

The Christian Rites, part 10 of the Baptist Faith and Message Series  
May 7, 2017

This morning I am continuing the series I started back in February. I am preaching on the articles of the Baptist Faith and Message, a document that describes what most Southern Baptists generally believe. It is not a do or die statement of beliefs. We do not use it as a creed, demanding that you believe everything in it in order to join our church. It is simply a summary of basic beliefs that Southern Baptists generally agree on.

Nor is it cut in stone. We are currently, as a denomination, on our third version of this statement of beliefs. The first was in 1925. It was modified in 1963, the version that our church affirms, and it was changed again in 2000. I do not believe every article as they are written. But I am in general agreement with the great majority of what the three versions state.

The topics this morning are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Please note the title of the sermon this morning. It uses a word that I generally do not use. That is the word rite, r-i-t-e. (**rite = "a ceremonial act, observance, or procedure in accordance with prescribed rule or custom, as in religious use" )**)

According to Webster's Dictionary, a rite is "a ceremonial act, observance, or procedure in accordance with prescribed rule or custom, as in religious use."

I usually use the word ritual when speaking of today's sermon subjects, though Webster's dictionary makes a distinction between a rite and a ritual. A ritual, as defined by Webster, is made up of a group of rites. So a rite is smaller or shorter than a ritual.

We observe two rites as Baptists, those being baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some churches have more than two. The we have only these two is that only these two find their basis in the Bible. So let's read what the Baptist Faith and Message says about them.

## **VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper**

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing

- > the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior,
- > the believer's death to sin,
- > the burial of the old life,
- > and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

*Matt. 3:13-17; Matt. 26:26-30; Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; Luke 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; Acts 8:35-39; Acts 16:30-33; Acts 20:7; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:16,21; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Col. 2:12;*

The Baptist Faith and Message speaks of baptism and the Lord's Supper as ordinances. The word ordinance can be a synonym for command. But as we use it in this context, it

is a command to practice a certain rite or ceremony. Jesus gave us other commands, like the command to love each other. But He only gave us these two rites. Let us look briefly at each of these and their meaning for us.

Baptism was not practiced in the Jewish religion by Jews. They were born into the Jewish religion as children of adult Jews. But they welcomed non-Jews to become part of the Jewish religion. These non-Jews had to go through a series of steps or rites in order to convert to Judaism. One of these steps was a washing or baptism. So Jews were familiar with the rite of baptism, but not for themselves.

That changed with the teaching ministry of John the Baptist, or more literally, John the baptizer. John called for Jews to admit their sinfulness and repent of their sin. As a public demonstration of this they were to be baptized. This was not Christian baptism. This was the baptism of John. The Jews who underwent this baptism were baptized in the name of John. They were identifying with the teaching of John. (Acts 19:1-7)

Again, this was not Christian baptism. Christian baptism occurred later, after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples, His missionaries called for people to believe in Jesus as their Lord and to be baptized in His name. The following verses are at the end of Peter's sermon to a crowd that had gathered on a neighborhood street in Jerusalem.

**Acts 2:36-38 (NIV)** "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is Christian baptism. **Christian Baptism is a public rite of immersion in water symbolizing our obedience and commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord.**

**Baptism is not optional for a Christian.** We become Christians by receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord. To receive Jesus as Lord means to turn our lives over to Him and live out His commands. And His command is that His followers be publicly baptized in His name as a testimony to the world of their relationship to Him.

This is the meaning of Christian baptism. A baby cannot do this. A baby cannot understand his sin and choose to trust in Jesus as Savior. A baby cannot submit herself to Jesus as Lord. We believe that you must be old enough and mature enough to understand your sin and need for a Savior before you can choose to become a Christian and then be baptized. We do not baptize infants. We do not baptize very young children. We are very careful about baptizing older children, teens, and even adults. We try to make sure they understand what Christian baptism is and what it means before we baptize. Not everyone who asks to be baptized comes with the right understanding of Christian truth, and I have to turn them away, at least for a time.

In addition to baptism as a testimony of your new commitment to Jesus the method of baptism carries additional meaning. **The act of immersion, being lowered into water and raised up out of water, symbolizes us dead, and being lowered into a grave, and then rising up from the grave to new life.** We read of this in Romans 6.

