

2018

**FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
ECCLESIOLOGY
THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH
PART 7**

This morning in our series Foundation of Faith we are going to be looking at the Ordinances of the Visible Church. And you might think that this is a non-controversial subject, but make no mistake about it. There are a wide variety of ideas and thoughts regarding the ordinances of the church or what some might call the sacraments of the church. Now as we look at this I might stir some hearts, I may make some angry with me, but if I misrepresent any point of view regarding these ordinances or sacraments as some call them, please let me know. But that may be hard to do because I am going to quote what their leaders have said and then we will see what the Bible has to say.

To me that is the most important view, what God says because they are His ordinances and not mine or any other church or denomination! And for some churches there are more than the two we will be looking at, but as you will see, there is no evidence for more than two and God is very specific about these two as you will see. I am sure most if not all of you know which two I am speaking of, Baptism and Communion, and like I said, there are many that have views that are contrary to the Scriptures and thus, may we look at what God has for us and then apply it to our lives.

And there is confusion regarding these ordinances as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

The story is told about the baptism of King Aengus by St. Patrick in the middle of the fifth century. Sometime during the rite, St. Patrick leaned on his sharp-pointed staff and inadvertently stabbed the king's foot. After the baptism was over, St. Patrick looked down at all the blood, realized what he had done, and begged the king's forgiveness. Why did you suffer this pain in silence, the Saint wanted to know. The king replied, "I thought it was part of the ritual."

- Source Unknown

Now as funny as that is, at least I think it is, many are that confused today. They just partake of these ordinances without even knowing what they are about and how they are to be received. And so I hope to clear that up for you this morning and again, please keep an open mind and you search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.

Before we look into these two ordinances let me share with you these words from John MacArthur regarding this issue. He wrote,

Communion and baptism are the two ordinances instituted by Christ for observance by the church. Communion grew out of the last Passover of Christ with His disciples before His crucifixion. Later, Paul corrected the Corinthian church because they had perverted the commemoration through their selfish conduct. The purpose of Communion is to proclaim the death of Christ symbolically. It behooves each Christian to prepare himself carefully each time he celebrates the Lord's Supper.

Also, Christians should view the ordinance of baptism with the utmost seriousness. This means that no one who professes faith in Christ should remain unbaptized. Baptism portrays a believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus personally submitted to the baptism of John before beginning to baptize people Himself. While baptism plays no part in one's personal salvation, it is a nonoptional act of obedience to Christ (Matt. 28:19).

- John MacArthur, Pastoral Ministry, p. 284

I think you can see that this is a very important subject and one that should not be taken lightly by the church nor should it be ignored.

1. BAPTISM

The first ordinance that we are going to look at is baptism because baptism is one of those things that is usually only done once in a person's life, the question though, "When is someone to be baptized?" You see, that is important, and not only when but who are the people that are to be baptized!

First of all let me show you what baptism is not and then we will look at what baptism is all about and who should be baptized and why we should be baptized. The Roman Catholic Church believes that baptism is essential for salvation. They believe that if you are not baptized you are not saved! And yes, there are other groups who believe if you are not baptized you are not saved or if you are not baptized by them, in their prescribed way, then you are not saved.

But since there is such a push today for the Protestant Church to come together with the Roman Catholic Church, I think it is important to note the difference and why we can't come together in the faith because it is a different faith! Listen to what they believe regarding the ordinances or what they call sacraments and I think you will clearly see that this is not Scriptural!

