

TWO ORDINANCES: COMMUNION AND BAPTISM.

(1 Corinthians 11:17-29; Matt.28:18-20; Acts 16:31-34; Romans 6:1-4)

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Because of the Baptism celebration this afternoon, I'm taking this opportunity to address the two ordinances of Christ's Church: Communion and Baptism.

This is what the Bible teaches us about the ordinances, as expressed in the seventh article of our church's statement of faith: *The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.* (Articles of Faith, Evangelical Free Church of America)

We call these ordinances because Jesus ordained, or established them.

Some people call them sacraments. I avoid the term, because a "sacrament" has traditionally been understood to mean a religious act or ceremony that confers God's grace to a person.

But the New Testament presents communion and baptism as a response of obedience by those who have already received God's saving grace through faith in Christ. Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper confer God's saving grace.

THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION)

We celebrate communion regularly each month here at Crossroad.

Most of you have things etched into your memory—things you can't forget.

Things you did; things done to you; or something you saw.

I'll never forget something I saw as a young teenager.

I saw a man hanging from a tree. He had taken his own life. That scene haunted me for years. I couldn't erase the picture of the disfigured face and distended form.

I still have the knife the police borrowed to cut the rope. It takes me back 50 years to Uncle Arthur's farm in the Mooketsi Valley in the northern part of South Africa.

- I'm not very comfortable with using that as an analogy for communion, but there is a powerful, gruesome element in Communion. We have to deal with the horrors Christ experienced for us, culminating in his being tortured and hanged on a Cross.

From another perspective, Christ's death on the cross is the most beautiful event in history.

- I'd like us to look at what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about Communion, the Lord's Supper.

This practice had broken down in Corinth, so Paul wrote to fix it.

It's from his fixing that we learn how to celebrate Communion.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 the apostle Paul gives us basic lessons about the observance of the Lord's Supper.

I. WE VALIDATE THE LORD'S SUPPER BY OUR UNITY. 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 27-29

If we don't love and respect each other in the church we invalidate the ordinance. It isn't real. It's just a sham!

¹⁷ *In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.*

¹⁸ *In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.*

¹⁹ *No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*

²⁰ *When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,*

²¹ *for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.*

²² *Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!*

The Lord's Supper is real only when you accept and respect one another as members of the spiritual body of Christ, his Church.

If this doesn't happen, then 'it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.' (v.20)

²⁷ *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*

²⁸ *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

We validate the Lord's Supper by observing it in Christian love and unity.

II. WE COMMEMORATE THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A PRIORITY. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

How important is communion in our church life?

Jesus Christ our Lord said, "Do this."

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,*

²⁴ *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."*

²⁵ *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."*

The setting was the Jewish Passover--an annual celebration of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Earlier in his letter Paul spoke of Jesus as the lamb sacrificed to deliver people from bondage to sin. (1 Corinthians 5:7)

The Apostle Peter wrote, '*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*' (1 Peter 3:18)

The Cross of Christ is the anchor of our faith. Communion brings us back to the cross, lest we forget.

Fanny Crosby said it so powerfully in her song, *Near the Cross*. '*Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me; help me walk from day to day with its shadows o'er me.*'

Jesus said to his disciples when he gave them the bread and the cup, '*This is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*'

That's why we commemorate the Lord's Supper as a priority. It brings us all to the Cross where Jesus died for our sins.

III. WE ASSOCIATE THE LORD'S SUPPER WITH OUR EXPECTANCY. 1 Corinthians 11:26

Jesus Christ established his church to proclaim the good news about what he accomplished on the cross for sinners everywhere.

²⁶ *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

There's expectancy in the Lord's Supper. We let the world know the good news of what Jesus Christ accomplished by his death on the cross. We do this "until he comes."

We look forward to our Lord's return.

In Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper we read Jesus' words, '*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.*' (Matthew 26:28-29)

- My imagination is hard-pressed to picture the scene at that great event in heaven. Our Lord Jesus Christ will once again share in the Lord's Supper.

I imagine Christ passing the bread and the cup to us and saying, 'Remember, this is how you got here!'

- When we celebrate communion we look forward to our Lord Jesus Christ's return.

We look forward to God's kingdom coming in its fullness and completely destroying the devil's dominion.

We believe the best is yet to come for all who have believed in Jesus Christ and received him as their Savior.

Much, much more could be said about this, but that's why we celebrate communion.

THE ORDINANCE OF WATER BAPTISM

Our practice as a church is to baptize those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation and have requested baptism

Today some people are going to be baptized at our church picnic at the DeBoer farm.

To understand and appreciate baptism I want to ask and answer three questions: Why? Whom? How?

I. WHY DO WE BAPTIZE?

There are several reasons. One is most important. Jesus Christ ordered, or ordained it.

Just before ascending to heaven Jesus Christ said to his disciples, as reported in Matthew 28:18-20, Then Jesus came to them and said, *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*

Jesus Christ gave his disciples a mission—to make disciples. As Christ's disciples today, that is our purpose too. And Jesus said making disciples includes baptizing them.