**Romans 6:3-7 (NIV)** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Jesus says we must be born again to enter His kingdom, to receive Him as Savior and Lord. When you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit rebirths you, making you a new person in Jesus. I covered this in previous sermons in this series (March 12). Many spiritual changes take place in your relationship with God in that moment. The immersion act of baptism symbolizes what has already happened in you. The old you is gone and new you has been created.

This is one reason that we observe baptism by total immersion into water. Other Christians sprinkle or pour water on a person's head. But **the Greek word, *baptidzo*, literally means to “dip” or “plunge.”** So for the rite of Christian baptism, that means to immerse in water. When people are baptized in the Bible, this is what we see.

**Acts 8:36-38 (NIV)** As they (Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch) traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized (immersed) him.

If Philip was simply going to pour some water on the man's head, there would be no need to actually go down into the water. But that is what we see they did. Any mode other than immersion does not do justice to the symbolism described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6.

The mode of baptism is important, but not all important. To say that the mode is not important means that you could throw a water balloon at the person and if it pops and they get wet, they are thus baptized. Baptism is a symbolic act, but not every mode is a suitable symbol.

Never-the-less, I would make exceptions for someone lying on their death bed. In such a case I could put water on a person's head and call it baptism. Jesus is not less honored by such an act if the person's heart is right with Him by faith in Him alone for salvation. But if we can do what the word signifies, immerse, it is appropriate to do so.

Again, baptism is not optional for a true follower of Jesus. It is one obedient act of a life of serving Jesus.

The other Christian rite is the Lord's Supper. **The Lord's Supper is an act to commemorate Jesus' sacrificial death for us.**

A description of the Lord's Supper comes to us in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NIV)** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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." 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." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

You can use various terms to refer to the Lord's Supper. There are five different terms that come from the Bible.

**1. The Lord's Supper** (1 Cor 11:20)

**2. The Lord's Table** (1 Cor 10:21)

**3. Breaking of Bread** (Acts 2:42) The phrase, "breaking of bread" is used in two different ways in the Bible. It can mean a meal shared together. It can also mean the Lord's Supper.

**4. Communion** (1 Cor 10:16)

**1 Corinthians 10:16 (NIV)** Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

The word participation is the Greek word, *koinonia*, which means "fellowship, partnership, or communion." I covered that in part 9, on April 9th.

**5. The Eucharist**, from the Greek word for giving thanks, *eucharistees*. (Matt. 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor. 11:24)

**1 Corinthians 11:24 (NIV)** "... 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."

You can use any of these terms to refer to this Christian rite. But let us look at the elements of the rite.

The Lord's Supper consists of taking a piece of bread or cracker and identifying it as a symbol for Jesus when He died on the cross for your sins. It doesn't matter if it is made with yeast or not, is salted or not, whether it is made as individual pieces or you break it off of a larger loaf. The element itself is not as important as what you are thinking and praying as you eat it.

This is followed by the cup, which may be wine, watered down wine, or juice. Again, the element itself is not as important as what it means to us. It is a symbol for the blood of Jesus, the blood that drained out of him as He hung on the cross dying for us. That blood is important in atoning for our sins.

**Hebrews 9:22 (NIV)** "... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Jesus lost His blood for us in His death to pay for our sins. This allows us to enter into a new covenant relationship with God, one of righteousness. This is what it means when it says that "this cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus commands us to observe this rite. Baptism is a one time rite for each Christian. But we are to engage often in the Lord's supper as a memorial of Jesus' great sacrifice on our behalf.

Jesus does not say how often we should observe the Lord's Supper. Some churches observe the Lord's Supper everyday, while a few observe it once a year. Most churches fall somewhere in-between those two patterns. We observe the Lord's Supper together once a month.

We are warned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 to take it seriously by examining ourselves for sin, which we must then confess and repent of.

These, then are the two Christian rites given to us by Jesus. We believe they are symbolic acts only. There is no word in the Bible that the act itself is an automatic instrument of blessing from God. Some people believe they are and so call them sacraments instead of ordinances. Again, such meaning does not come from the Bible, so we do not agree with that tradition. We believe they are outward demonstrations of inward realities for those who are already in Christ.

### Invitation

Both of these rites are based on the death of Jesus on our behalf. In fact, everything about Christianity rests on the death and resurrection of Jesus. If you do not believe that He died in your place, for your sin, and was raised from the dead by God, then you are not a Christian, no matter what else in the Bible you believe. Jesus gave us these two rites as demonstrations of what He did for us and what His death brought to us.

This morning we give you the opportunity to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Won't you turn your life over to Him?