



Foundations of a Healthy Church

Ordinances

Questions for Discussion

- What are some common explanations you've heard for the meaning of baptism?
- What have you heard people believe about the Lord's Supper?
- What challenges have you experienced (if any) in explaining the ordinances to other people? What misconceptions might people have?

What Are Ordinances?¹

- Ordinances are practices that have been "ordained" by Christ for the church.
 - They were established by Jesus during his time on earth.
 - They were given to be done in the context of the local church.
- The ordinances are "means of grace" to God's people.
 - They are given by Christ for the benefit of His people.
 - Their purpose is to help us in our spiritual lives.
 - They are means, therefore, through which God ministers grace to us. Through them we ...
 - Are reminded of his grace
 - Grow in thankfulness for his grace
 - Demonstrate dependent on his grace
 - Proclaim the power of his grace
 - Testify to the effects of his grace
 - Invite others to experience his grace
- We recognize two ordinances in Scripture:
 - Baptism
 - Lord's Supper

¹ This lesson material is adapted from *Basic Christian Discipleship: A Twelve Week*

- Both ordinances are symbolic in nature.
 - They are done in the physical world.
 - They have spiritual significance.
 - Symbolic does not mean they are unimportant.
 - Both are “outward signs of invisible, spiritual realities.”

Baptism

- What is Baptism?
 - Comes from the Greek βαπτίζω, “baptizo”, which means “to immerse”.
 - Though some churches practice “sprinkling”, this is not the proper use of the Greek word in Scripture or in other texts written during the same period.
- When is baptism performed?
 - Baptism in Scripture is the immersion in water done once in the life of a true believer in Christ after profession of faith.
 - Baptism is an ordinance marking for all time the beginning of the Christian life.
 - Baptism, therefore, should be practiced as soon as possible after initial saving faith.
 - Consider those baptized on the day of Pentecost.
 - Consider the Ethiopian Eunuch, baptized immediately after professing faith (Acts 8:35-38).
 - Baptism is a matter of obedience since it is given as a command from Christ (see the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20).
 - It would not make sense for a genuine believer to claim faith in Christ and then reject his first command.
 - Baptism is also thus only for believers
 - In Acts, only believers are baptized (Acts 2:37-38, Acts 8:12, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:29-34, Acts 18:8)
- Baptism is an opportunity to proclaim faith.
 - This accords with Jesus’s instructions elsewhere about acknowledging him before men (see Matthew 10:32-33).
 - See Romans 10:9 where a verbal confession points to faith in Jesus.
- Baptism is connected to the local church.
 - Throughout Acts, water baptism is the means by which someone makes public their connection to the church of Christ.
 - So, it is necessary in order to be a member of a local church.

- Baptism in Scripture
 - Matthew 3:1-2. Seen in the ministry of John the Baptist.
 - Gospels
 - Submitted to by Christ. (Matthew 3:13-17)
 - Performed by Christ's disciples (John 3:22, John 4:1-2)
 - Commanded by Christ for the Church (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - What Baptism Symbolizes
 - Baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13)
 - Baptism is a picture of the "immersion" into the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.
 - Union with Christ in Death and Resurrection, Commitment to Walk in Resulting Holiness (Romans 6:1-5)
 - The act of baptism is a drama that displays this spiritual reality.
 - Spiritual Cleansing (1 Peter 3:21)
 - The water of baptism is a picture of the washing we receive by faith in the gospel.
 - Faulty Views of Baptism
 - Infant Baptism. There is no scriptural warrant for infant baptism; there is no command or example of infants being baptized.
 - Baptismal Regeneration. This is the idea that baptism is required for heaven, that the actual act of baptism is what saves you. There's no scriptural warrant for this either (see the thief on the cross, as well as 1 Corinthians 1:17)

