

Lesson 2: Baptism & Communion; Disciples of Christ History & Confession of Faith

WATER BAPTISM

I. What is the meaning of baptism?

1. IT ILLUSTRATES CHRIST'S _____ AND RESURRECTION.

*".. that Christ died for our sins...and he was buried...and he arose from the grave..."
1 Corinthians 15:3-4*

"For in baptism you see how your old, evil nature died with him and was buried with him; and then you came up out of death with him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead." Colossians 2:12

2. IT ILLUSTRATES MY _____ AS A CHRISTIAN.

"When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

II. Why should I be baptized?

1. TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE SET BY _____

"Then one day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John there in the Jordan River." Mark 1:9

2. BECAUSE CHRIST _____ IT.

"Therefore, go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you" Matthew 28: 19-20a

III. Why are we baptized by immersion?

1. BECAUSE _____ WAS BAPTIZED THAT WAY.

"After his baptism, as soon as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened to him" Matthew 3:16

1. THE WORD "BAPTIZE" MEANS "TO _____ WATER.

The Greek word *baptizo* means "to immerse or dip under water".

2. IT BEST SYMBOLIZES A BURIAL AND RESURRECTION.

Baptism doesn't make you a believer. It shows that you already believe. Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ by God's grace does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring --it's the outward symbol of the commitment you made in your heart. There is no magic in the water!

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus never asked His disciples to remember his birth. But He did instruct them to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols: Baptism and The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an objective lesson that represents a great spiritual truth for believers.

1. WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER? (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
2. WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS AND WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT? (Mark 14:22-24)
3. ONLY THOSE ALREADY _____ SHOULD TAKE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

"For if he eats the bread and drinks from the cup unworthily, not thinking about the body of Christ and what it means, he is eating and drinking God's judgment upon himself for he is trifling with the death of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:29

4. YOU SHOULD _____ YOURSELF BEFORE TAKING THE LORD'S SUPPER.

"So, if anyone eats this bread and drinks from this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, he is guilty of sin against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why a man should examine himself carefully before eating the bread and drinking from the cup." 1 Corinthians 11:27-28

- a. self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:27)
- b. confessing my sins (1 John 1:9)
- c. recommitment (Romans 12:1)
- d. restoring relationships (Matthew 5:23-24)

Disciples of Christ History and Polity

I. Disciples History

In 1832, Barton Stone and Thomas and (son) Alexander Campbell united to form The Christian Church. As a "restoration" movement, they wanted to eliminate some of the exclusive characteristics associated with denominationalism (such as creeds and ecclesial hierarchy) and return to the original order of the church found in the 1st century Church as described in the New Testament. Also known as the Stone-Campbell Movement, or the Restoration Movement, the early history of the Disciples of Christ is also shared with two other branches of the movement, the Churches of Christ and the independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Formal division during the Civil War in 1868 meant that white & black churches would split. In 1906, The Christian Church divided into two branches over disagreements around the use of instrumental music in worship (oddly enough). In 1927, yet, another split occurred, and the

more conservative Independent Christian Churches/Church of Christ branch was formed. Like other Free Church Protestant denominations, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) maintains autonomous local churches that are congregationally governed. Most Disciples of Christ worship services consist of weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, a distinguishing hallmark of the Disciples.

Stone-Campbell

Here is a more in-depth look at Stone and Campbell. In western Pennsylvania, Presbyterian minister Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), frustrated with the differences among Christian denominations, proposed uniting Christians under the principles of the New Testament church in 1809. Campbell's son Alexander (1788-1866), a Baptist minister, agreed with his father on the need to do away with differences among faith groups. They did not like creeds or confessions. Although Campbell was a trinitarian, he was an advocate of slavery. Some of Alexander Campbell's publications include Christian Baptist publication July 4, 1823-1830, Millennial Harbinger 1830-1866, and Declaration and Address. Alexander Campbell began carrying the movement through Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia.

About the same time, minister Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) was breaking away from the Presbyterian church in Kentucky. He found that he could no longer follow their doctrines. Stone chose to rely solely on the Bible for theology, in the footsteps of the early church. Barton Stone was a non-trinitarian, often accused of being Unitarian, yet Stone was an abolitionist. Stone took the name "Christians" for members of his church, to remove denominational labels. It's unclear whether the leaders of these two simultaneous movements were aware of each other's work, but Stone and Alexander Campbell finally met in Georgetown, Kentucky in 1824.