By decree of the Roman Catholic Church,

If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith . . . let him be anathema.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 6.849.262

Furthermore, according to Catholic dogma it is anathema to claim that “grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked” [Lat: *ex opere operato*]; grace is not from “faith alone”

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 8.851.263

The purpose of a sacrament is to bestow the grace of God through the Roman Catholic Church to its recipient in seven stages from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction). Thus, the sacraments are necessary for salvation, said Trent (infallibly):
If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation, but are superfluous, and that, although all are not necessary individually, without them or without the desire of them through faith alone men obtain from God the grace of justification: let him be anathema.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 4.847.262

Again, Trent proclaimed:

If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, or that there are more or less than seven, namely Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, [Holy] Order, and Matrimony, or even that any one of these seven is not truly and strictly a sacrament: let him be anathema.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1.844.262

If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in Baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even assert that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away . . . let him be anathema.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 792.247

So the Roman Catholic Church believes that not only is baptism necessary for salvation but so too are the other six sacraments that they came up with! And if you don't agree with them then you are cast into hell! So that is pretty serious if what they say is true but if it is not then it is just a fear game they are placing upon people! First of all to examine what baptism is we need to have a foundation before we can examine the other aspects of this ordinance.

Baptism is the outward display of an inward reality. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that baptism does not save anyone, never did and never will. You see, when you ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, to forgive you of your sins you are adopted into the family of God. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and not by works, not even baptism. Thus, once you come to Christ, once you repent of your sins, then Christ commands us to be baptized, not for salvation but for identification!

Let me give you this example to show you what I mean. In Mark 16:15-16, after the death and resurrection of Jesus we are told, "**And He [Jesus] said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'**"

Now I can see your head spinning here. "Pastor Joe, it says you have to believe and be baptized to be saved, right?" The problem is that we tend to focus on what we want to believe instead of what the text is saying and I am guilty of that too from time to time. You have to look at the totality of the text.

First of all this verse can literally be translated like this, “**The one who believed and was baptized.**” You see, once they were saved they were baptized. Salvation is an inward commitment to the Lord while baptism is an outward expression to tell others what has taken place in your life. Now that may not satisfy some of you so let me go on and show you why you have to be saved and then be baptized!

Jesus did say “**He who believes and is baptized will be saved**” I have no problem with that because He clarifies this issue with those that are lost right after that. He says, “**but he who does not believe will be condemned.**” Did you catch that? If you don’t believe that Jesus is the Messiah, your Savior then you are condemned because you have not believed in the only Son of God who came to take away your sins. Did you catch what was missing? Jesus did not say that you are condemned if you are not baptized but if you don’t believe because that is the key, our salvation is in Christ! If it was important then Jesus would have mentioned it! And I think that is very clear, baptism is not necessary for salvation but the Lord does want us to be baptized once we are saved!

And think about this for a minute. If baptism was needed for salvation, then Paul missed the boat on it for he said in I Corinthians 1:14-17, “**I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.**”

If our salvation was based upon belief and baptism then why was Paul only preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ? That would be foolish because that is only half of what is needed for salvation! The reality is, that is all that is needed for salvation, our belief in Jesus and our surrender to Him as our Lord and Savior. Baptism is important, not for salvation, but for our identification with Him!

I think we have lost sight of this today because we baptize people in the church building instead of outside. But when a person came to Christ and was baptized in the first century church you were saying that the old life is dead, all that went with it was put to death in the waters of baptism and as you came up out of those waters you came up new in Christ. It was a symbolic identification and for those family and friends who watched, they knew exactly what you were doing!

That is why we baptize people in Lake Michigan because we can do it at the beach, we bring the worship team out there to sing praise unto our Lord, I share what baptism is all about and then we bring the people out into the Lake and baptize them. You see, it is a witness to those on the beach and the door is open for us to share our faith because of our identification with Christ that was made!

And please understand that the early Christians took this seriously. As soon as the church was born, about 3,000 new believers were baptized (Acts 2:41). Belief always comes first, then baptism as I have said.

Think of it like this, “Baptism signifies that the old self in us is drowned, and the new person is risen to life before God in righteousness and purity forever.” Paul put it like this when he said, **“and you are complete in Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”** Colossians 2:10, 12, 13.

