

SYMBOLS OF SALVATION

The Lord's Supper and believer's Baptism are two ceremonies Jesus commanded the church to perform

This e-book is free for individual use or group study

Chapter One, see how baptism in water is related to becoming a Christian

Chapter Two, see what baptism in water means and how Christians are baptized

Chapter Three, see how the Lord's Supper is introduced and how Jesus is present as Christians participate in eating the supper

Chapter Four, see how the Lord's Supper is celebrated

Believer's Water Baptism 1



Who should be baptized?

Baptism in water should be a natural process for anyone who becomes a Christian. It's recorded in Acts 8:12,

"When they believed Philip as he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women"

Baptism is related to the act of becoming a Christian. Jesus set the pattern for Christian baptism, He himself was baptized by John at the beginning of His public ministry, Matt. 3:13-17. He later commanded His followers to,

"Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Matt 28:19.

The above illustrations show that Christ initiated His ordinance of baptism both by His example and command. Keeping this in mind every Christian should be willing to be baptized in water.

"The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament."
J I Packer

Pause for thought

Are you a Christian believer? If so have you received believer's baptism?

If you have not been baptized could you give any reasons why?

If you have been baptized what effect did your baptism have on your Christian life?

Why do you think Jesus was baptized? Discuss, this question with a fellow Christian and then look at the following scripture. Matthew 3:13-15.

WHICH METHOD OF BAPTISM IS CORRECT?

Some Christian groups baptize by sprinkling or pouring water on the head (effusion). The Bible also shows baptism as an act of putting someone completely under the water and bringing them up out of the water. This method is called immersion.

WHY IMMERSION?

The New Testament term translated 'to baptize' is taken from the Greek verb, 'baptizo'.

The word has more than one meaning, but most scholars agree the essential meaning of 'baptizo' is to 'immerse' or 'submerge'. In ancient literature the word denoted 'plunge', 'sink into', 'drench', and 'overwhelm'.

If any New Testament author wanted to indicate that people were sprinkled with water, a perfectly good word-meaning 'sprinkle' was available. 'Rhantizo'. This word is used in the sense of sprinkling in Hebrews 9:13, 19, 21 & 10:22. However we are going to look at the idea of immersion rather than sprinkling.

The Bible records that, John the Baptist

"was baptizing at Aenon because there was plenty of water", John 3:23.

John would not require much water to sprinkle: however, he'd need a lot of water to baptize by immersion.

When Jesus was baptized it's recorded that

"He came up out of the water" Mark 1:10. The Greek text specifies that Jesus came 'up out' (EK) of the water, not that He came away from it, this would be expressed by (APO)

When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, it's recorded that both of them

"went down into" and "came up out of the water".

It appears neither Philip nor the eunuch believed pouring or sprinkling was adequate. Acts 8:38-39.

Baptism by immersion also conveys the significance of Bible passages like, Rom 6:3-4.

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The sinking of the baptismal candidate beneath the water and rising out vividly symbolizes sharing in Christ's burial and resurrection. Sprinkling or pouring may not capture this symbolism. Going down under the water and coming up out of it express fully this idea of burial and resurrection.

ARE THERE ANY EXCEPTIONS TO BAPTISM BY IMMERSION?

There may be unusual and rare occasions when it's appropriate to use another method of baptism, for example, when baptizing an elderly or physically disabled person. This is not a compromise. The method of baptism is not more important than the spiritual identification with Christ in His death and resurrection - which is symbolized through believer's baptism.

Pause for thought

If you were baptized as an infant, how did you feel when you eventually learned that there is such a thing as believer's baptism, which follows repentance towards God and

personal faith in Christ?

If you're a Christian and you've received believer's baptism did you have any fears or apprehensions about going under the water? Was the idea of immersion strange or not?

Do you think there should be any exceptions to baptism by immersion?

Is there any flexibility in some of God's instructions? Discuss, this issue with another Christian and look at the following scriptures for the answer. Mark 2:25-27; John 8:3-11

Commit yourself to reading the account of Jesus' baptism in Matt 3:13-17 and write out any observations or points of interest.

CHAPTER 2

IMPLICATIONS OF WATER BAPTISM

In chapter one we considered how baptism in water is related to the act of becoming a Christian. We also noted that believer's baptism is usually practiced by putting someone completely under water and bringing them back up again. This form of baptism is known as immersion. In chapter 2 we are going to explore the meaning of Christian baptism.

