

The two ordinances of Christianity

Are we missing the mark?

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Introduction

Jesus gave instruction for two things we call ordinances – that is ‘religious’ rites. Christianity is much more a relationship with the risen King than it is a religion.

The first is what is most frequently called communion – though various streams have other names for it. Jesus said, ‘Do this in remembrance of Me,’ so it is primarily a memorial (of Him and what He has done,) as was Passover (a memorial of deliverance from Egypt) which He was celebrating when He made it personal to Him – and it became The Lord’s Supper or Communion or breaking bread.

The second is Baptism. Again various streams have their own ‘method’ of fulfilling this command.

When the Scribes and Pharisees of Judaism adopted their own ways instead of the ways of scripture Jesus criticized them for their worthless traditions.

This booklet gives an opportunity for us to look at and review our own practices – do they accord with scripture or have traditions crept in? Then are they honouring the Lord and are they valid?

All bible references are from the New King James.

Part 1 Communion

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Chapter 1

The scriptures

First let's see the scriptures:

From the gospels:

'As they were eating (at Passover) Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take eat this is My body.' He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' Matthew 26:26-28 Mark 14:22-24

(Luke 22:14-20 has the same message laid out in a slightly different way)

Passover took place during the feast of unleavened bread which is what Jesus broke and gave to the disciples. (Leaven is commonly referred to as yeast)

Instructions through the Apostle Paul who gives us most of the New Testament revelation for the church.

Paul was not present at the last supper. He received his instructions and understanding direct from the Lord.

After chastising the Corinthians for accepting grievous sin amongst them:

'Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,' 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Then he goes on to give more instruction:

'For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you; that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take eat this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.'

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.'

Therefore who ever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat the bread and drink of the cup.

For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.'

1 Corinthians 11:23-30

There is more in 1 Corinthians about the behaviour of the believers there who were meeting together in a very unthinking way. Paul urged them to be very mindful of each other especially at this time.

The scriptures are very clear and straight forward. Do we recognize and follow the symbolism of the occasion and thus fully honour the Lord or have our own 'ideas' and ways and traditions crept in?

Chapter 2

The purpose - all about remembering Jesus in His humanity as the Son of Man.

The text tells us that Jesus said, regarding both the bread and the wine, that the purpose was, 'in remembrance of Me' because when taking communion we are proclaiming the Lord's death 'til He comes.

The Passover (which Jesus was now changing to the Lord's Supper or communion as it is more frequently known) was to Israel a very significant memorial - one they were commanded to keep.

The Jews had been taken captive to Egypt and put to increasingly hard labour. The Passover was taken the night before they were led out of Egypt by Moses. It was a very serious matter detailed in Exodus 12. It involved the slaughter of a lamb without spot or blemish - its blood being daubed on the doorway of each house. The angel of death seeing the blood would then Passover and the occupants of each house so daubed with the blood would be safe.

(The death of every firstborn in Egypt was the last of the 10 plagues visited on Pharaoh by God)

Jesus is described as our Passover [lamb] in 1 Corinthians 5:7 quoted in chapter 1.

We are remembering our deliverance from the power and the penalty of sin. Just as Israel was led to the promised land, so too we have the promise of eternal life in a place prepared for us in our Father's house. See John 14.

Chapter 3

The format.

Paul warned about taking communion in an unworthy manner, so we now consider the scriptures instructions regarding how to proceed.

The bread

Just as Israel was commanded to search out all leaven from their houses before they celebrated Passover the scripture insists that we *'keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,'* as we read in chapter 1. Paul's words on the matter we strong, *'purge out all the old leaven.'* Sincerity and truth are required.

The bread we use is a symbol of Jesus body and therefore we should be careful to consider using unleavened bread. It cannot be honouring to symbolize the perfect sinless body of Christ with a bread symbol infused with leaven – which always represents sin in the scripture.

It would be unworthy to take communion with anything less than sincerity and truth and unworthy to use a symbol incorporating sin to represent the perfect body of our Lord.

We are warned that taking communion in an unworthy manner has consequences – including among the flock sickness and death.

Using unleavened bread may be a bit inconvenient but actually it is very easy to make.

The cup

Jesus took the cup saying, 'this cup is the new covenant in My blood.' We take it that the cup was full of wine to symbolize Jesus blood. His sacrificial blood which deals with sin and brings in the new covenant for our benefit.

Paul warns you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. Hence the requirement for sincerity and truth when taking communion.

Remembrance, Reverence, thankfulness and joy.

So taking communion, the Lord's Supper, or whatever name we give it, will involve deep reverence as we take the two symbols. Jesus suffered in order to set us free and it cost Him. The first importance is that we are taking the feast in remembrance of Him – particularly His time on earth and what He did in giving Himself for us in the ultimate sacrifice.

Moving into thankfulness would be an appropriate response leading into the joy of our salvation.

