



“Ordinances in the Church”

Idea: By partaking in the church’s ordinances believers declare and remember Jesus as the source of everlasting life.

Intro: Christians do some strange things in church. Often the songs that are sung in church are laced with lyrics that speak of blood, death, and resurrection. They are hardly the things that someone with no experience in the Christian faith might expect to hear in church. Earlier in the service, we saw people walk out into a large tub of water, stand in front of a person, and be pushed down into the water. Were we attempting to drown people? At other times, Christians pass out tasteless little pieces of bread and a thimble of grape juice and eat it together, calling it a meal. Have you noticed these peculiar practices or others and wondered why we do some of the things we do in the church? From an outsiders’ perspective, there really are some strange things that we do, and they cause us to scratch our heads and wonder, “Who came up with this?”

It reminds me of the young couple who had only been married for a few weeks. After returning from their honeymoon, the bride wanted to impress and serve her husband, so she prepared and had dinner ready when he got home from work each evening. Being young, she only had a few recipes, so after a few weeks into marriage she had already repeated her meals a couple times. The husband noticed that the ham she had fixed a few times always had the end of it cut off. So, he asked her, “Babe, I love this baked ham, but I keep wondering why you cut the end of it off each time. Is that what makes it taste so good?” The bride thought for a moment and shrugged her shoulders and said, “I am not sure why I do that. It is something my mom always did.”

The next weekend, the bride’s parents came over to visit and have dinner. While the ladies were in the kitchen getting ready for dinner, she asked her mom about it. “Mom, why do you always cut the end of the ham off before you bake it?” The mom thought for a minute and said, “Huh, I don’t know why I do that. It’s just something I saw your grandma do when she baked hams.” Being perplexed by this mystery, they immediately called grandma. After explaining their question, grandma laughed and said, “You girls are funny. The reason I always chopped off the end of the ham was because it did not fit in my pan.”

How easy it is to do something routinely, even religiously, without knowing the reason for it! It happens all the time. It happens all the time in the church. Think about it: Why do we gather for worship? Why do we worship on Sunday? Why do we sing? Why do we preach from the Bible? Why do we take up an offering? Why do we participate in small groups? These are all great questions, and they and many others are all answered in the Bible. Today, we move forward in our “In the Church” series by looking at two things we do regularly. We are looking at ordinances in the church, and I want us to ask and answer two questions. Why do we baptize? Why do we observe the Lord’s Supper? We are going to discover that, by partaking in the church’s ordinances, believers declare and remember Jesus as the source of everlasting life.

Do we do these things, like the young bride, simply because we saw others do them before us, or is there purpose behind them? There is purpose. The reason we do them is because the Bible directs us to observe them. Therefore, they are so much more than empty religious actions.

Inquiry: While the Bible speaks clearly to the function and purpose of both baptism and the Lord's Supper, there is still much confusion in the church about them. Some of the confusion stems from the growing biblical illiteracy within the church. Christians today simply do not read and study their Bibles. Then some of the confusion comes from experiences in other denominations. For example, the Catholic Church has a different understanding than Evangelical churches do on these.

Catholic doctrine teaches individuals receive grace through the partaking of seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders. As evangelicals and specifically Southern Baptists, we believe the New Testament teaches that believers receive grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8-10). We believe Jesus ordained two practices for the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. They were specifically commanded by Christ and evident in the New Testament church. This is why we call them ordinances. They do not give grace but reflect on grace already given by Christ.

Today, I want to share with you what the Bible says about the ordinances. In doing so, I will answer two questions for you: Why do we practice baptism? Why do we observe the Lord's Supper? Let's tackle the question on baptism first.

1. Through baptism, believers declare their identity with Christ and His church to the world.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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..."

– Matt 28:18b-19

We baptize new believers in Christ because Jesus was baptized (Matt 3:13-17) and because He commanded us to baptize others who believed on the gospel. But what is the purpose behind it? Why did Jesus establish this ordinance in the church?

Read Acts 8:36-38; 10:47-48.

Both the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius could have secretly followed Jesus. Perhaps, it would have even been easier for them keep their faith a secret, but secrecy is not the nature of Christianity. Our faith is a confessional faith because our God is a confessional God. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended in a dove and the Father declared from the heavens, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17).

In baptism, we testify to the world that we are follows of Jesus Christ. It is a public expression of our unwavering faith in Him.

There are four things we need to understand about baptism.

1) The Mode of Baptism

The only mode described in the New Testament is immersion. The Greek word used by the writers is βαπτίζω. It literally means, "to plunge, dip, or immerse." Jesus, the eunuch, and everyone else in the New Testament went down into the water to be baptized and were placed under it.

2) The Symbolism of Baptism

The theological symbolism of immersion and elevation from the water throbs with the movement of the gospel. The submersion of a believer pictures the person's union with Christ in His death and

burial. Being raised from the water pictures the spiritual reality of the believer being raised with Christ in newness of life.

³*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* ⁴*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* – Rom 6:3-4

There is further gospel symbolism in immersion. Baptism pictures not only our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ but also our washing and cleansing from sin that occurs concurrent with conversion. We see it in Ananias' command to Saul when he was saved, "*Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16).

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward change.