Paul, indentifying what happens to us in a symbolic sense, showing us what Christ has done in us, put it this way in Romans 6:3-9, **“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 also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.”**

Paul is saying that we all should understand this truth, and he uses baptism to illustrate his point. The word “**baptized**” or “**baptism**” means “to immerse or overwhelm something.” And when you look at how it is used here, it has to mean immersion. Paul is saying that when we are saved we are identifying ourselves with Christ and as He was buried in the tomb, we are buried in the waters of baptism, it is a picture of death, the death of the old life so that as we come out of the waters of baptism, resurrected you might say, we begin a new life in Christ. Paul put it this way in II Corinthians 5:17, “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**” And in Galatians 2:20 Paul tells us, “**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**”

Now don't think that Paul is saying that baptism saves us. Paul is only using it as in illustration of what takes place in a person's life once they are saved and it is a visual picture of a spiritual truth. I believe we should be baptized in water, the Lord commands us to, but it doesn't save us! Thus, should we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Certainly not! Walk in the newness of life that is found in Christ Jesus our Lord!

And if you are still struggling with this idea of baptism being needed for salvation, let me give you a few more Scriptures that should help answer your questions or your doubts.

First of all, in Luke 23:39-43 we see the story of the crucifixion and the thief on the cross who came to Jesus! He asked Jesus if He would remember him and Jesus responded by saying, “**Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.**” Luke 23:43. Notice that this man was not baptized, he did no good works, he never did one good deed to earn salvation! Then how was he saved, not by works but by faith!

Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, “**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.**” And Jesus said in Matthew 3:15, “**Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” Now if works are righteousness and Paul said that our salvation is not based upon works, our righteousness, then baptism is not needed for salvation but again, for identification. Paul said in Titus 3:5-7, “**not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**”

I hope that clears it up, we are not saved by works of righteousness, but by faith in Jesus Christ! Now, in saying that, let me ask you this. Who are the ones who are to be baptized, what is the requirement for baptism? Can infants be baptized or should I say does it even matter if they are or not?

Some may argue that in the Old Testament we see that males were circumcised on the eighth day and thus, infants should be baptized. If you follow that through, only males were circumcised and thus, should we only baptize male infants? That would be foolish and so is this idea of baptizing infants because the Scriptures don't support it!

If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, how in the world can an infant repent of their sins and come to Christ? They can't! Now there is that argument that speaks of "**households**" being baptized and thus, there must have been infants in those homes and thus, they were baptized! That again is a foolish line of reasoning that is based upon pre-conceived ideas and not what the Scriptures tell us. Let me explain.

One of the ones that people bring up is the Philippian Jailer who asked what must he do to be saved, and Paul said, "**. . . 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.'**" Acts 16:31. Notice that there has to be some reasoning here, they have to believe on the Lord Jesus and then be saved. Luke continues to tell us that, "**Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.**" Acts 16:32. So they spoke the Word of the Lord, not to those who could not understand, infants, but to those who could hear and understand and the result of that was that "**. . . immediately he and all his family were baptized.**" Acts 16:33. And the conclusion of all this is that this Philippian jailer "**rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.**" Acts 16:34. Notice that they all believed and thus, they had to be old enough to understand that decision that they made and once they came to Christ Paul baptized them!

Then there is the “**household of Stephanas**” (I Corinthians 1:16) that Paul baptized. Now some may argue, “There must have been children there!” But again, listen to what we are told in I Corinthians 16:15, “**I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints.**” Did you see that? They were doing the work of God and let’s face it, as cute as infants are, they were not doing the work of the ministry for the Lord, even if they did not have child labor laws in those days!

And as you study through the New Testament every time we see baptisms it is always of an adult and they are believers! I hope that helps. And the key is that they are not capable, infants that is, of belief in Christ’s condition for being saved! Infants are not ready to make that conscious decision to accept this gift of grace, the gift of salvation!

Let me rap this part up by sharing with you just some information regarding baptism and then we will move on to the next ordinance. The English word “baptize” comes from a nearly identical Greek word “baptizo” which is the language of the original New Testament writings. The simplest meaning of the word is to “soak, plunge, drench or sink in water.” It is with this meaning that it appears in the New Testament of the Bible 74 times.

