

Baptism & Communion

Introduction

The Statement of faith of Calvary Chapel La Mirada states, “We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ committed two ordinances to the church: 1) Baptism, and 2) The Lord’s Supper,” which is communion. Webster defines ordinance as an authoritative rule or law as well as an established rite or ceremony. When we say that we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ gave two ordinances to the church, we are saying that we believe the Lord Jesus Christ gave two authoritative commands to the church to perform baptism and the Lord’s supper.

Before we will look at the Scriptures that show us that Jesus gave these two rites to the church, I want to point out that since the giving of these rites, there has been a lot of ideas as to what these two rites signify. Some see these two ordinances as a means of grace, meaning that in order for one to be saved they must take part in them. Others see them as a command but they serve only as symbols of the relationship that we have with Christ. I think the bible teaches the latter, but let us look at the definitions of these two rites, their initiation, their results, their recipients, and their method.

In many theological textbooks, these two ordinances are usually dealt with separately, but because the information is practically the same with exception to the definition, I want to look at the information for both baptism and communion together.

Definitions

First lets us look at the definition of baptism and communion.

Baptism

Baptism is an outward showing of what has already taken place in the heart of someone who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In the New Testament it is the declaration of a identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Symbolically, we die to our old life, and we rise out of the water in newness of life. The word baptism means to immerse, plunge, to dip in or under, to sink, to drown, or to bathe.

- We identify with the person of Christ: **Acts 2:38**. The phrase “into the name of Jesus Christ” is a technical term of commerce meaning to the account of someone, signifying ownership. It also means that we are identifying with his identity, purposes, and plan. His identity becomes ours.
- We identify with the death and resurrection of Christ: **Romans 6:4** and **Col 2:12**.
- We identify with the people of Christ. **Acts 2:41**

Communion

Communion is a participation in the New Covenant that Christ established in his broken body and shed blood on the cross. It is an outward display of what Christ has done on the inside of the believer. When the believer takes communion, he or she is proclaiming a remembrance of what Christ has done on the cross and proclaiming that one day Christ will return.

- It is symbolic of the New Covenant that Christ established. **Matthew 26:26-28**
- It is a proclamation of your remembrance of Christ. **Luke 22:14-19**
- Proclaiming your anticipation of His return. **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

Their Institution

How do we determine the ordinances that the church takes part in as commands from Christ? The Catholic church has seven different ordinances or sacraments that they take part in. I believe that there are two rules in discovering what ordinances Christians should take part in: 1) Did Christ command it, and 2) Did the New Testament church practice it. In other words, is it commanded by Jesus Christ and seen practiced within the church?

Taking these two rules, was baptism and communion commanded by Christ and practiced in the New Testament church?

- Baptism was commanded by Christ: **Matthew 28:19**
- Baptism was practiced by the New Testament church: **Acts 8:12**
 - It was part of the message that was being preached. **Acts 2:38**
 - It was after they became a Christian not to become one **Acts 10:47**
 - Lydia was baptized after God touched her heart **Acts 16:14-15**
 - The Jailer was baptized after he believed. **Acts 16:33.**
 - Jesus is not recorded of baptizing anyone.
 - Thief on the cross was not baptized. **Luke 23:29-43**
 - It is not works of righteousness which we have done **Titus 3:5-6**
- Communion was instituted and commanded by Christ. **Matthew 26:26-29,**
- Jesus tells them to do it often. **1 Corinthians 11:26.**
- Communion was practiced by the New Testament church. **Acts 2:42-46**

Who is to receive baptism and communion.

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward work that has already been done by grace through faith. It is an outward sign or symbol of that inward change. Baptism does not do the changing, but shows that the change has already taken place. There needs to be a profession of faith. After that profession of faith, baptism is a public testimony of that faith. **Colossians 2:12**

Communion is a symbol of the continual presence of Christ in the believer's life. It is a continued proclamation of the believer who has already taken part in the covenant relationship based on faith.

Its Mode

The final question regarding the issue of baptism and communion is one of mode or method. How should baptism be done? There have been three different modes or ways that Baptism has been administered.

- **Sprinkling or aspersion:** In the early centuries sprinkling was reserved for those who could not receive public baptism due to sickness or weakness and was not accepted as in general usage until the 13 century.
- **Pouring or affusion:** Historically, pouring was applied by the one baptizing as he poured water three times over the head of the one being baptized one for each person of the Trinity.
- **Immersion:** This is putting the whole person under the water. I think this has the most support biblically when looking at the historical understanding of the word that is used for baptism. As we looked at in the definition, the word baptize means to dip, immerse. It was used to identify sinking ships. **Mark 1:9-10.** The death and resurrection symbol also points to this method.

Conclusion

Although these ordinances are not means to bring salvation on the performer, they are commandments of Christ that need to be followed after one exercise faith in Him. When the believer takes part in baptism and communion he or she declares love for Christ. **John 14:15**