Believer's baptism contains several important implications for Christians. It indicates,

Union with Christ

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourself with Christ." Gal 3:26, 27

The imagery of stripping off clothes and putting on fresh clothes implies a transformation of character. This is changing clothes image is frequently used in the Old Testament. Isaiah 52:1, 6:10, Zechariah 1:1-5. With this in mind the actions of stripping off clothes for baptism affords the symbol of putting off the old life without Christ and putting on the new life with Christ.

Identification with Christ

New Testament believers are baptized into the name of Jesus Acts 8:16, indicating that they were entering the realm of Christ's sovereign lordship and authority.

Covenant relationship

'God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you. Also, not the removal of dirt from the body but the

pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ' 1 Peter 3:19-21

Peter makes a comparison with Noah and his family going through the flood in the ark (Noahic covenant).

What does this mean to the Christian believer?

'The water of the flood brought judgement on a world that was corrupt and full of violence (see Gen. 6:5-11). So, the water of baptism symbolizes judgement that Jesus in His death took upon himself for all people of all times. The water of the flood did not cleanse Noah. Rather, the fact he and his family came through the flood and were saved from its judgment was a testimony to the faith they had before the flood - faith that caused them to believe and obey God and build the ark. So, the water of baptism does not cleanse us, but is a testimony to our faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, a faith we must have before we go into the water of baptism. Therefore, it is not the water itself that saves us, but what coming through the water represents: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection that showed God had accepted Christ's sacrifice on our behalf and in our place. The New Testament clearly shows it is the blood of Jesus, not the water of baptism, that brings us cleansing and forgiveness: By His blood we are justified (Rom. 5:9), our consciences are cleansed (Heb. 9:14), we are redeemed (1 Pet 1:19)'

William Menzies

Witness of testimony

Baptism in water also declares that believers are cleansed from sin Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21,

given the Holy Spirit Acts 10:47, 1 Cor 12:13

and introduced into the Church Gal. 3:26-28, 1 Cor. 12:13.

Pause for thought

Do you think water baptism has any other meanings in addition to those already stated?

What does believer's baptism mean to you?

Baptism is a celebration

'He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your Household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into

his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family' Acts 16:30-34

Having been converted and baptized, the Jailer was filled with joy and declared his faith in Christ. We may conclude that water baptism should be a joyful public ceremony, in which an open witness is made to the community. Testifying that the believer has accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Along with this the church as a whole should rejoice with the person being baptized.

Pause for thought

Write down the details of any baptismal service that you have attended. What was it like?

How can churches improve their baptismal services? In what ways can baptismal services be made more appealing, exciting, relevant and honouring to God?

Try and memorize the following scripture

'We were therefore baptized with Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life' Rom. 6:4

Commit yourself to invite a non-Christian friend to the next baptismal service involving your church.

The Lord's Supper



Having considered the aspects of Christian baptism we now consider a second ceremony which Jesus commanded His church to perform, 'the Lord's Supper'

Hours before the crucifixion,

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat: this is my body." Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Matt 26:26-29

The Supper is known by a number of names.

"The supper of the Lord" because Christians keep it on the Lord's authority, and in His honour 1 Cor 11:20

'Communion' 1 Cor 10:16,

'The Lord's Table' 1 Cor 10:21,

'The Eucharist' from the Greek word "giving thanks", Lk 22:17,19, 1 Cor 11:24.

'*Breaking of bread*' Acts 2:46, 20:7 probably refers to receiving the Lord's supper with a common meal known as "the Love Feast" 2 Peter 2:13, Jude 12.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD THE LORD'S SUPPER BE CELEBRATED?

According to 1 Cor 11:26, The Lord's Supper is to be repeated again and again until Christ returns. Some churches observe the Lord's Supper at every church meeting, some once a week. Other assemblies observe it once a month and some just four times a year. There are no set rules. Jesus said,

"Whenever you eat", "whenever you drink"

At whatever time you choose to celebrate.

Pause for thought

The Lord's Supper is known by a number of names, which name do you think is the most popular?

How often do you think a Christian should celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Give any reasons for your answer to the question above.

Do you think that the Lord's Supper can be celebrated too often?

IN WHAT SENSE IS CHRIST NOW PRESENT AT THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Many of Jesus' actions and words at the last supper, such as breaking and distributing the bread, were part of a prescribed Passover meal taken to commemorate Israel's escape from Egypt. Ex. 12.

But as Jesus said, "*This is my body*," and "*this is my blood*" while distributing the bread and the cup he did something totally new.

Unfortunately, Jesus' words have been involved in a little disagreement among Christians for centuries.