In the Old Testament, the priests were taught to wash themselves before engaging in worship (Leviticus 15:11, 13). In the New Testament, if people wanted to be converted to Jewish belief, they went through a ceremonial washing referred to as baptism (Mark 7:4, Luke 11:38, Hebrews 9:10).

The second reference to baptism concerns the work of John the Baptist. This was pre-Christian baptism. It was the outward symbol of a repentant heart (Matthew 3:6, 11; John 1:25).

The most common use of the word baptism in the New Testament is Christian baptism. After Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples. In His final charge, known as the “*Great Commission*,” Jesus included a command to baptize. This was not to provide or be a prerequisite of salvation, but was intended as an outward sign and mark of a believer who was obediently following Christ.

And thus, in the Great Commission we see Jesus say to us, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.**”

Matthew 28:19-20. So as Christians we should be baptized, not for salvation but for identification!

What we do here at Calvary Chapel is we dedicate infants to the Lord. We bring the child and their parents up front and we pray for the parents that God would give them the wisdom to raise their child in a godly manner. We pray for the child asking God to protecting the child and that this child would grow up loving and serving the Lord all the days of their life!

Remember the story of Hannah in I Samuel. Hannah is at the tabernacle, praying, crying out to the Lord because she is barren, she is broken. It is then she is at the place where God wanted her to be and she makes a vow to the Lord that if the Lord gives to her a son, she will dedicate him back to the Lord. You see, God needed a man to lead the people from the time when the judges lead Israel, which was going to be a transitional period into the time of the kings. Hannah was willing to give what she treasured most back to the Lord!

And God did bless her with a son and they called him Samuel, which means, “asked of God” or “heard by God,” for he was the result of answered prayer! And as little Samuel grew, after he was weaned, he was brought to Shiloh and there he was dedicated to the Lord. Look at I Samuel 1:25-28 once again, **“Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, ‘O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord.’ So they worshiped the Lord there.”**

This is where we get the dedication of our children. We dedicate our children back to God, that He might help us to train them up and that this child would be used for the glory of God! Those blessings that He has given to us, entrusted to us, we ask Him to make these children into the men and women that He wants them to be, so that they make serve Him all the days of their lives! That is why we do baby dedications here at Calvary and not baptisms!

2. COMMUNION OR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Here is another of the ordinances that gets messed up for many today. Does the bread and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ or Transubstantiation as the Roman Catholic Church believes? The Lutheran Church believes that Christ's body and blood are present; there is no change in the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. He penetrates and permeates the bread and wine. I am not sure even how that one works, it is there but it really is not there? This view of the Lutheran Church is called, consubstantiation or permeationally view. Then there is the Reformed view where they believe that the bread and the wine spiritually contain the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Again, I am not sure how that all plays out. This view held by the Reformed Church is called, spiritually or dynamically view. And lastly, the view that I believe the Scriptures teach us is that the bread and wine are to commemorate what Christ has done for us and it does not turn into the body and blood of Jesus physically, spiritually or even consubstantionally!

Since the Roman Catholic view of Communion is the most documented and it really covers the others except for the commemorative, we will look at what they have to say regarding this ordinance or what they would call a sacrament. We are told,

The Eucharist is that Sacrament, in which, under the forms of bread and wine, [Christ] is truly present, with His Body and Blood, in order to offer Himself in an unbloody manner to the Heavenly Father, and to give Himself to the faithful as nourishment for their souls.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 370

In the words of Trent's infallible pronouncement we are told,

The holy Synod teaches and openly and simply professes that in the nourishing sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the consecration of the bread and the wine our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1.874.265

Again, we need to understand that the Roman Catholic Church believes that the Eucharist literally is transformed by the priest into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ or what they call transubstantiation. We are told,

By the consecration of the bread and wine a conversion takes place of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the Body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This conversion is appropriately called transubstantiation by the Catholic Church.

- Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 4.877.267–68

Now, since transubstantiation turns the elements of Communion into the actual body and blood of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church feels it is appropriate to worship the consecrated elements as God. Trent pronounced that there is “no room left for doubt that all the faithful of Christ . . . offer in veneration (can. 6) the worship of *latria* [the act of adoration] which is due to the true God, to this most Holy Sacrament” (Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 5.878.268).

