

***Objective: What are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and why are they relevant to the believer?***

### ***Sacraments***

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments of Protestant Christianity.

These sacraments, which mean simply 'holy things', are used as signs or symbols of God's grace at work in believers. They proclaim the grace of God visibly by signifying the saving work of Jesus Christ.

"Both sacraments, the Lord's Supper and holy baptism...stand together, shoulder to shoulder, announcing the reality of the grace of God through which we are accepted without condition and by which we are under the unconditional obligation to be to others what Christ has been to us" (Jenkins 2001:241).

It is important to realize that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are God's ideas, not human ideas. They reflect the Father's grace and were instituted by Christ. God stipulated through Scripture that men and women should repent (meaning turning to God - see Study 6) and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and that believers should partake of the bread and the wine "in remembrance" of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

New Testament sacraments differ from Old Testament rituals in that the rituals cast only "a shadow of the good things to come", and "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1, 4). The rituals were designed to mark out Israel as separate from the world and belonging to God, while the New Testament

sacraments show that all believers of all ethnic backgrounds are one in Christ and one with Christ.

The rituals and sacrifices did not lead to lasting sanctification and holiness. The first covenant, or Old Covenant, under which they functioned, is no longer valid. God "takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:5-10).

### **Reflection**

**What are the implications of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as being ideas that emanate from God?**

**Can you think of ways in which to distinguish between sacraments and rituals?**

### ***Symbols that reflect God's self-giving***

Philippians 2:6-8 tells us that Jesus emptied Himself of his divine prerogatives for us. He was God, and yet He became human for our salvation.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper illustrate what God has done for us, not what we have done for God. Baptism is for the believer an outward expression of an inward commitment, yet it is first and foremost a participation in God's love and commitment to humanity: we are baptized into Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

"Baptism is not something we do, but something that is done to us" (Dawn & Peterson 2000:191). Paul explains, "do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3).

The baptismal waters that cover the believer symbolize the burial of Christ on his or her behalf. The act of coming out of the water symbolizes Jesus' resurrection and ascension. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life" (6:4).

It is due to the symbolism of being covered completely with water, representing that "we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (6:4), that the Worldwide Church of God practices total immersion. At the same time the church recognizes other baptism methods.

The imagery of baptism shows us that "our old man (that is, our former, sinful self) was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (6:6). Baptism reminds us that just as Christ died and rose, so spiritually we die and rise with Him (6:8).

Thus baptism is a visible demonstration of God's giving of Himself for us, "in that while we still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8).

The Lord's Supper also witnesses to the sacrificial love of God, the supreme act of salvation. The symbols used represent the broken body (the bread) and the shed blood (the wine) so that humankind may be saved.

When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper He shared the bread with the disciples saying, "Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Jesus is the bread of life, "the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:48-58).

Jesus also passed the cup of wine 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). This is "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Hebrews 13:20). It is by ignoring or underestimating or rejecting the value of the blood of this New Covenant

that the Spirit of grace is insulted (Hebrews 10:29).

Therefore just as baptism is a re-enactment of and participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord's Supper is also a re-enactment of and participation in the body and blood of Christ sacrificed for us.

Questions arise regarding the Passover. The Passover is not the same as the Lord's Supper because the symbolism is different, and because it does not signify the remission of sins through God's grace. The Passover was also clearly an annual event, whereas the Lord's Supper is "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The blood of the Passover Lamb was not shed for the forgiveness of sins because animal sacrifices can never take away sin (Hebrews 10:11). The custom of the Passover meal, a night much observed in Judaism, symbolized the national deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 12:42; Deuteronomy 16:1); it did not symbolize the forgiveness of sins.

The sins of the Israelites were not forgiven through the ceremony of the Passover. Jesus was killed on the same day as the Paschal lambs were slaughtered (John 19:14), which led Paul to state that "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

### **Reflection**

**In what ways is God's love made visible through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper?**

**How do Baptism and the Lord's Supper witness to God's saving grace to the church and to the greater community?**

### ***Togetherness and community***

Baptism and the Lord's Supper also reflect the unity of believers and fellowship with one another and with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Through "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5) believers "have been united together in the likeness of His death" (Romans 6:5). When a believer is baptized, the church recognizes that in faith she or he has received the Holy Spirit.