Some think,

"This is my body"; "this is my blood" should be interpreted literally. This is known as the Transubstantiation view. Christians who believe this maintain that the actual bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ, also the word "remembrance" used in the phrase, "*Do this in remembrance of me*" is taken to be a memorial before God, a representing of the sacrifice before the Father.

And "*this do*" has been interpreted as meaning, "*offer this*". Consequently, at each celebration of communion is viewed as offering to God a new sacrifice of Christ.

It's thought by some that this view fails to grasp the figurative language used by Jesus. Christ spoke in symbolic ways many times. When speaking of Himself He said, *"I am the true vine"* John 15:1, *"I am the door/gate"* John 10:7,9. Likewise *"This is my body,"* and *"this is my blood"* is to be taken in a symbolic way; Jesus could not have been holding His actual body and blood in His hands. He was sitting with the disciples holding the bread. The bread in Christ's hands was distinct from His body.

It's also thought that Transubstantiation may infringe on the finality and completeness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

'Nor did He enter Heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him' Hebrews 9:25-29

Christ's sacrifice for our sin will not happen again, *'It is finished'* said Jesus, John 19:30 Hebrews 1:3. It's a complete historic sacrifice never to be repeated again.

Pause for thought

Do you think there's anything wrong with the transubstantiation view?

Another view relating to the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper was developed by Martin Luther. (1483-1586).

He stated that Christ's body and blood are truly present "in" with and "under" the bread and wine. The elements do not actually change into Christ's body and blood. But in the same way that the heat is present in a piece of hot iron, so Christ is present in the elements. Luther's view is often called 'consubstantiation' meaning "with or of the same nature and kind". Like that of 'transubstantiation' it is thought by some Christians that Luther misses the figurative use of Jesus' words. It also thought that Luther's view may draw attention more so to the bread and wine than to Christ Himself.

The third position on the Lord's Supper is known as the symbolic view. The bread and wine are understood to symbolize the body and blood of Christ. They give a visible sign of the fact that Christ is also spiritually present whenever we partake of the bread and wine. This in my opinion is the correct view.

Indeed, Jesus promised to be present whenever believers worship

'where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them' Matt 18:20.

If Jesus were especially present when Christians gather to worship, then we would expect that He would be present in a spiritual way in the Lord's Supper. Having

noted the different views on the Lord's supper we might state that all Christians agree on the following:

1. Jesus Himself established the Lord's Supper. Matt 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20
2. Jesus commanded the repetition of the Lord's supper Matt 26:29
3. The Lord's Supper proclaims the death of Christ 1 Cor 11:26
4. The Lord's Supper imparts spiritual benefit to the one who partakes in it

Pause for thought

What views of the Lord's Supper do you have?

Can you think of someone who you could contact and break bread with before Sunday?

CHAPTER 4

In weeks 1 and 2 we considered the aspects of Christian baptism, learning why and how believers should be baptized.

In week 3 we gave our attention to the Lord's Supper learning how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated and in what sense is Christ present in the Lord's Supper. This final chapter we explore the meaning of the Lord's Supper and highlight the responsible way in which the Lord's Supper should be taken.

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER?

There are several facts symbolized in the Lord's Supper.

1. Christ's death.

When we participate in the Lord's Supper we symbolize the death of Jesus because our actions give a picture of His death for us. When the bread is broken it symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body, and when the cup is poured out it symbolizes the pouring out of Christ's blood for us. Participating in the Lord's Supper is a proclamation.

'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)

2. Our participation in the benefits of Christ's death.

Jesus commanded His disciples, *'Take, eat; this is my body'* (Matt 26:26).

As we individually reach out and take the cup for ourselves, each one of us is by that action proclaiming,

"I am taking the benefits of Christ's death to myself."

When we do this, we symbolize that we share in the benefits earned for us by the Lord's death.

3. Spiritual Nourishment.

Just as ordinary food nourishes our physical bodies, so the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper give nourishment to us. But they also picture the fact that there is spiritual nourishment and refreshment that Christ is giving to our souls. Indeed, the ceremony that Jesus instituted is in its very nature designed to teach us this. Jesus said,

'Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me' John 6:53-57.

Jesus is not speaking of a literal eating of His flesh and blood (cannibalism). But if He is not speaking of a literal eating and drinking, then He must have in mind a spiritual participation in the benefits of the redemption he earns. This spiritual nourishment, is necessary for our souls and is symbolized and experienced in the Lord's Supper.

4. The unity of believers.

When Christians participate in the Lord's Supper together they also give a clear sign of their unity with one another.

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." 1 Cor 10:17

When we put these four things together, we begin to realize some of the rich meaning of the Lord's supper. As we participate we come into the presence of Christ. We remember that He died for us. We participate in the benefits of His death. We receive spiritual nourishment. We are united with other believers who participate in this supper.