The two leaders shared many areas of agreement. Both wanted to restore the authority of the Bible and get back to the ways of the New Testament church. Opponents called Stone's followers "New Lights" or "Stoneites," while Campbell's critics dubbed his people "Reformers" or "Campbellites." The two groups merged in 1832 in Lexington, Kentucky. From that time, they became the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. Originally, Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell saw much in common in their desires for restoration to New Testament ways. While the Disciples do not recognize creeds, they have developed many slogans and statements of principles designed to recall and reinforce their distinctive affirmations. Such slogans include:

"We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the Divine"
Early Stone-Campbell slogan.

"Where the scriptures speak, we speak. Where the scriptures are silent, we are silent."
Introduced by Thomas Campbell

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Early Christian slogan attributed to various sources.

Disciples Split

For many members of the Disciples, following the example of the first century church meant strict observance of what was written in the Bible. If it wasn't there, they didn't want to add it. Those members objected to instrumental music and organized missionary activity because they couldn't find these in the Book of Acts or other New Testament writings. Dissension went on for decades, leading to a split in 1906. The breakaway group, which reorganized as the Churches of Christ, uses a cappella, or unaccompanied singing only.

Yet another split began in 1926 and culminated in 1971 when the Disciples restructured. Church of Christ DOC was the formation of the Black church in 1954. Christian Churches of Christ in 1971 were primarily independent. Those breakaway congregations became known as Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, or Independent Christian Churches since they reject denominationalism. That group separated because it felt the Disciples were leaning toward liberalism and modernism. Obviously, the similarity in names has led to much confusion. Scholars generally classify the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as liberal, Christian Churches/Churches of Christ in the middle, and Churches of Christ as conservative. Some splits were, of course, due to a lack of racial and cultural diversity. While the Disciples through the years have made attempts to reach cultures beyond the predominantly White majority of its North American roots, many, such as William Hobgood have critiqued the effort as somewhat feeble. Here is a brief timeline of notable socio-cultural events within the Disciple's evolution:

- Christian Woman Board of Missions 1874
- Fellowship of Christian Missionary Society 1875
- Crutches of Christ 1889
- ACMS 1890's evangelism to Negroes
- 1907 Disciples become charter members of Federal Council of Churches
- Ecumenism 1908, 1910 Edinburgh, 1948 WCC, ecumenism redefined
- 1917 NCMC, Native Americans
- Consolidation, 1929-1968 evangelism vs. social justice. inter-religious dialogue Missions 1920's (isolationism)
- Hart-Cellar Act (1965) lifts all restrictions on immigration
- 1968-2005 no changes to Provisional Design
- Light of the World Christian Church centennial history written in 1996 (my context)
- 2012 Regional vote to uphold the ordination of LGBT ministers.

Of course, history is identity, not merely names and dates. An updated and expanded, more inclusive DOC history book is planned for January 2013 release.

II. Disciples Polity

The Design is the Disciples of Christ primary document and source of polity and governance. It basically consists of a Preamble, Membership and Participation, Congregational Ministries, Rights and Responsibilities, General Assembly, General Board, General Ministries, Relationships of Other Organizations to the DOC, and Revisions and Amendments. There are

three expressions of the Christian Church: General, Regional, and Congregational. When compared to other forms of denominational polity, the Disciples of Christ would be considered "Congregational" in nature: Episcopal (Bishop rules), Presbyterian (Elders rules), Congregational (Congregation rules). This indicates that each congregation maintains its own autonomy to function as it sees fit, while also being responsible in cooperating with the covenant principles of the Disciples of Christ.

One of the important points we discussed in class is that congregational autonomy and unity also creates dichotomy. Disciples are bonded together by a covenant, rather than a contract. A covenant denotes responsibility, while a contract is characterized by guidelines and rights. Covenant also gives way to relationships, while contracts do not generally allow for any more intimacy than that of conducting business.