How does whatever format we use compare to the scriptures? In view of the warning about taking communion in an unworthy manner does it matter? Then what about the consequences?

Chapter 4

Essential thoughts.

Jesus chastised the Scribes and Pharisees because they honoured their traditions above obedience to the truth of the scriptures.

'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your traditions,' and 'you make the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.'

Mark 7:9,13

We have added many traditions – for example many churches insist that only their priests or leaders can celebrate communion, though the scripture does not require it. Some deny the cup to the congregation – that was part of Luther's objection to the then catholic church. Some use bread with leaven maybe unwittingly denying the perfect sinless body of Christ.

All sorts of things have crept in to the actual 'service.'
Is it time to review what we do to get back to the simplicity of remembering Jesus with reverence and thanksgiving as shown in the scripture?

Many sick?

Paul said that many were sick amongst the Corinthians because they took communion unworthily. Many are sick in many of our churches – is this for the same reason?

In our experience we attended the annual communion in a church fellowship which took it seriously. Everyone was advised days/weeks before to examine themselves, and to put right any broken relationships (1 Corinthians 11:28) before the coming communion. The meeting was absolutely full of remembrance, reverence, thankfulness finally moving into praise and worship with great joy. It was noted (by a Doctor GP) that this church fellowship had very little sickness – way below the level in the general population.

The scripture uses the term ‘as often as’ or ‘whenever’ you eat this bread and drink this cup, not specifying daily, weekly, monthly, yearly or random times. Every alternative will be found amongst the churches. Jesus was celebrating the annual Passover and making it His remembrance.

Whatever we choose to do remembrance, reverence, thankfulness, coming to praise and worship with joy should be the norm – and that following what is laid down in scripture not traditions.

Have we, like the Israelites, put aside the clear instructions of scripture for the sake of our own ideas and traditions?

Chapter 5

The missed Apostolic example

There is one example of the apostles celebrating Jesus resurrection found in the book of Acts.

Before we can even recognize let alone appreciate the occasion we have to deal with one bad translation. In a number of places the scripture refers to 'the first day of the week.' In every case the text is badly translated. It should read 'on the first of weeks.' The feast of weeks followed on after Passover. When Mary goes to the tomb it is on the first of weeks the day Jesus rose from the dead. (You can easily check this using an interlinear bible - where you will find weeks is plural not singular.)

'Now on the first of weeks when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day spoke to them and continued his message until midnight Then we go on the read how a young man fell out of the window from the 3rd story and was found dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him and his life was restored. Then they ate. (Acts chapter 20)

As it was the first of weeks, the day of Jesus resurrection, they were clearly remembering His resurrection - the restoration of life to the young man was a glorious example!

Appendix

How to make unleavened bread.

Here is a recipe for unleavened bread:

- 1 cup whole wheat strong flour
- 1 tablespoon butter
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
- 2 teaspoons oil

Sift the flour, add the butter and the salt and rub in.

Add the water and the oil.

Knead and flatten.

Roll out to about 1.5 cm deep.

Perforate with a fork.

Bake for about 8 minutes at 200c.

Part two - Baptism

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Introduction

This booklet is dealing with the 2 ordinances of Christianity. In the case of baptism it is necessary to go a bit broader to cover the three separate baptisms that are available for every born again believer.

The meaning of the word 'baptism.'

'baptizo' means to dip, to immerse. For example it was used for dying a garment. Different uses in the New Testament conform to the result - the garment baptized in dye is then fully associated with its new colour. When Jesus spoke of the baptism He suffered it was judgement and suffering for our sin - He was fully associated with these in His death. When the Israelites left Egypt the New Testament refers to them as being baptized into Moses - that is fully associated with Moses. (1 Cor 10:2)

When we talk about baptism here it has this meaning - 'to be fully associated with' - like the garment taking on the same colour as the dye.

Chapter 1

The first baptism

The first baptism of a believer is unseen and has no element of ritual.

‘The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ -

‘For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and all have been made to drink into one Spirit.’ 1 Corinthians 12:13

At that moment when we first believed and placed our trust in what Jesus achieved on the cross we were instantly born again. It was the Holy Spirit that accomplished this by bringing our ‘dead’ human spirit back to life. At that moment of first belief we were baptized by the One Spirit.

The first baptism of a believer is the baptism by the Holy Spirit. Frequently this moment is accompanied by a significant feeling of peace.

Chapter 2

The ordinance of believer's baptism

On the surface baptism is an unusual rite – being immersed in water* and then taken up out of the water dripping wet.

(* Not every stream of Christianity uses full immersion for baptism – but when we understand the symbolism it is apparent that is what was both practice and intent.)

The candidate offers him/herself for baptism as a symbol of his/her trust that the death of the Lord Jesus and His resurrection have delivered him/her from sin and gained eternal life.

