

Discover Baptism and Communion

Jesus Christ did not leave many instructions to govern our forms of worship. Jesus was most interested in our worshiping God from the heart. Yet Jesus himself did institute two religious rites, namely baptism and communion. Because Christ himself instructed his followers to perform these rites, we continue to do so today.

The aim of this study is to help you come to an understanding as to what the Bible teaches on these two subjects. Our hope is that through this knowledge, your experience of worship will be enriched.

Discussion Question:

What do you think Jesus meant when he said in John 4:24 “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”?

Baptism: The Rite of Initiation.

The word baptize, comes from the Greek word that means “to immerse”. The rite of baptism is simply the immersion of a believer in water. The primary reason that churches practice baptism, is because of the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Beyond obedience to Christ’s instructions, baptism is also a deeply meaningful act of worship. In order to understand why Jesus would command his followers to be immersed in water, we need to come to an appreciation of the meaning of baptism.

The Meaning of Baptism:

Baptism is a rite that is designed as an initiation, not so much an initiation to a local church, but an initiation into a relationship with Jesus Christ. In the practice of the New Testament church, when a person pledged their faith in Jesus Christ, they were baptized. Their baptism signified their desire to be identified as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Water Baptism is essentially an act of identification. When a person is baptized, they are identifying (or associating) themselves with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is why Matthew 28:19 speaks about being baptized in (or into) “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

More specifically, the act of baptism signifies your identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. (Romans 6:1-10)

Going under the water, you identify yourself with the death and burial of Christ. It is a physical representation of the fact that you have accepted Christ's death as your death to sin and your former way of life. In other words, baptism represents the fact that you have found forgiveness through Christ's death. One can also think of the cleansing power of water and see that baptism is a picture of our sins being cleaned by Christ.

Rising up from the water you identify yourself with the resurrection of Christ. It is a physical symbol of the fact that you have found new and eternal life in Christ. In other words, baptism represents the fact that through God's strength, you can live a life pleasing to God and are guaranteed an eternal home with Him.

Water baptism is a physical symbol of what occurs spiritually, when a person becomes a Christian by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. The act of water baptism itself does not accomplish the spiritual work. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that our salvation is not dependent on our works. The spiritual work is accomplished by Christ and received by faith. When you place your faith in Christ you die to sin and become alive to God. Baptism is a testimony to the fact that your salvation is based on the work of Christ. Therefore, the act of water baptism does not itself produce salvation, but rather is a testimony to salvation already received from Christ by faith.

With all of this in mind, baptism plays a significant role in the life of the individual Christian as well as the life of the larger community of faith.

1. **Baptism is a physical expression of beginning a life of faith and obedience to Christ:** In being baptized a person acts out physically what they have already done spiritually. They are giving physical expression to the spiritual commitment that they have already made to Jesus Christ.
2. **Baptism is an act of proclamation before others:** By publicly submitting to Christ in baptism, a person declares his desire to follow Christ and in doing so encourages others to do the same.
3. **Baptism is a submission to the Christian community:** 1 Corinthians 12:13 indicates that all Christians are baptized by the Spirit into one body. As a person publicly declares his desire to follow Jesus, he joins the family of believers. In addition, that person is asking the Christian community to encourage, support and keep him accountable in this pursuit.
4. **Baptism is a source of encouragement from God:** As a physical representation of the spiritual change that God has worked in a person's life, baptism serves as a reminder of God's grace. When you remember your baptism, God reminds you of our new identity in Christ. He reminds you that you have died to sin, and are

alive to God. You are forgiven, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God and you have eternal life with Christ.

Baptism is therefore a deeply meaningful act of worship.

Who May Be Baptized?

In light of the meaning of baptism, it is only appropriate for people who have already by faith experienced the spiritual realities to which baptism testifies. Baptism is only for believers, those who have come to Christ in repentance and faith. That is why it is often called believer's baptism. This is confirmed by Matthew 28:19-20 which indicates that baptism is part of discipleship (which means following Christ). Therefore, baptism is for followers of Jesus.

How Should Baptism Be Done?

In light of the meaning and symbolism of baptism discussed above, baptism should be the full immersion of the body in water. Immersion symbolizes death, burial and resurrection. Furthermore the word baptize itself means to immerse.

When Should a Believer Be Baptized?

