

IX

VOLUME VII



The Ordinances

The Church Made Visible

A Journal
for Pastors

Church Matters

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Church Matters: The Ordinances: The Church Made Visible

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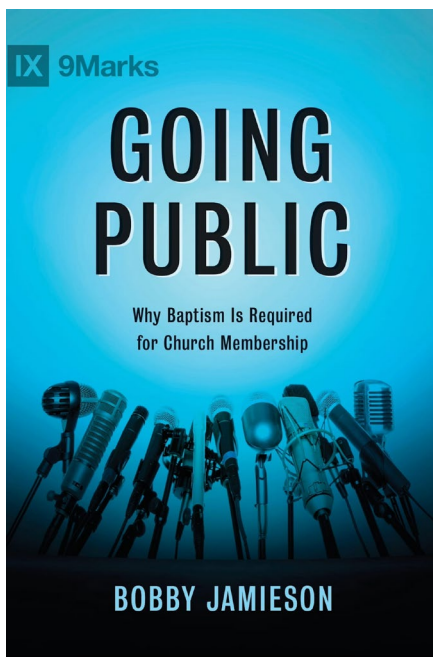
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Biblical Thinking For

Building Healthy Churches

The Corporate Nature of the Ordinances

by Taylor Hartley

I need to lead off my first editor's note with a confession . . . two confessions actually. First, I have performed multiple spontaneous-ish baptisms in various bodies of water with no local church in view. Second, my and wife and I took the Lord's Supper at our wedding while all our guests simply watched. Now, you may be thinking, "What's the big deal about that?" Keep reading and, hopefully, it will become clear! If you're at all familiar with 9Marks, however, you are probably asking yourself a different question: "How did this guy get hired?!" I wonder the same thing.

To be fair, much has changed in my views on the ordinances since then. When I think back, what seems most strange to me now is how un-strange my individualistic instincts on the ordinances were to me then. I truly thought that so long as one approached baptism and the Lord's Supper with faith and sincerity, then they had a Jesus-given right and responsibility to participate immediately. Why shouldn't a

new believer be immediately dunked after praying to receive Christ? Why wouldn't I take the Lord's Supper around our Christmas table or with my accountability bros?

The trouble with these questions is that they presuppose the primacy of the individual Christian. These questions say of the ordinances, "They're all about me-and-Jesus." But is this right?

The answer to that question is a resounding no. Of course, there is an individual aspect to the ordinances. In baptism, I profess my faith in Jesus; and in the Lord's Supper, I remember that Jesus died for me. But Jesus didn't give the ordinances to individual Christians. He gave them to the church. That's why in my baptism my church actively affirms my faith and welcomes me into their number. Similarly, in the Lord's Supper, my fellow members reaffirm my faith and we, together, renew our covenant to follow Jesus and love one another.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Baptism functioned for Paul as the way for individual Christians to identify with Jesus and one another. Notice the plural "we." Who believes in Jesus? "We" in Rome who have been baptized. Who agrees to walk "in the newness of life" that Jesus gives? Same answer. Baptism, in other words, isn't just about me. It is also about us. Baptism is where my

faith joins their faith and becomes our faith.

The corporate nature of the ordinances is even clearer when we consider the Lord's Supper. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). "Many" Christians become "one body" by eating together the "one bread." Paul connects what it means to have benefited from Jesus's broken body and shed blood with belonging to everyone else who has done the same. To have Christ is to belong to Christ's people. How does our having and belonging become visible? By eating the bread. And yet, on this side of heaven we can't possibly enjoy the Lord's Supper with every single Christian let alone those who are already home with the Lord. There isn't a megachurch on either side of the Mississippi large enough for such a gathering. No, the immediate scope of 1 Corinthians 10:17 is the church in Corinth (i.e., those who ate from the same loaf). The bread constituted their body—it made them a church.

So, the ordinances are all about the church. My guess is that I am not the only one who previously missed this point. Who knows? Maybe even you, dear reader, spontaneously dunked someone while on a beach vacation. If so, email me and we can commiserate together. Either way, we hope this issue of *Church Matters* helps you locate the ordinances in the local church. For within that sacred gathering, Jesus offers your church the chance to see with your eyes and taste

with your mouths what he has done church would grow in its love for Je-
for you all. As you do so, I pray your sus and for one another.



Taylor writes, edits, and project manages for 9Marks. He graduated from Southern Seminary in 2022 and intends to pursue more education. Taylor is married to Rachel and they live on the Hill in Washington, D.C. They are members at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

Section One

What Are the Ordinances and Why Do They Matter?

IX 9Marks

Building Healthy Churches

IS YOUR CHURCH HEALTHY?

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To that end, we want to help churches grow in nine marks of health that are often overlooked:

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3. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion and Evangelism
4. Biblical Church Membership
5. Biblical Church Discipline
6. A Biblical Concern for Discipleship and Growth
7. Biblical Church Leadership
8. A Biblical Understanding of the Practice of Prayer
9. A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Missions

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It has been said that baptism and the Lord's Supper make the gospel visible.

That's true. These ordinances portray Christ's saving work, allowing everyone to see *what* Christ has done—he died and rose again. And yet, baptism and the Lord's Supper also make the church visible. That is, the ordinances allow everyone to see *who* Christ has saved from their sins—those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ. What does all this mean? Well, for one it means that the ordinances are about more than you and Jesus. They're about you and Jesus and Jesus's people. This issue of *Church Matters* will explore the corporate implications of baptism and the Lord's Supper. By rightly understanding and practicing the ordinances in the context of the church, churches grow not only in their love for Christ but also in their love for one another.

“ Our doctrine of the church is largely contained in and made visible by our understanding of the ordinances. ”

Sam Emadi

9Marks exists to help pastors build healthy churches. We create resources and host events focused on expositional preaching, gospel doctrine, conversion and evangelism, church membership, church discipline, discipleship and growth, church leadership, prayer, and missions. Learn more at 9Marks.org.



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