In addition to these truths visibly portrayed by the Lord's supper, the fact that Christ has instituted this ceremony for us means that by it He is also promising or affirming certain things to us as well. When we participate in the Lord's supper, we should be reminded again and again of the following affirmations that Christ is making to us.

Jesus affirms His love for me.

The fact that I am able to participate in the Lord's Supper and that Jesus invites me to do so is a vivid reminder and visual reassurance that Jesus Christ loves

me, individually and personally. When I come to take of the Lord's Supper I thereby find reassurance again and again of Christ's personal love for me.

Christ affirms that all the blessings of salvation are reserved for me.

When I come to the Lord's Supper, the fact that He has invited me into His presence assures me that He has abundant blessings for me. In this supper I am actually eating and drinking as a foretaste of the great banquet table of the King. I come to His table as a member of his eternal family. When the Lord welcomes me to this table, He assures me that He will welcome me to all the other blessings of earth and heaven as well, and especially to the great marriage supper of the Lamb, at which a place has been reserved for me.

I affirm my faith in God

As I take the bread and cup for myself, by my actions I am proclaiming, "I need you and trust you, Lord Jesus, to forgive my sins and give life and health to my soul, for only by your broken body and shed blood can I be saved." As I partake in the breaking of the bread when I eat it and the pouring out of the cup when I drink from it, I proclaim again and again that my sins were part of the cause of Jesus' suffering and death.

In this way sorrow, joy, thanksgiving and deep love for Christ are richly intermingled in the beauty of the Lord's supper."

Pause for thought

Having studied the symbolic meaning of the Lord's Supper, will you approach communion differently now?

What do you think of, when you take the Lord's Supper?

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Those who believe in Christ should participate in the Lord's Supper because it is a sign of being a Christian and continuing in the Christian life.

Self-examination is essential when taking the Lord's supper.

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 1 Cor 11:27-29

There's a sense in which we all partake unworthily. No one can ever be fully worthy. But in another sense, we can become worthy in faith because Jesus has invited us to participate in the Lord's supper.

However, the Lord's Supper does carry a responsibility in our attitude and behaviour. Those who harbour sin, whether it's gross and carnal, or subtle and personal are in need of cleansing before eating.

'But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness'
1 John 1:7-9

The moment we confess, the blood of Jesus shed at Calvary removes our sins. Every time we say sorry for the things we do wrong, we're forgiven because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Those who participate in the Lord's Supper also have a responsibility in the area of relationships with others.

Significantly the context of 1 Corinthians shows that believers were divided and quarreling among themselves,

'one says, "I follow Paul", another says, "I follow Apollos" and another says, "I follow Cephas"' 1 Cor 1:12

It seems the division had spilled over into the celebration of the Lord's Supper (originally celebrated in connection with a meal) 1 Cor 11:17-23. The Corinthians were rejecting each other.

In a broad sense,

"Let a man examine himself before taking the Lord's Supper" means we ought to ask if our relationships are right with other Christians.

In this connection, Jesus' teaching about coming to worship in general should be mentioned.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar; first go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."
Matt 5:23_24

Whenever we come to worship we should be sure that our relationships with others are right, and if not? We should act quickly to make them right, then come and worship God. This admonition is especially true when we come to the Lord's Supper.

The Bible does not tell those who are taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner to stop taking it. Rather, "we examine" ourselves, "judge" ourselves and wait for each other. 1 Cor 11:28,31,33. We put right what's wrong in us.

We are to wait until we recognize the body of Christ in each other and partake of the Lord's Supper in unity of love, and faith, honouring Christ and God's word. It is perhaps worse for a Christian to refuse to take the Lord's Supper than it is to partake of it in an unworthy manner.

By refusing to partake, a person is saying, I refuse to repent. I refuse to believe that Christ's body and blood were the effective sacrifice I need for the cleansing of my sins. I don't believe what He did on the cross was good enough. I refuse to give thanks and refuse to continue to accept the new covenant. I refuse to accept the brothers and sisters in the assembly as members of the body of Christ.

Pause for thought

What's the best way to help a Christian who is unwilling to participate and take the Lord's Supper?

Are there any broken personal relationships that you need to make right before you come to the Lord's Supper again?

Are there any areas in which you think there should be more teaching about the nature of the Lord's Supper? If so, what are they?

Memorize the following scripture, which relates to the Lord's Supper.

*"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."
Mk 14:22*

Make sure all my relationships with others are as amicable as possible.

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