Through the reception of the Spirit Christians are immersed into the community of the church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Jesus will never leave nor forsake the church community (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20), which is his Body (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12).

This active involvement in the Christian community is reinforced in the taking the bread and the wine at the Lord's Table.

Not only is the wine, the cup of blessing, "the communion of the blood of Christ", and the bread "communion of the body of Christ", it is also participation in the shared life of all believers. "For we, though many, are one bread and one body" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

#### **Reflection**

**How do the sacraments deepen your personal fellowship with other believers?**

**Consider whether baptism is a private activity or an act of the community of believers or both.**

### ***Forgiveness***

Both the Lord's Supper and Baptism are visible participation in God's forgiveness.

When Jesus commanded His followers that, wherever they go, they should baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), it was an instruction to immerse believers into the community of the forgiving forgiven. Acts 2:38 explains that baptism is for "the remission of sins" and for the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If we are "raised with Christ" (i.e. by rising from the waters of baptism into a new life in Christ) we are to forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave us (Colossians 3:1, 13; Ephesians 4:32). Baptism implies extending forgiving as well as receiving forgiveness.

The Lord's Supper is sometimes referred to as Communion (stressing the idea of communing with Christ and other believers through the symbols). It is also known as the Eucharist (from the Greek word meaning "thanks" because Christ gave thanks before breaking the bread and passing out the wine).

When we come together to take the wine and the bread, we proclaim with thanks the Lord's death for our forgiveness until Jesus comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26), and we are both declaring and taking part in the communion or fellowship of the saints with one another and with God. This reminds us that forgiving one another is to participate in the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ.

We are in danger if we judge others of being unworthy of Christ's forgiveness or unworthy of our own forgiveness. Christ said "judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). Is this what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29? That, by not forgiving, we fail to discern or understand that the Lord's body was broken for the forgiveness of all? So if we come to

the altar of the Lord's Supper, and we hold grudges and have not forgiven, then we eat and drink the elements in an unworthy manner. Authentic worship is linked to the spirit of forgiveness (see also Matthew 5:23-24).

May the forgiveness of God be present always in the way we take the Lord's Supper.

#### Reflection

**Can you think of an area where you are not forgiving someone. What steps can you take to put that right?**

**In what way does this understanding imply that attending church is good practice for the believer?**

#### Conclusion

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacramental acts of personal and congregational worship which demonstrate visibly the Gospel of salvation. They are relevant to the believer because they were prescribed in Scripture by Christ Himself, and they are means of active participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord.

#### **From the Statement of Beliefs of the Grace Communion International/ Worldwide Church of God UK:**

##### **Baptism**

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/#Baptism>

**"The sacrament of baptism proclaims that we are saved by Christ alone and not through our own repentance and faith. It is a participation in the death and**

**resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which our old selves have been crucified and renounced in Christ and we have been freed from the shackles of the past and given new being through his resurrection. Baptism proclaims the good news that Christ has made us his own, and that it is only in him that our new life of faith and obedience emerges. Grace Communion International baptizes by immersion."**

(Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:26; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38)

##### **The Lord's Supper**

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/#Supper>

**"In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we partake of bread and wine in remembrance of our Savior, proclaiming his death until he comes. The Lord's Supper is a participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord. Just as the bread and wine become part of our physical bodies, so we are made by grace to partake spiritually of Jesus Christ in his body and blood. Thus the Lord's Supper declares to believers that in every aspect of our Christian life we rely not on any obedience or righteousness of our own, but solely upon the grace of God incarnate in Jesus Christ."**

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 10:16; Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:9)

##### **Bibliography**

See WCG literature on:  
<http://www.wcg.org/lit/church/lordssup/default.htm> and  
<http://www.wcg.org/lit/gospel/baptism.htm>

Dawn, Marva & Peterson, Eugene. *The Unnecessary Pastor*. 2000. USA: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Jenkins, Michael. 2001. *Invitation to Theology*. USA: InterVarsity Press.

***Next Study***

***What happened at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and how does this affect our salvation?***