And so they tell us,

If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly with the worship of *latria* ... and is not to be set before the people publicly to be adored, and that the adorers are idolaters; let him be anathema. (Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 6.888.271).

Now what if you disagree with their teachings, is that a problem? You bet it is. Again, this is from the Council of Trent and referenced in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We are told,

If anyone denies that in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist are contained truly, really and substantially the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ, but says that He is in it only as in a sign, or figure or force, let him be anathema.

- H. J. Schroeder, O.F., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, p. 79, Canon 1

I think that is pretty clear, that they not only believe that the bread and wine actually turn into the body and blood of Christ but it should be worshiped and if you deny this you are cast into Hell. But is that what the Scriptures teach us regarding this ordinance and not sacrament? Let me show you!

Let's go back to the place and time when Jesus instituted this ordinance of Communion and see what we can glean from that. In Matthew 26:26-29, on the night of the Last Supper, as Jesus and His disciples were sharing in the Passover meal, we are told, **“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then 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. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.”**

Now keep in mind that this Passover meal was done in remembrance of how God delivered the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and now this New Covenant is established on the same day and this one too speaks of deliverance. It is the deliverance from sin that is accomplished through Christ.

You see, and this is important for us to understand, this New Covenant is not based upon man's faithfulness to do something but upon God's. How can I be sure of that? Let me explain. There is a Greek word for **“covenant”** and it is SYNTHEKE. This word speaks of a deal made between two people, both playing a role in this contract. If that is the word that Jesus used then yes, Jesus has a role to play in our salvation and we have a role to play in it. He has His work to do and we have ours to do.

But that is not the word Jesus used. He used the Greek word DIATHEKE which speaks of a one person contract, and in this case, it is based upon God. You see, our salvation is not based upon what we have done but upon the completed work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. When He cried out, **“It is finished!”** He meant it! If our salvation was based upon our good works then God would be a debtor to us but God is a debtor to no man. God does not owe us heaven, but He freely gives it to us, it is a grace gift. It is not based on the fact that we deserve it, but God desires to give it to us!

Paul reminds us in II Timothy 1:9-10, **“who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”** God not only saved us but He uses us for His glory not because we are so special, so talented, but because of His Grace! We don't deserve any of it and yet He freely gives it to us.

Now here in Matthew, during this meal, the picture that is being painted for us is the bread and the wine represent the body and the blood of Jesus, to remind us what it cost Him to save us. Paul makes that point in I Corinthians 11:23-26, "**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 till He comes.**" Thus, as we celebrate Communion that is what we are to be reminded of, it should draw us closer to Him and we are to do this until He comes again!

Now there were four cups that they would drink during the Passover meal and we will look at them and see which one Jesus used as He gave to us Communion. The first cup began when the host would pronounce a blessing and this cup, filled with red wine, was symbolic of the blood of the lamb. They would also partake of bitter herbs which symbolized the bitterness of the bondage they were in and the meaning of Passover would be explained. Then from a grouping of Psalms known as the Hallel Psalms, they would sing Psalms 113 and 114.

Then they would drink from the second cup and after this the host would lift up and break the unleavened bread, dip it into the bitter herbs and a fruit sauce called Haroseth, and share it. The unleavened bread symbolized the haste in which the Jews left Egypt. Then the roasted lamb was brought out.

Now, when the Passover meal was finished the host prayed. He then took the third cup and here they would sing Psalms 115 through 118. It was this third cup that Jesus instituted Communion with. No longer was it the physical deliverance from Egypt that they would celebrate but to remember Christ's death and the deliverance that He provided for them and us!

And yes, there is one more cup and this fourth cup Jesus will not drink until He drinks it with us during the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven. It is the cup of joy, and what a joyful time that will be! It will be a joyous celebration as the Bridegroom and the bride come together!