That's the main reason why we do it.

It's obedience to our Lord and Master.

But baptism itself doesn't save anyone or wash away people's sins.

I read in the Book of Acts 2:38, that after a soul-stirring address by the Apostle Peter, people asked, *'What shall we do?'* Peter answered, *'Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'*

Baptism, from the time of John the Baptism was an expression of repentance. He preached a *'baptism of repentance'* (Mk.1:4)

Repentance and baptism in that day went together. If people repented, they were baptized. It was the inner repentance, not the outward act of baptism that led to forgiveness of sins.

Jesus our Lord ordained baptism. That's why we baptize.

II. WHOM DO WE BAPTIZE?

We read in Acts 2:41 after Peter preached the Gospel, *'...those who had received his word were baptized. . .'*

Similarly, in Acts 8:12, we read about Philip the evangelist preaching in Samaria. It says, *'But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.'*

Clearly, those who were baptized were those who *had believed*.

Then, in Acts 16:30-34, Paul and Silas were jailed in the city of Phillipi for preaching the Gospel. By a miraculous act of God's power they were released. The jailer repented and was saved. He took Paul and Silas to his home where they told his whole family the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

It says that all in the jailer's household were baptized. But it also says all had clearly believed. We don't know how old the youngest ones in his family were. But we do know they were old enough to place their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation personally.

That's why we don't practice infant baptism here at Crossroads.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to baptize infants. Instead we see that those who were baptized understood exactly what they were doing, and why. So we practice believer's baptism only.

We do practice child dedication. Parents acknowledge their responsibility before God and commit themselves to raising their children to know and love God.

We follow the biblical pattern of baptizing only those who have personally trusted Christ for salvation.

III. HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

We immerse. We use a lot of water, not a sprinkling of it.

In Romans 6:3, 4 the Apostle Paul explains that baptism is a sign of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. He asks, *'Don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.'*

Baptism is a dramatic statement that your old sinful life has ended. It has been buried with Christ. (Colossians 2:12) Christ arose to give new life, eternal life, to all who believe in him.

The Greek word for baptize is *baptizó*.

It means, literally, to *immerse*. Sometimes the verb was used as a synonym for *bury, sink, drown*.

By the very definition of the term *bapizó* and the symbolism the apostle used to explain baptism, it is clear that immersion is the mode of baptism practiced in the New Testament.

That's why we baptize by immersion.

Let me add an exception to this. I "baptized" an elderly lady who was too frail to manage the stairs into the church baptistery. She had come to faith in Christ late in life, and wanted to express her obedience to her Lord by being baptized. At the same service in which others were being immersed, she was brought in her

wheel chair to the platform, and leaned back as water was poured over her head and collected in towels. That was as close as she was physically able to come to baptism by immersion, and it clearly expressed her public confession of faith and obedience to Christ.

Similar baptisms have been conducted in countless hospital rooms for those who repented and placed their trust in Jesus Christ on what turned out to be their deathbeds. Was it essential for them to be baptized? Would their salvation have been forfeit if they had not been baptized? No. As we have seen, baptism does not save anyone, but is rather a willing response to Christ's command to be baptized.

There are a few more things I want to say about the Ordinance of Baptism.

There are two further questions concerning baptism that I did not ask or answer, but I think something should be said about them. They are "Where?" and "Who?" questions. Where should baptism take place, and who should do the baptizing? Neither of these have any clear biblical or spiritual significance. That's why I didn't focus on them.

First, the "Who" issue. You should be baptized by someone who is spiritually mature and who shares the truth of baptism that you embrace, namely that it is a believer's baptism. It does not need to be a pastor who baptizes you. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian Church that he was glad he had personally baptized very few of them, lest they attach significance to the person doing the baptizing. The person who baptizes you is insignificant. The person who is being baptized is the significant factor.

Second, the "Where" issue. You may be baptized in an ornate baptistery in a beautiful church, or in a river, or a lake, or a pool, or a pond, or in someone's Jacuzzi, if you wish. The place doesn't matter. You may be baptized in Israel in the River Jordan because that's where John the Baptist baptized Jesus, but that doesn't make your baptism of a higher grade than anyone else's baptism. It is purely a sentimental matter, and it is quite harmless, unless the person being baptized tries to attach a greater spiritual significance to it.

Finally, a statement of caution to parents. I have at times heard parents say, "I want to get my children baptized." That raises a bright red flag for me. I cringe at that terminology. Parents, it is appropriate—even essential—to do your part to get your children ready for baptism. Make certain that they understand God's grace. Explain the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. Pray that you will have the privilege of leading them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Then, when you are convinced that their faith is real, and not just something they have professed in order to please you, you may encourage them to seek baptism. "Getting your children baptized" strongly implies it is something they will do for you, to put you at ease. Children must never be baptized out of obedience to their parents. It is always, and only, out of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.