

Article 9 – Church Fellowship

“We believe that none but those who give a reason of a spiritual birth and have been legally baptized have a right to commune at the Lord’s Table.”

This ninth Article of Faith sets forth the Biblical qualifications for membership in the Lord’s Church by disciples of Jesus Christ. Article 9 shows the vital connection between spiritual birth, water baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper. It emphasizes the link between our inward experience with God and our outward fellowship with Him and His Saints. *“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”* 1 John 1:3.

Everyone who is born by the Spirit of God has had a personal, individual encounter with Him. John 3:8. To give a “reason for a spiritual birth” means to provide external evidence of the inward work by God upon our heart. This includes confessing our state as sinners and our desperate need for a Savior. Matthew 3:7-12; 1 Peter 3:15. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we are commanded to confess Him with our mouth and submit to water baptism as an outward evidence of this internal work of grace by God. Acts 2:37-38.

To be “legally baptized” means to be baptized in accordance with the pattern and requirements set forth by the Bible. A legal baptism is a believer’s baptism. It requires a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is carried out by being immersed in water by a qualified, ordained elder. By submitting to baptism, we receive assurance that we are accepted of God, and is *“the answer of a good conscience toward God.”* 1 Peter 3:21.

The “Lord’s Table” is a reference to the Lord’s Supper or Communion, which is held by the church to commemorate, and reflect upon, the interceding death of Jesus Christ. *“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”* 1 Corinthians 11:26. It is a joyful time for the Lord’s Saints, and constitutes the highest form of fellowship we can enjoy here on earth, both with the Lord and with one another. Luke 22:14-20.

Only those who have given evidence of having received the new birth and have submitted to water baptism have the right to participate in the Lord’s Supper. Hebrews 13:10. These qualifications are Biblical and serve both an encouraging and a warning purpose.

The encouraging aspect is that we must examine ourselves to ensure that we are in the faith, that is, in the proper spirit to perceive the Lord’s body as we partake. This introspection causes us to perceive our own unworthiness and great dependence upon Him. *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”* 1 Corinthians 11:28.

The warning aspect recognizes the danger of disregarding the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:29. Many in the Corinthian church were struck with sickness, and some had even died, because they abused the Lord’s Supper and failed to discern the Lord’s body. 1 Cor 11:27-30. While extreme, we warn others of the perils of entering into this service lightly without having first examined themselves and submitting to legal baptism. As Peter said, *“For the time has come that judgment of God must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”* 1 Peter 4:17.

Let us therefore draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, and follow our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ in all that He has commanded with joy, reverence and peace.