As the believer is immersed and then raised out of the water -

'Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in new life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection' Romans 6:3-5

When we see the scriptures it becomes apparent that the New Testament practice was full immersion. [We should question whether the tip of a finger dipped in 'holy' water makes a good and adequate symbol or not.]

The point of symbolism is that it demonstrates what it is symbolizing, not that it doesn't!

Baptism in or into the name of Jesus

In water baptism we are baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ and into His death. Here is the symbolism - this is the spiritual truth that immersion in the water of baptism is demonstrating - we are now fully associated with both the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul could say, I have died with Christ - full association with Jesus death. It is the same for every believer.

'Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Acts 2:38

'And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

Acts 19:5

The witness of believer's baptism

The witness is to everyone else, believers, unbelievers and spiritual beings.

Our witness is to the efficacy of Jesus sacrifice both its effectiveness for dealing with our sin and for setting us free from God's judgement - the penalty of sin. Our witness is to being made righteous as Jesus takes away our sin and gives us His righteousness.

Our witness to evil spiritual powers 'seals' their fate for their disobedience - if there were none righteous, in true justice, He could not judge them for their unrighteousness.....

.....This is God demonstrating His wisdom to principalities and powers as stated in Ephesians 3, through the church.

Our witness to each other encourages and builds one another up in the faith.

Our witness to unbelievers gives them the opportunity to seek Jesus for themselves. In addition to believer's baptism our witness is a life lived by the Spirit which will include what we say. There is a saying, 'actions speak louder than words,' so our day to day behavior and attitude through life will speak more loudly.

Chapter 3

Baptism by Jesus

John the Baptist said of Jesus, 'this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' John 1:33

What we call the baptism of the Holy Spirit is administered by Jesus. It is not the same as believer's baptism and can occur before, or at the same time, or most usually sometime after.

Before believer's baptism:

'Whilst Peter was still speaking those words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.'
Acts 10:46-7

Before believer's baptism the Lord Jesus had given them the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with its usual evidence of speaking in tongues.

'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.' Acts 1:8 - Jesus speaking to the disciples.

So Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have,'
Acts 10:47

After believer's baptism:

'Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria has received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ' Acts 8:14-17

Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, Acts 11:16 all tells us that Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. For example -

John said, 'I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God ' John 1:33-4

Baptism with the Holy Spirit can take place before water baptism or with water baptism or after water baptism, often long after, or not at all.

The evidence of being baptized with the Spirit is power – most frequently accompanied by speaking in tongues and in exercising the gifts of the Spirit. It is the gift of Jesus Himself and not to be confused with believer's baptism administered within the body of Christ.

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as believer's baptism in or into Jesus and His death – it is about receiving power to live the Christian life to the full. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is often imparted by the laying of hands. Living the Christian life to the full is part of the eternal purpose of the Lord God as stated in Ephesians 3:

Paul teaching - 'I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and make all to see what is the mystery, which from the beginning of ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.'
Verses 8-12

In order to fulfil this the baptism with the Holy Spirit is essential, otherwise we are only able to offer our own strength and power.

'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.' Acts 1:8

There should be evidence of being filled with the Spirit in each believer's life – speaking in tongues, operating in the gifts of the Spirit, knowing one's calling, becoming more like Jesus in life and actions.

Chapter 4

The anomaly

In chapter 2 we read of the practice of baptism in the early church - that is, where stated, what believers were baptized into. We found the early church baptized into Jesus or into His name. At first sight this is strange because of different instructions given in Matthew.

It helps when we remember the meaning of the word *baptizo* - it means to be fully associated with. So we are baptized into full association with Jesus and with His death and resurrection. [When the Israelites left Egypt, the scripture tells us they were baptized into Moses (1Corinthians 10:2), they were fully and totally associated with Moses as they walked through the Red Sea on dry land. The following Egyptians all drowned - not being associated with Moses.]

So the early church, those who walked with Jesus and with the Apostles baptized in this way - into Jesus name.

What about Matthew 28 then?

Here is what we call the great commission - '*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.*' Whilst there is no indication that the early church did that, this wording is very frequently followed today.

* *ethnos* - gentiles,

A lot of the last part of Matthew is not for the church - it is about the coming tribulation and therefore Israel and those alive at that time. The scripture has to give relevant instruction until the time Jesus returns to reign in person. In Revelation 7 (4-14) we read of 144,000 Jews sealed for protection and of the great multitude who come out of the tribulation through their witness.

It is inconceivable that those who lived and walked with Jesus and the Apostles would be in disobedience to the instruction in Matthew - so it seems most likely that it is what will happen in the tribulation and or Millennium.

It will be too late for believers at that time to be baptized into Jesus as His body would already be complete and, before the tribulation having been raptured, be preparing as His bride.

There is no evidence that Matthew 28 is intended for the church which accounts for the fact that they didn't follow it.

So are we missing the mark?

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