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Ordinances of the Church

Today we are going to look at and participate in the only 2 ordinances that Jesus gave to the church: Communion (Lord's Supper) and Baptism. If you're only familiar with the term ordinance in relation to municipality rules and regulations just be aware that the term merely refers to a religious ritual that was instituted by Jesus for Christians to observe within the church. Both of these ordinances are beautiful pictures of profound spiritual truths yet they are always associated with tangible elements (water, bread and wine). Since these rituals represent real biblical truths, the observance of them should never be taken lightly. Still, the full benefit and blessings of these ordinances only come as the church is taught the purpose and importance of each.

Now, some of us were raised in a religious system that put undue emphasis on these ordinances, even upholding them as sacraments that are necessary for salvation. Others of us may have come up in churches that went the other way and failed to put any emphasis on them at all. Both positions are unbiblical and wrong and we will attempt to clarify the sad discrepancies that have been attributed to both the Lord's Supper and the rite of Baptism and then we will observe both during our services today.

Communion

I Cor 11:20-31

There are 2 primary purposes for observing the Lord's Supper given in Scripture. The first is a public purpose – when we as a corporate body observe the Lord's Supper, we publicly proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes (26b). There is also a personal purpose – the communion service is a reminder of Christ's death for believers do this in remembrance of Me (24b). In light of these purposes, there are 3 things we as believers need to do when we participate in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

1) Remember – This may seem like a given but the first thing we actually need to remember is that the Lord's Supper actually has it's origins in the OT. In fact, it points back to a very specific time in Israel's history – they're miraculous redemption from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. When Jesus

instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples in the upper room, they were actually celebrating the Passover. The first Passover marked the onset of the last of the 10 plagues God released against Pharaoh and Egypt for their refusal to set Israel free from slavery. The 10th plague was that of the Death Angel who moved through Egypt on that night taking the first born of both man and beast – any household that wasn't covered by the blood of the Passover lamb.

That's the history of Passover in a nutshell. It's a story of redemption through the shedding and application of innocent blood. Jesus took the symbolism of this historic Jewish tradition and applied it directly to Himself and what He was about to accomplish very soon on the cross. Jesus didn't take the entire Passover feast and apply it to Himself, only the bread and the wine; the bread to represent His broken body and the wine to represent His shed blood. Our observance of this, not the Last Supper but the first Lord's Supper should bring us back again to that night of His false arrest and unlawful trial, His subsequent beating, brutal scourging and horrific death on the cross at the hands of Roman soldiers but at the behest of His own people, the Jews.

Now, let's stop and consider the circumstances of this 1st Lord's Supper. Who was involved in it? Well, there was Jesus of course, and His disciples. They were the only participants. Jesus is presenting this ordinance directly to His disciples – those who were already committed to following Him. Jesus didn't take this ordinance out into the Temple precincts or the public market place to use as an evangelistic tool to bring the lost to faith in Himself. No, He only delivered it to those who were already believers.

For this reason, at Grace Chapel, while we've always observed an open Communion, meaning you don't have to be a regular attendee to participate, we do insist that you should be a born-again believer to participate. If the purpose of Communion is to remember what Jesus has done for you, if you haven't availed yourself to the gift of salvation that He has purchased with His blood, what's there for you to remember? On the night of the first Passover, it wasn't enough for the Passover lamb to just be slain; its blood must also have been applied to the doorpost and lentils. Without the application of the blood, there was no protection or deliverance from the judgment of the Death Angel.

This truth should also clear up the fallacy that observance of the Lord's Supper is necessary for salvation. If the ordinance was given only to believers then it is impossible for it to contribute in any way to salvation. Not to mention that the Bible clearly states that salvation doesn't come through works of any kind but by grace alone through faith alone.

2) Reflect (27-29) – The Corinthian church was a mess. It seems they had a habit of combining their weekly love feasts (potlucks) with their observance of the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, the selfish actions they engaged in during their common meals only served to disgrace their participation in the Lord's Supper. But let's just say this up front – no one is "worthy" to participate in anything involving the church, its ordinances or ministries. It's Jesus that makes us worthy. And yet, if there remains any stubborn, unrepentant sin in the believer's life then their participation in Communion only serves to mock what Jesus did on the cross to cleanse them from all sin.

Paul's warning here for reverence through self-examination isn't to cause believers who don't feel worthy to exclude themselves from the Lord's Supper but is a call for all believers to prepare themselves to receive the elements of Communion with the right heart. Paul is asking each Christian to do an honest appraisal of their heart, not engage in some form of self-denial and self-effacing separation from the Body.

3) Reaffirm (31) – As we remember what Jesus has done for us and reflect on what it means for our lives, current and eternal, we should then have every reason to reaffirm our love for Jesus Christ, which also means we will seek to follow in His footsteps by striving to live a life of holiness, obedience and complete dependence on Him. Jesus Himself gave us the true measure of love for Him when He said, If you love Me, keep My commandments (Jn 14:15). If we love Him, we'll do what He says without complaint or excuse. I've heard too many times, "I know I should do...but I just can't right now." Christ's call to obedience doesn't depend on our current circumstances rather; our circumstances merely reveal our level of obedience.

