

APPENDIX 6

THE SACRAMENTS: BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER



BAPTISM

Jesus Christ calls his people to be baptized as an expression of their faith in him. Our faith is not in the act of baptism, rather baptism is an expression of our faith in Christ.

1. Baptism is not necessary for salvation. Eph. 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. Salvation comes, not by works that we do but by faith in Jesus Christ.”* The works that Paul is speaking of here include any “good works” we might do in order to try to put ourselves into God’s favor, especially religious rituals such as keeping kosher, offering sacrifices to idols, or baptism.

2. Baptism is not an element of the gospel. In Rom. 1:16 the apostle Paul says, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”* Salvation only comes through faith in the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor. 1:17 Paul says, *“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”* Salvation is through the gospel. Of course, Paul baptized and thought it was important, but this verse clearly shows the primacy of the gospel over baptism. Baptism is something separate from the gospel.

Good works and religious rituals convey no forgiveness, impart no life, and grant no salvation. The sacraments are *a* vehicle for your faith and God’s grace, but the only acceptable object of faith is God himself.

Baptism reflects a confession of faith in Christ.

In Scripture the pattern is that belief proceeds baptism. **Acts 18:8** says, *“...and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.”* **Acts 8:12-13** reads, *“But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.”*¹

Acts 16:30-33 tells about a man who came to the apostle Paul and asked him point blank: *“What must I do to be saved?”* The apostle did not tell him to be baptized. He said; *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.”* Then the passage goes on to tell us that Paul spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. And *“... the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”* ²

We know when it speaks of his whole family being baptized it is not talking about infant children because it also says that they spoke the word of the Lord to the whole family. **Acts 16:34**, the next verse says, *“he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.”* Whatever ages were represented in this man's family they were all able to hear and believe and rejoice. They were baptized because they had believed. This is what Christ calls all those who have believed in him to do.

Frequently Asked Questions on Baptism:

1. Does Acts 2:38 teach that you have to be baptized to be forgiven?

Acts 2:38 says, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

In Acts 2 Peter is preaching to the very people who crucified Jesus Christ. As he is preaching, the Holy Spirit convicts them with the realization of what they have done. The Bible says they were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the other disciples, *“What shall we do?”* We just talked about the very direct and specific question: *“What must I do to be saved?”* I think, in light of the context, that this question may be a bigger broader question. It is a larger question and it receives a larger answer.

The first thing we have to understand here is the meaning of the word “for” in the phrase. The word “for” here does not mean that the baptism is

¹ It is the belief of the pastors and elders at Christ Community that there isn't good biblical evidence for the practice of baptizing the infant children of believing parents, despite the fact that we have studied the issue closely.

in order that you may have forgiveness. It simply means be baptized because you have the forgiveness of sin.

If I said I am going to the store for milk you would understand that I was going to the store in order to get milk. But if I said I received a prize for winning a race you would understand that it meant something different. I wasn't given the prize in order that I might win the race, I was given because I had already won the race. If I received a bill for services rendered, that would mean the bill was for (in connection with or in relation to) the services that had already been rendered. Well, the Greek word that is translated “for” here is like that. It doesn't mean that the baptism is in order that you may have the forgiveness of sins it simply means that the baptism is in relationship to the forgiveness of sins that is already yours the moment you repent and believe the gospel. So we might paraphrase the passage like this, “repent and then be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ as an expression of your repentance and a symbol of the forgiveness that you have received because of your repentance.”

The reason we know this is what that verse means is because this is what the whole book of Acts teaches. In the very same sermon in **Acts 2:21**, Peter quotes the prophet Joel and simply says, “*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” Faith in Christ is the essential element in receiving forgiveness, and baptism is the external expression of faith that is expected of all believers. In **Acts 3:19**, Peter is preaching again and he says: “*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...*” What this teaches us is that repentance and faith are the essential elements in receiving forgiveness.

Look at **Acts 10:43**. It says, “*All the prophets testify about him [Christ] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*” That's the message that is repeated throughout the book of Acts and throughout the rest of the Bible as well. Look at the next verse, **Acts 10:44**, it says, “*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.*” This is very important.

In **Acts 2:38** Peter said “*Repent and be baptized ... And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” But here you have people who, hearing the message, believe in Christ and immediately receive the gift of the Spirit. What this shows is that the essential thing – the necessary element – is not the baptism but the belief. After the believers receive the Spirit in Acts 10 the Jewish Christians are astounded that they have received the Spirit and are speaking in tongues just as the disciples did at Pentecost.