Now the question is, "On this night did Jesus turn the bread and wine into His body and blood?" Let me make a couple of points on this because many times I don't think we think these things through. First of all did Jesus die on the cross of Calvary yet? No, He was still with His men. So why in the world would He give them a piece of His body to eat and some of His blood to drink? That would be crazy!

Secondly, and even more importantly, we are told in Matthew 5:17-20, "**Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**"

Jesus makes it very clear that He did not come to break the Law but to fulfill it. Not only that but He condemns anyone who would lead others to break the Law. I think we can all agree on that right? Now here is the thing and it is not a little thing. If Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the prophets why would He then break them and encourage His disciples to break them? He wouldn't. I know, "What do you mean Pastor Joe? What are you talking about Jesus breaking the Law?"

Think about this for a minute. Let it sink in. The Old Testament tells us that God said they were not to drink the blood because the life is in the blood. And God did not want them to practice what the pagans would do because they would drink the blood of humans thinking it would give them some kind of power! Not only that but God does not condone cannibalism and if we are partaking of the body of Christ, isn't that what we are doing! Absolutely and thus, Jesus was not saying that we are to physically partake of His body and blood but we are to share in Communion and remember what He has done for us!

Now many point to John chapter 6 where Jesus said, “. . . ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever 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 feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven - not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.’ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’” John 6:53-60.

Now doesn't Jesus say that we are to partake of His body and blood, His physical body and blood? Remember what we just said. If Jesus broke the Law then He would be a sinner and He would need a Savior, He could not pay in full the penalty for our sins. So we must dig deeper into what Jesus said and sometimes it is just as easy as reading further down in the passage because it will be explained and that is exactly what we see here.

In John 6:61-64 we see what Jesus is speaking of. We are told, **“When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.”**

What Jesus said troubled some of them so much because they were still thinking on the physical, literally eating His flesh and drinking His blood, a kind of a cannibalism mentality. That is what we are told in John 6:52, **“The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’”** Again, they were missing the picture but they did understand if Jesus meant this literally, that would not be kosher! You see, like I have said, it went against what God said in His Word, so Jesus would not tell them to do something that was contrary to the Word, for it is truth.

In Leviticus 17:10-14 we are told, **“And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.’ Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’ Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life.’ Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”** So this would of course upset them, but Jesus is not speaking of cannibalism but a deep relationship with Him. And I truly believe they did not want to hear what Jesus was saying and were looking for ways to get out.

There is a lot we can cover here but the main point from our topic here is what Jesus said in John 6:63. He is not speaking of physically partaking of His body and blood, for He says that the flesh profits nothing. You can chew a chunk of His flesh and partake of it and it is meaningless or even a Communion wafer and it is not the body of Christ. He is talking spiritual, receiving Him, receiving His Words into your life, partaking of Him and you will have life!

And think about this. You will read over and over again that the disciples of Jesus partook of Communion whenever they got together but how can that be? You see, if you need a priest to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ where did they get all those priests? The reality is that they did not need a priest to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, you just needed to partake of the Communion implements because it did not change, it was still bread and wine!

Also, we are not to worship a Communion wafer because it is not Jesus and thus, to do that is a form of idolatry. In Exodus 20:4 we are told that we are not to worship idols, any image of God and thus, if you are worshiping the Communion wafer like the Church is telling you to do, you are worshipping an idol and God forbid that!

Thus, you will never find in the Bible any mention of us partaking of the actual body and blood of Jesus, that would be wrong. Nor are we to worship the Communion wafer. But we are to celebrate Communion in remembrance of what our Lord had done. And it was a common practice in the early church to celebrate Communion as we are told in Acts 2:42, “**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**”

Now in saying all that, we must not partake of Communion in a way that would dishonor God and Communion is for believers not for unbelievers. Communion doesn't save a person, Jesus does! And for those that partake of Communion in an improper way, listen to what Paul tells us in I Corinthians 11:27-34, **“Therefore whoever 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 of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.”**

The way the Corinthian's were acting they were dishonoring the Lord and then they entered into Communion, a oneness with the Lord while they were cutting up, tearing apart, their brothers and sisters in the Lord. Obviously this was wrong behavior although they didn't see it that way, but Paul did and let them know it!