Because Baptism is a rite of initiation, a person can be baptized at any time after he or she has become a Christian. One becomes a Christian by repenting of sin and placing faith in Jesus Christ. According to the example in the book of Acts, most believers were baptized immediately after trusting Christ. If a person truly trusts Christ and desires to follow him, then that person should be baptized.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe in your own words, what baptism is intended to portray?

According to what you have learned, would it be appropriate to baptize an infant?

Should a person who has been baptized as an infant consider being baptized again?

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Communion: The Rite of Remembrance:

Communion is an act of worship whereby the church commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Communion is a simple act whereby fellow believers share bread and juice/wine which remind them of sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself instituted the practice on the night before he was betrayed, (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20) designing it to be done in his remembrance. Because of this, communion is also referred to as the Lord's Supper.

The Meaning of Communion:

The act of communion is a simple act of sharing bread and juice/wine, but the bread and juice have deep spiritual meaning. We see this meaning in Luke 22:19-20, which reads,

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

From this passage we see that the central meaning of communion is the remembrance of Jesus Christ and the saving significance of his death. The bread signifies Jesus' body given to us and the cup represents his blood poured out for us. This point is driven home as we recall that Jesus instituted communion the night before he literally gave his body to us and poured out his blood for us, when he died on the cross. Communion is a symbolic act which focuses our attention on Jesus and his death for us. As 1 Corinthians 11:26 reads, “for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Communion is a Reminder of God's Grace:

As such communion finds its meaning in the message of salvation. As we understand the significance of Jesus' death, we see the significance of communion, for communion is an act of remembrance of this death. The significance of Jesus' death is that he died as a substitute for us. We all have sinned and deserve to die as the penalty for that sin, but Jesus traded his innocent life for our guilty lives. The penalty for our sin was satisfied by Jesus so that we could find forgiveness. As it says in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

So as we celebrate communion we do so with great humility and immense gratitude for we remember the high price that Jesus paid to secure our forgiveness.

Communion is a Reaffirmation of Our Faith:

The act of eating the bread and drinking the juice is symbolic of our faith in Jesus Christ. In John 6:35, Jesus describes himself as the bread of life who satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst. It reads “Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” In this verse Jesus shows that coming to him satisfies spiritual hunger and believing in him satisfies spiritual thirst. In a similar way the eating and drinking of the bread and juice are symbolic of coming to Jesus and believing in him.

As the very name “communion” implies, the act of eating the bread and drinking the cup is a celebration of a relationship with God through faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ. We remember Jesus and declare our faith in him; believing him to be the satisfaction of our spiritual hunger and thirst.

Communion is Reaffirmation of Unity

In addition, the act of communion, speaks of our unity with other believers. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 10:17, which reads, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” The bread is symbolic of the fact that we all belong to one body, for we are all spiritually nourished by Jesus. Therefore, communion also reminds us of the fact that we have spiritual union with our fellow believers through our common faith.

Communion is a wonderful act of worship whereby we are reminded of our relationship with God and with our fellow believers. Through the act of communion, God encourages us by reminding us of his grace in Jesus Christ and challenging us to continue in faith and love.

Who May Participate in Communion?

Based on the meaning of communion, it is only appropriate for believers to participate in communion. The taking of communion symbolizes faith in Jesus Christ and if a person who does not have faith in Jesus takes communion, they are in fact lying and will bring judgment upon themselves.

Furthermore, Scripture instructs us that before we take communion, we must examine ourselves. This means that we need to be sure that we are a Christian and that we are seeking to living in harmony with God and our fellow believers.

1 Corinthians 11:28-29

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. “

We must “recognize the body” which means that we must examine ourselves to be sure that we are in communion with God and our brothers and sisters. If we are celebrating our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our unity in the faith, we must not make a mockery of these relationships by living in disobedience to God or hostility towards others.

How Should Communion Be Celebrated?

There are a wide variety of ways in which communion can be celebrated. No one format is specifically ordained in scripture. The importance is not found in the details but in the overall intent of the ceremony. Some churches use wine, others grape juice. In some churches, people come forward to receive, in others the elements are passed out. What is most important is that Jesus Christ is remembered and worshiped.

Discussion Questions:

Some churches call communion “the Eucharist” which comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving. Why is this an appropriate term?

In our church, we pass out the bread and all eat it at the same time. Why do you think we do it this way?

Why might it be inappropriate for a child to take communion?