The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion

and why one should come before the other

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redemption
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What is an Ordinance?

An Ordinance is a practice to which the Lord Himself gave special significance. These are to be ordinarily and mandatorily done in our worship. The two official ordinances for the Church are Baptism and Communion.

The Lord's Supper (Communion) is the ongoing ordinance of the Church, which visibly represents the Gospel as is understood by Jesus' explanation in the upper room and, a day later, fulfilled in His death on the cross.

Luke 22:19-20 - And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

We do this as an obedient act of faith and worship in remembrance of the work of Jesus on our behalf. It is a beautiful thing to witness and to take part in on a regular basis as it reminds us of our unworthiness and God's grace. Its proper place is in the gathering of the church.

Biblical Order

Though, not everyone at church should participate in this. We believe that the Lord's Supper is for baptized believers only. We realize everyone is at a different place in their faith journey and healthy churches ought to have every kind of person coming to hear the Word. Some are just in the place where they need to do their initial act of faith by getting baptized, the one-time ordinance and visual example of the Gospel, and afterward take the regular ongoing step of communion with the Church. This is not a legalistic thing, rather this is what we believe the Scriptures teach concerning Communion.

I know, I know, the thief on the cross didn't get baptized or take communion and he went to heaven, saved from his sin. We are saved by faith alone, apart from any works, including the ordinances, but true Christians want to do what the Lord said and live holy lives, walking by the Spirit. So unless any of us dies before we can do any act of obedience and worship, we must live for our Lord.

Acts 2:41-42 - So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

"The breaking of bread" is representative of taking communion together regularly as a part of the foundation of the Church. It is meant for those who have publicly professed their faith, were baptized and submitted themselves to the institution of the Church and its leaders. It's the family meal, administered by the church, that indicates who is in and who is out. Baptism is the first one-time ordinance that identifies who is in the family of faith. It is done by a leader of a local church that can affirm their testimony and understanding of the Gospel. This is the sign that they are a Christian. "Baptism is an overt, public act that expresses inward decision and intent; since it is performed in the open, and not in secret, it becomes by its nature a confession of faith and allegiance embraced." G.R. Beasley-Murray

We see that first century believers always got baptized immediately upon initial faith. In our day and age we've lost this act of public profession of symbolic repentance and devotion to Christ. We now see "altar calls" and "pray a prayer after me" models of getting people to their faith moment. You will not find these practices anywhere in Scripture. Instead, what we find is "Repent and be baptized!"

Peter's first sermon ended with a call to be baptized:

Acts 2:38 - And Peter said to them, "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.

Paul's conversion story includes Ananias urging baptism:

Acts 22:16 - And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Jesus was baptized in the beginning of His ministry:

Matthew 3:15-17 - But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

The disciples were baptized early on as well:

John 4:1-2 - Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)

Jesus leaves the leaders of the Church with a clear duty to baptize new believers:

Matthew 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

<u>The simple and clear point to be made here is that Baptism should precede taking Communion in the Christian life.</u> In fact, it should come before doing anything else in the church. We want to faithfully and lovingly do as the Christians did from the beginning, even Christ Himself, to teach that the proper order or steps a believer should follow is to get baptized as soon as possible after coming to faith. Then, they are to regularly attend church worship services where they can join the other professing Christians at the Lord's Table to commune together with God.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 - The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Historical View

One of the earliest writings from Church History outside the Bible is the Didache (or Teachings of the Twelve Apostles). This is believed to have been written in the late first or early second century. It is basically a "Church Practices" manual that was compiled from local pastors in that time based on what they had learned from the Bible and the teachings of the Apostles. Chapter 9, paragraph 5 makes yet another, I believe legitimate application, as follows, "But let no one eat or drink of your eucharist (Lord's Supper) except those who have been baptized in the Lord's name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs."

The First London Baptist Confession was published in 1644 and revised in 1646. It says: "That Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized and after to partake of the Lord's Supper (Article XXXIX)."

The Baptist Faith & Message 2000 states in section 7 on Baptism and the Lord's Supper: "…Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper."

Loving Plea

Pastors are called to teach God's people, as our Lord in The Great Commission says, "... to obey all that I have commanded." The Lord has commanded baptism. If someone who is new comes to our church on a Communion Sunday it is our responsibility to give them the reason for this proper order and to ask all to examine themselves before taking the Lord's Supper. When a person has issues with this it is usually because other churches they've gone to before have never taught this or they just haven't seen it clearly for themselves in the Bible. Our hope is that upon reading this article one can have a better understanding of how important the ordinances are and that there is a proper way to think about them, and even participate in them.

1 Corinthians 11:28 - Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

If you, or a person you know, is a professing Christian but haven't been baptized, the question to ask is "Why not?" If we believe it is a command from the Lord to do then would procrastination be a matter of disobedience? This is why we want to urge people to do it soon and wait to take Communion until they have done the first initial obedient act of following Jesus. We have seen, time and time again, as we practice fencing the Table in this way that people begin to examine themselves, ask the same questions as to why they haven't been obedient yet, and then they make the decision to publicly profess their faith. It has been such a sweet thing to watch believers take this step.

If you have any further questions about this or want to talk to a pastor about getting baptized then please talk with us at church on Sunday or fill out a Connect Card on the website.