3) The Subjects of Baptism

The New Testament consistently records that baptism was reserved for those who professed faith in Christ – believers only. Following Peter's sermon at Pentecost, we read, "*So those who received his word were baptized*" (Acts 2:41). Of Philip's preaching of the gospel in Samaria, we read, "*When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized*" (Acts 8:12). There are many more examples of people who were baptized after hearing the gospel preached and placing faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the only proper candidate for baptism is someone who has upon hearing the gospel believed on Jesus Christ for salvation. That person has experienced the grace of God. There has been an inward transformation in him or her. The old things have passed away and behold all things are new (2 Cor 5:17).

4) The Necessity of Baptism

The New Testament is clear that baptism is not necessary for salvation. A symbol cannot save.

⁸*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* – Eph 2:8-9

The crucified repentant thief next to Jesus went straight from his cross to paradise (Luke 23:42-43). Yet so many denominations teach that baptism is in one way or another a mode by which one is saved. As Southern Baptists we have rightly pushed against this heresy, but in doing so, we have also in many ways undervalued baptism.

If baptism does not bring a person into relationship with Christ, then why is it important for a believer to be baptized? The answer is simple...Jesus said so (Matt 28:19). Our imperative is simply to obey Christ, who commanded baptism to all who believe. And the reason for it revolves around our confession. Believers in the early church identified publicly with Jesus through baptism. In doing so they were declaring, "I have left my old life and ways and have found new life in Jesus Christ." There was a strong sense of immediacy in their baptisms. They did not wait long periods of time to be baptized, and neither should we.

If you are in relationship with Jesus Christ and have never followed in believers' baptism, you need to be baptized soon. It can happen on any Sunday.

Why do we practice baptism? In baptism, at least two things take place: 1) a believer publicly identifies with Jesus and His people, and 2) a church publicly affirms the believer and receives him or her into Jesus' family.

Now, let's tackle the question of the Lord's Supper?

2. Through the Lord's Supper, believers remember their identity with Christ and His church.

Read [Luke 22:19-20](#).

In the Lord's Supper we testify to ourselves that we are recipients of God's grace through Christ. It is a corporate reflection of our Lord's unwavering commitment to redeem us.

There are four features I want to highlight:

1) Memory

The theological groundwork for the New Testament observance of the Lord's Supper was the Passover (Ex 12:1-13). God commanded His people to remember His saving work (Ex 12:26-27; 13:6-10, 14-16).

By New Testament times, the Passover seder had morphed into a ceremony that included, in addition to the unleavened bread, the partaking of four cups of wine. Jesus filled the ceremony with ultimate redemptive significance when He equated the bread to His body and the wine to His blood. Now, just as the blood of the Passover lamb had shielded God's people from death, the blood of the ultimate Passover lamb would shield His followers from judgment and death.

Therefore, just as the Passover observance was instituted as a memorial of redemption as the blood above the door stayed the angel of death, the Lord's Supper is a memorial of redemption as the blood of Christ on the cross satisfied the wrath of God the Father. Whenever we take the bread, we must remember the Lord's body, which became sin for us on the cross. Whenever we take the cup, we must remember the source of our freedom from sin, the shed blood of Christ.

2) Communion

¹⁶The 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? ¹⁷Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. – 1 Cor 10:16-17

According to Paul, when the church observes the Lord's Supper together, there is literally an experience of *κοινωνία*. We are, after all, members of Christ's body (1 Cor 12:12-13). When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we experience a deepened sense of communion with Christ and one another. Therefore, the meal is reserved only for those in relationship with Christ and His church.

There is yet another feature that is important to us.

3) Gospel

When we observe the Lord's Supper, we testify to ourselves that we are recipients of God's grace through Christ, but we also proclaim the gospel.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
– 1 Cor 11:26

The meal is reserved for those in relationship with Christ, who are baptized members of His church, and whose lives are worthy of partaking of the meal (1 Cor 11:27). If you are not in relationship with Christ, if you have not followed the Lord in believer's baptism, or if you have unconfessed sin in your life as a believer, then you should abstain when we observe this sacred meal. Our goal is not to condemn you. Our goal is that as you watch others observe the Lord's Supper, you would be

overwhelmed by the grace of God and seek out the forgiveness and life He desires to give you. We want you to see that Jesus became sin for you, so you could experience His forgiveness (2 Cor 5:20).

Why do we observe the Lord's Supper? In the Lord's Supper we testify to ourselves that we are recipients of God's grace through Christ. It is a private reflection of our Lord's unwavering commitment to redeem us.

4) Anticipation

"For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." – Luke 22:18

As Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He wanted His disciples to know that it was only a preview and foretaste of something greater to come. There is coming a day when Jesus will be forever united to the people, He shed His blood to redeem. This great day will be celebrated with a wedding feast in honor of the Lamb and His Bride (Rev 19:6-9).

Conclusion: Christians do some strange things when they gather with the church. In addition to singing songs about a man's bloody death and resurrection from the grave, we observe two bizarre ordinances. Regardless of how they may seem or how someone on the outside might view them, there is great purpose in baptism and the Lord's Supper. By partaking in the church's ordinances, believers declare and remember Jesus as the source of everlasting life.

Have you come to know Jesus as the source of everlasting life? Are you in relationship with Him? Have you knowingly and willingly repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus? If not, what would hold you back from doing that today?

Have you identified with Jesus through baptism? Some of you might have been baptized as a child and then later became a follower of Jesus. If you have not been baptized post-conversion, then you need to follow the example of the Ethiopian and be baptized. Baptism always follows salvation. It never precedes it.

Are you in fellowship with Jesus? Is there sin that you are holding onto? Why not confess it, forsake it, and receive forgiveness? Come just as you are today.