** No. The Communion service is a great way for equipping and discipleship to be practically applied. Often times there will be several people involved with leading through the different elements of Communion, even high school students have led before.

Practically Speaking
- Communion is for believers only. It is a physical act that symbolizes salvation. Therefore one must have a relationship with Jesus Christ to participate.
- Communion does not begin ones relationship with Jesus Christ. The bread and the cup do not dispense God’s grace; they remind us of God’s gracious love.
- The bread and cup are not literally the physical body and blood of Jesus, nor is the presence of Jesus within the bread and cup. The bread and cup represent Jesus’ body and blood.
- There are times when the three parts of Communion may be done separately from one another.

8. **Do I have to be a member or a regular attendee to participate in Communion?** No! We welcome any one who confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior to join us in celebrating His work in our lives.

We hope that this short position paper on our convictions regarding Communion has been helpful for you in not only clarifying “what we do” but answering the more critical question “why do we do what we do.” If you have further questions please do not hesitate to contact one of the Pastor’s on staff.

*With Grace, For Grace, and Because of Grace,*

The Overseers of The Family @ Grace Brethren Church