Now please, don't come to the conclusion that before you partake of Communion you must be perfect, for that would exclude all of us. The idea here is to examine your heart, prepare yourself to enter into Communion with the Lord and if you have something against someone, then you need to deal with it. And if you think about it, the Lord's Table is a place where healing can take place.

Think of it like this, a doctor would never tell you to “Go home and get well and then come back and see me when you are healthy!” That would be ridiculous! We can’t make ourselves worthy to partake of Communion but we should open our heart to Him, give Him those things that are hindering our relationship with Him and enjoy His presence with us and in us! Don’t keep people away from Communion but help them to prepare for it and we do that through worship and prayer.

Now if we do come before Him with the wrong heart God will discipline our behavior when it is wrong. Here in Corinth, because of their actions, some were sick and some have died! That word “**judgment**” is the Greek word KRIMA (kree’-mah) and it speaks of judgment not damnation as the KJV translates. The word “**condemned**” or KATAKRINO (kat-ak-ree’-no) speaks of the judgment of the lost. KRIMA refers to the discipline of the saved.

In I John 5:16-17 we are told, “**If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.**”

Yes there is a sin that can cause you to be taken home early, but just because someone dies young does not mean they committed that sin. The idea is, because God does not tell us how far that line is, don’t see how far you can push God, live for Him, bring Him glory and that will not be an issue for you!

So what should we do? Paul tells us in I Corinthians 11:33-34 as he is summarizing how they should conduct themselves at these Agape feasts. They needed to share, to love each other, look out for each other, put all their differing aside in Christ. Paul, in Philippians 2:1-5 said, and this is from The Amplified Bible, **“SO BY whatever [appeal to you there is in our mutual dwelling in Christ, by whatever] strengthening and consoling and encouraging [our relationship] in Him [affords], by whatever persuasive incentive there is in love, by whatever participation in the [Holy] Spirit [we share], and by whatever depth of affection and compassionate sympathy, Fill up and complete my joy by living in harmony and being of the same mind and one in purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and of one harmonious mind and intention. Do nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves]. Let each of you esteem and look upon and be concerned for not [merely] his own interests, but also each for the interests of others.”** May we be like-minded, having the mind of Christ, live what we believe!

Several years ago at one of our pot lucks I took too much insulin before I was ready to eat and had an insulin reaction. I didn't know where I was or what I was doing. When I finally came out of it I was shocked to see one of the men feeding me a candy bar, which is great because I do love candy, but for Doug, it was like it was the most natural thing for him to do. That is what Paul was looking for in the Corinthians, that they would love each other so much, care for each other so much, that if there was a need, they would be ready to help.

You see, instead of having these Agape feasts, they needed to live that way, with unconditional love for each other. Paul, in I Corinthians chapter 13:4-8a tells us what Agape love, God's love is all about and it is far different than what Hollywood tries to tell us. Paul says, "**Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.**"

Put it into perspective, who are you living for, yourself or the Lord? You see, this love cannot be manufactured, but it is God's love that is given to us as we surrender to Him, as we say "Not my will, but your will Lord!" You see, how you walk is manifested by where your heart is at, who is on the throne of your heart. May it be the Lord as His love not only flows in us but through us! And may we be able to say as Paul said, "**Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**" I Corinthians 11:1.

Thus, we should partake of Communion and there is no set limit of how often you do. The key is that each time we do celebrate Communion that we do it with a right heart and we remember what Christ has done for us so that we can have fellowship with God the Father!

I know, that was a lot of information but let me close with this. Communion and Baptism are ordinances, they are not sacraments. You see, sacraments are a means or cause of grace and that just negates what grace is all about. These are ordinances that if properly observed, can be a blessing to your life. These symbols do not bring grace but they are a reminder of what Christ has done for us! May we celebrate Baptism and Communion in the church and in our own lives!