Within the Disciples polity, there is room for freedom and accountability w/out coercion - or "responsible freedom." However, for Michael Kinnemon the problem is that Disciples can be too ecumenical but don't know their own identity. For William Chris Hobgood, "no two individuals are exactly alike, nor are two social systems, such as congregations. But each has certain core elements" (Born Apart, Becoming One p.29)

Disciples maintain a set of certain covenantal values, although they do not adhere to any creeds.:

1. The Confession of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
2. The Open and Inclusive Lord's Supper
3. The Ministry (Priesthood) of All Believers
4. The Love of Unity, Wherein We Are Called to Lead in the healing of the Broken Church and World
5. Restoring the Justice of God: A Radical Commitment to the Truth That God's Whole Creation is Good

Disciples Confession of Faith

This confession is the opening paragraph in the Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is used by many Disciples congregations in worship as an affirmation of the faith of the church throughout the ages — not as a "test of fellowship," but as a statement of faith that identifies the Disciples' commitment to and place within the universal and ecumenical church. As members of the Christian Church, we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world. In Christ's name and by his grace we accept our mission of witness and service to all people. We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in God's covenant of love which binds us to God and to one another. Through baptism into Christ, we enter into newness of life and are made one with the whole people of God. In the communion of the Holy Spirit, we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ. At the Table of the Lord, we celebrate with thanksgiving the saving acts and presence of Christ. Within the universal church we receive the gift of ministry and the light of scripture. In the bonds of Christian faith, we yield ourselves to God that we may serve the One whose kingdom has no end. Blessing, glory, and honor be to God forever. Amen. Disciples of Christ Beliefs.

Baptism - Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It signifies new birth, a cleansing from sin, the individual's response to God's grace, and acceptance into the faith community.

Bible - Disciples of Christ consider the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and recognize 66 books in the canon, but beliefs vary on the inerrancy of Scripture. Individual churches cover the spectrum from fundamentalist to liberal.

Communion - Open communion, where all Christians are welcome, was one of the reasons for the founding of the Christian Church. In the Lord's Supper, "the living Christ is met and received in the sharing of the bread and the cup, representative of the body and blood of Jesus."

Ecumenism - The Christian Church constantly reaches out to other Christian denominations. One of the early goals was to overcome the differences among Christian faith groups. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) belongs to the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches and has had conversations with the Roman Catholic Church.

Equality - One of the four priorities of the Christian Church is to become an anti-racist church. The Disciples of Christ include 440 predominantly African American congregations, 156 Hispanic congregations, and 85 Asian American congregations. The Disciples also ordain women.

Heaven, Hell - Views on heaven and hell among the Disciples of Christ range from belief in literal places, to trust in God to provide eternal justice. The church itself does not engage in "speculative theology" and lets its individual members decide for themselves.

Jesus Christ - The Disciples' Confession states that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God ... Lord and Savior of the world." Belief in Christ as Savior is the only requirement for salvation.

Priesthood of Believers - The ministry of believers extends to all members of the Christian Church. While the denomination has ordained clergy, lay people play key roles in the church.

Trinity - Disciples of Christ profess God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their Confession, and they baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Church members are allowed freedom of opinion on this and other doctrines and are expected to give others that same freedom.

Our Statement of Faith

What we believe:

- **In essential beliefs -- we have unity.**

"We are all parts of the body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. For us there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and we all have the same God and Father who is over us all and in us all and living through every part of us." Ephesian 4:4-6

- **In non-essential beliefs -- we have liberty.**

"Give a warm welcome to any brother who wants to join you, even though his faith is weak. Don't criticize him for having different ideas from yours about what is right and wrong. They are God's servants, not yours. They are responsible to him, not to you. . . Yes, each of us will give an account of himself to God. . . You may know that there is nothing wrong with what you do, even from God's point of view, but keep it to yourself; don't flaunt your faith in front of others who might be hurt by it." Romans 14:1, 4, 12, 22

- **In all our beliefs -- we show love.**

"...if I knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything. even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love." 1 Corinthians 13:2

Our Statement of Lifestyle

Beliefs are not worth much unless they are translated into actions. Based on what the Bible teaches, we feel very strongly about the following seven practices:

- 1. Bible as our sole authority. (2 Timothy 3:16)**
- 2. Autonomy of each local church. (Colossians 1:18)**
- 3. Priesthood of every believer (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9)**
- 4. Tithing (Malachi 3:10)**
- 5. Immersion (Colossians 2:12)**
- 6. Spirit-led living (John 15:5; Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 5:17)**
- 7. Telling others about Christ (1 Peter 3:15)**