Now look down at the conclusion of the episode in **10:47-48**. Peter says, “*Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*” You see, these people received forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit the moment they believed in Christ as their Lord and Savior, then they were baptized as an outward symbol of that inward gift

of God which had already been received. Baptism is not the means by which we receive salvation but it is a symbol of our faith in Christ and His grace in us.

2. If baptism isn't necessary for my salvation why does it matter at all?

The short answer is because Scripture commands it. It isn't denominational – although they may argue over the “how” and “who” – it is biblical. Jesus made baptism a part of His ministry and a part of our mission.

It began when God called John the Baptist at the beginning of the gospels to baptize with water for repentance. It continued in the ministry of Jesus Himself. **John 4:1** says, “*Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John,*” although it was the disciples, not Jesus who did the actual immersing (**John 4:2**). The practice was continued by the followers of Christ not because of their own wisdom, but because of the command of the Lord. At the end of his earthly ministry Jesus said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (**Matt. 28:19**). So Jesus made baptism part of his ministry and part of our mission.

Baptism is a God given symbol of the most precious thing in the world. It is an outward symbol of the real and profound spiritual change that God's grace brings in the life of a frail, fallen human being. It's a symbol of the washing away of our sins. Every one of us needs to be inwardly washed clean of our sins through forgiveness. And if, by the grace of God, we know what it means to be washed within, then Christ calls us to be baptized as an outward, visible, physical symbol of that inward, invisible, spiritual washing.

It is also a symbol of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The moment you receive Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is poured into your life and you are immersed into a whole new relationship with God. Rebirth, renewal, the Holy Spirit flooding our lives... these are the inner, spiritual realities that are pictured by the outward, physical act of baptism.

It is a symbol of new life through oneness with Christ. **Rom. 6:4** says, “*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*” When you come under the water in baptism it pictures the old you – the person that you used to be is dying – and when you come up it is a picture of the beginning of a new life. Baptism is a ceremony that powerfully pictures the most precious thing in the world – the change that Jesus Christ brings into the life of one who believes in Him.

Baptism is an act of love, of faith, and obedience. **John 14:15**, “*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*” God doesn't want you to think of baptism as something you trade to him for forgiveness or salvation. He doesn't want it to be something you give to him only because you think

that by giving it you will get something better in return. He wants you to be baptized because you want to be baptized for him.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is a church observance in which believers share bread and the cup as a memorial to Christ's crucified body and shed blood (**Mt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26**). By vividly reminding us of the price Jesus paid to save us, Communion calls us to self-examination and spiritual renewal. It is an important means of grace and of communion with our risen Lord. It is not to be observed carelessly or indifferently (**1 Cor. 11:27-34**).

Matt. 26:26-29, records the initiation of the Lord's Supper. *"²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'"*

In **1 Cor. 11:23-25** Paul writes, *"²³For 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 meaning of the Lord's Supper is complex, rich, and full. There are several things symbolized and affirmed in the Lord's Supper.

1. Christ's Death. When we participate in the Lord's Supper we symbolize the death of Christ because our actions give a picture of his death for us. When the bread is broken it symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body, and when the cup is poured out it symbolizes the pouring out of Christ's blood for us. This is why participating in the Lord's Supper is also a kind of proclamation, **1 Cor. 11:26**, *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

2. Our Participation in the Benefits of Christ's Death. Jesus commanded his disciples, *"Take, eat; this is my body"* (**Matt. 26:26**). As we individually reach out and take the cup for ourselves, each one of us is by that action proclaiming, "I am taking the benefits of Christ's death to myself." When we do this we give a symbol of the fact that we participate in or share in the benefits earned for us by the death of Jesus.

3. Spiritual Nourishment. Just as ordinary food nourishes our physical bodies, so the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper give spiritual nourishment to us. But they also picture the fact that there is spiritual

nourishment and refreshment that Christ is giving to our souls – indeed, the ceremony that Jesus instituted is in its very nature designed to teach us this.

John 6:53-57, *“⁵³Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.”*

Certainly Jesus is not speaking of a literal eating of his flesh and blood. But if he is not speaking of a literal eating and drinking, then he must have in mind a spiritual participation in the benefits of the redemption he earns. This spiritual nourishment, so necessary for our souls, is both symbolized and experienced in our participation in the Lord's Supper.