Lord's Supper

- The Lord's Supper is an ongoing pattern instituted by Christ that reminds disciples of Jesus of Christ's death in their place and serves as a foretaste of the coming day when we will feast with Christ and each other in heaven.
- The Lord's Supper traces its roots to the Passover; it was at this celebration that Jesus instituted the ordinance. Just as the Passover was a continual reminder for the people of God's faithfulness and saving power, so too is it a reminder to those in Christ of the same.
- Key Scriptures for the Lord's Supper
 - **Matthew 26:26-29** ²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."
 - **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.
 - **1 Corinthians 11:23-32** ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

- Lessons from Scripture
 - The Lord's Supper is a memorial of Christ's death.
 - The Lord's Supper is a display of Christian unity.
 - The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the gospel to those on the "outside".
 - The Lord's Supper is an opportunity to evaluate one's spiritual state.
 - The Lord's Supper is an opportunity to repent of sin between brothers and sisters, and seek reconciliation.
 - The Lord's Supper is a picture of our heavenly feast with Christ.
 - The Lord's Supper is a reminder of the transience of this world as pilgrims.
 - The Lord's Supper is a serious ordinance that should be treated with reverence.
- Looking Properly at the Lord's Supper
 - Looking back to Christ and our conversion
 - Looking inward at our sinfulness and union with Christ
 - Looking around at the body of Christ
 - Looking up to God for ongoing sustenance
 - Looking ahead to Christ's return
 - **Revelation 19:6-9** Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah!
 For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
⁷Let us rejoice and be glad
 and give him glory!
 For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
 and his bride has made herself ready.
⁸Fine linen, bright and clean,
 was given her to wear."
 (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)
⁹Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are
 invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are
 the true words of God."
- Views of the Lord's Supper²
 - The meaning of the Lord's Supper has been hotly debated in church history.
 - In fact, Martin Luther and John Calvin could not agree on its meaning.
 - **Transubstantiation.** This is the official teaching of Roman Catholicism. Trans- means "change" and substantiation means "substance." The idea is that when the bread and wine are blessed by the priest during the Mass, the bread and the wine are transformed into the actual physical body and blood of Jesus

² Adapted and borrowed from Ligonier Ministries; see <https://tinyurl.com/LigonierLordsSupper> for more.

Christ. So, when a person eats and drinks the bread and wine, they are taking into themselves the actual body and blood of Christ, and thus—the teaching goes—the grace of God. It's for this reason that someone who deliberately refuses to receive the Eucharist—the Lord's Supper—is putting their soul in grave danger. To refuse the Eucharist is to refuse the grace of God.

- **Consubstantiation.** Martin Luther took issue with Roman Catholic teaching, and his view has become known as consubstantiation—con- meaning “together,” and substantiation still meaning “substance.” Luther argued that rather than changing completely, the substance of the bread and wine coexists with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Jesus Christ is present in, with, and under the bread and the wine whenever the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The analogy people sometimes use is a sponge full of water. The sponge isn't the water, the water isn't the sponge, but the two are there together with each other.
- **Memorial View.** Huldrych Zwingli, who was around at the time of Luther in the sixteenth century, taught this view. He said that Christ commanded us to “do this in remembrance of Him,” and that is all it is: an act of remembrance. The bread and wine are merely symbols, reminding us that Christ's body was broken for us, and His blood was shed for us.
- **Spiritual Presence or Real Presence.** John Calvin took strong issue with the Roman Catholic view, and he didn't agree with Luther. At the same time, he thought Zwingli's view didn't go far enough. It is certainly symbolic, but the symbols do more than merely represent—they actually bring to us the presence of Jesus Christ and His benefits. Yes, Christ's human body is locally present in heaven, but—Calvin said—it doesn't have to descend in order for believers to truly partake of it. Why? Because the Holy Spirit makes true fellowship possible here and now. The Holy Spirit is Christ's Spirit. He lifts us to the heavenlies to feed on Christ. Those who eat the bread and drink the wine in faith are also, by the power of the Holy Spirit, actually being nourished by the body and blood of Christ.
- It's this last view of “Spiritual Presence” that is most frequently adopted by reformed theologians today and best represents the benefits of the ordinance.