While we are reaffirming our love for Christ, let us also reaffirm our love for Christ's people – other believers. The problems in the Corinthian church stemmed divisions and factions which were caused by selfish attitudes. When we come to church only looking to be ministered to, then we're

missing one of the greatest blessings to be found in church – ministering to others through fellowship, prayer, encouragement and concern. Church isn't all about me and my needs; its about being empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to address the needs of those around you. Yes, there are days where you need to be ministered to but the vast majority of the time, we need to be concerned for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Finally, participating in Communion allows us to reaffirm our hope and expectation in the imminent return of Jesus Christ (26). Paul is in no way implying that we should be passively sitting on our hands just waiting for Jesus to come back. Not at all! In fact, he says every time we observe the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the Lord's death. The word translated proclaim is usually translated as preach. Every time we participate in communion we are preaching a sermon on the death of Jesus Christ. Who are we preaching to? In our acknowledgement of what Christ's death accomplished for us we're preaching a sermon of gratitude and thanksgiving to our father in heaven, a sermon of Christ's victory to Satan and all his allies and a sermon of forgiveness and redemption to the lost world who watches us. *****As the men come to prepare the elements, let's take a moment to reflect on what Christ has done for us.*****

Baptism

The ordinance of baptism has also given rise to disputes and division in the church. More than 1 denomination says it is a requirement for salvation while many dispute the method it should be done in. as far as the method is concerned, the word baptize is an English transliteration of the Greek word baptizo which means to immerse, submerge, to make overwhelmed (fully wet). That should be self explanatory and that's why we dunk. But as far as being required for salvation, let's again go back to the OT. Baptism as we know it isn't mentioned in the OT but the picture of baptism is certainly there; or at least the Apostle Paul says it was (1 Cor 10:1-4).

Paul is referring to Israel's escape from Egypt and subsequent 40 yr. wandering in the wilderness but he makes a curious reference in v2. He says that all Israel were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Well, we know that all Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea on dry land and followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night

but what does Paul mean that they were baptized into Moses? Basically, Paul is simply stating that all of Israel were identified with Moses as they passed through the sea and followed the cloud, just as Christians are identified with Christ by passing through the waters of baptism. The important question is again, did Israel pass through the Red Sea in order to be redeemed from Egypt or were they already redeemed? They were already redeemed; redeemed by the blood of the Passover lambs. Their “baptism” didn’t contribute to their redemption from Egypt anymore that our baptism contributes in any way to our salvation.

So, if baptism doesn’t contribute to our salvation, what’s the whole purpose of it anyway? There are 4:

1) Obedience ([Mt 28:19](#)) – We baptize new converts because Jesus told His disciples to do this. To put off or refuse baptism would be a great hindrance to a new convert’s discipleship. If this were the only reason, it would be enough but there are more.

2) Identification – The first mention of baptism in the NT is that of John the Baptist. Now John’s baptism was that of repentance, calling Jews back to the fundamentals of their faith. His baptism was not identical to Christian baptism. And yet, Jesus came to John and submitted Himself to be baptized by him. Why? Jesus lived a sinless life and didn’t need to repent of anything. You could say that Jesus submitted to baptism in order to identify with sinners and you would be correct but there’s more to it than just that. In being baptized by John, Jesus was confessing as His own, sins which He had not committed, and He repented of them before God. By this, he was numbered with the transgressors and bore the sins of many. Of course, the full ramifications of this wouldn’t be felt until He was nailed to the cross but its there in preview in His baptism. He identified with sinners.

What’s amazing about this is that when we participate in believer’s baptism, we are, in turn, identifying ourselves with Christ ([Col 2:12](#); [Gal 3:27](#)). Our baptism is a reflection, a reliving of Christ’s burial and glorious resurrection. Just as He was resurrected to new life, so are we.

3) Declaration ([Rom 6:3-4](#)) – Baptism is a tangible declaration that a spiritual event has taken place in our lives. When we accept Christ, we do that within the confines of our hearts, a place where no one but God can

see. But, in order to give public evidence of that very private spiritual event, we participate in public baptism. It's not just a public declaration of our personal faith in Christ, it's also a declaration that we will walk in newness of that life. We see this all through the Book of Acts, people hear the gospel; they accept Christ as their Savior and are immediately baptized as a declaration of their decision for Christ.

Again, baptism doesn't contribute to your salvation; it's merely a sign that points to your salvation. When you travel East on Hwy 90 you'll eventually see a sign that tells you how far you are from New Orleans. Now, the sign does say New Orleans but the reality and totality of the city of New Orleans cannot be contained within a sliver of metal painted green and white. No, the city is too large and massive for that. The sign merely points to the greater reality. That's the way baptism operates. There's no possible way the totality of salvation could be contained in the simple rite of baptism, the beautiful ordinance merely points to the greater reality that is the gift of salvation.

4) Unity ([1 Cor 12:13](#)) – As we have seen in Eph 4:4-6, baptism is one of the 7 unities that binds all believers together. Why would you not want to possess this wonderful blessing? It is your birthright as a Christian.