4. The Unity of Believers. When Christians participate in the Lord's Supper together they also give a clear sign of their unity with one another. In fact, in **1 Cor. 10:17** Paul says, *“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.”*

When we put these four things together, we begin to realize some of the rich meaning of the Lord's Supper – when I participate I come into the presence of Christ, I remember that he died for me, I participate in the benefits of his death, I receive spiritual nourishment, and I am united with all other believers who participate in this Supper. What great cause for thanksgiving and joy is to be found in this Supper of the Lord!

The presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper:

We believe that there is a symbolic and spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Jesus spoke in symbolic ways many times when speaking of himself. He said, for example, *“I am the true vine” (John 15:1)*, or *“I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved” (John 10:9)*, or *“I am the bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:41)*. In a similar way, when Jesus says, *“This is my body,”* he means it in a symbolic way, not in an actual, literal, physical way. In fact, as he was sitting with his disciples holding the bread, the bread was in his hand but it was distinct from his body and that was, of course, evident to the disciples. None of the disciples present would have thought that the loaf of bread that Jesus held in his hand was actually his physical body, for they could see his body before their eyes. They would have naturally understood Jesus' statement in a symbolic way. Similarly, when Jesus said, *“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20)*, he certainly did not mean that the cup was actually the new covenant, but that the cup represented the new covenant.

The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper did not change into the body and blood of Christ, nor did they somehow contain the body and blood of Christ. Rather, the bread and wine symbolized the body and blood of Christ, and they gave a visible sign of the fact that Christ himself was truly present through his Holy Spirit.

John Calvin said, "By the showing of the symbol the thing itself is also shown. For unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him.... And the godly ought by all means to keep this rule: whenever they see symbols appointed by the Lord, to think and be persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is surely present there. For why would the Lord put in your hand the symbol of his body, except to assure you of a true participation in it?" (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.10, p. 1371)

Calvin was careful to differ both with Roman Catholic teaching (which said that the bread became Christ's body) and with Lutheran teaching (which said that the bread contained Christ's body).

Calvin wrote: "But we must establish such a presence of Christ in the Supper as may neither fasten him to the element of bread, nor enclose him in bread, nor circumscribe him in any way (all which things, it is clear, detract from his heavenly glory)" (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.17.19, p. 1381).

We agree with this view. In addition to the fact that the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ, we believe that Christ is also spiritually present in a special way as we partake of the bread and wine. Indeed, Jesus promised to be present whenever believers worship. "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (**Matt. 18:20**). And if he is especially present when Christians gather to worship, then we would expect that he will be present in a special way in the Lord's Supper. We meet him at his table, to which he comes to give himself to us. As we receive the elements of bread and wine in the presence of Christ, so we partake of him and all his benefits. We "feed upon him in our hearts" with thanksgiving. Indeed, even a child who knows Christ will understand this without being told and will expect to receive a special blessing from the Lord during this ceremony, because the meaning of it is so inherent in the very actions of eating and drinking. Yet we must not say that Christ is present apart from our personal faith, but only meets and blesses us there in accordance with our faith in him. In what way is Christ present then? Certainly there is a symbolic presence of Christ, but it is also a genuine spiritual presence and there is genuine spiritual blessing in this ceremony.

Notes on the Roman Catholic view of the Mass:

For Protestants the idea that the mass is in any sense a repetition of the death of Christ seems to mark a return to the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant, which were "*a reminder of sin year after year*" (**Heb. 10:3**). Instead of the assurance of complete forgiveness of sins through the once for all sacrifice of Christ (**Heb. 10:12**), the idea that the mass is a repeated sacrifice gives a constant reminder of sins and remaining guilt to be atoned for week after week.

With regard to the teaching that only priests can officiate at the Lord's Supper, the New Testament gives no instructions at all that place restrictions on the people who can preside at Communion. And since Scripture places no such restrictions on us, it would not seem to be justified to say that only priests can dispense the elements of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, since the New Testament teaches that all believers are priests and members of a "royal priesthood" (**1 Peter 2:9; cf. Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22**), we should not specify a certain class of people who have the rights of priests, as in the old covenant, but we should emphasize that all believers share the great spiritual privilege of coming near to God.

Finally, any continuation of the restriction that will not allow lay persons to drink of the cup of the Lord's Supper would be arguing from caution and tradition to justify disobedience to Jesus' direct commands, not only the command to his disciples where he said, "*Drink of it, all of you*" (**Matt. 26:27**), but also the direction Paul recorded, in which Jesus said, "*Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me*" (**1 Cor. 11:25**).