

LOCAL CHURCH ORDINANCE

Discipleship 1 - Chapter 4

LOCAL CHURCH ORDINANCES

An *ordinance* is “an authoritative command or order...a religious rite,” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). A local church ordinance is commanded in the Gospels, practiced in the book of Acts, and taught in the Epistles. Jesus Christ left His church with two ordinances which must be performed: (1) baptism and (2) the Lord’s supper.

Baptism and the Lord’s supper are not merely rituals performed on the basis of tradition. Christians are commanded by Christ Jesus to baptize those who accept salvation (Matthew 28:19-20) and to regularly take part in the Lord’s supper which is called communion (1 Corinthians 11:24-27). Let’s examine these two ordinances.

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BAPTISM

A wedding ring does not cause the one who wears it to be married; rather, it is symbolic of a marriage that has already taken place. It is a symbol that the person wearing the ring belongs to another. Likewise, baptism is symbolic of a relationship entered into with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a outward, physical picture of the inward change that has already taken place in the believer’s life. Baptism is not a means of salvation, nor is it necessary for salvation. Baptism is a testimony of salvation.

Four important questions are often asked about baptism. They are:

1. **Who should be baptized?** The best answer to this question is found in reading these verses: “If thou believest with all thin heart, thou mayest [be baptized]” Acts 8:37. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” Acts 2:41.

Did you notice the truth taught by these verses? Baptism comes after believing in and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. Only believers should be baptized.

2. **Why should I be Baptized?** We are baptized to obey the command of the Lord who said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). We are also baptized to follow the example of Jesus Christ who came “from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him” (Matthew 3:13). Baptism affords us an opportunity to show others what Jesus has done for us.

3. **How should I be baptized?** The word *baptize* comes from the Greek word *baptizmo* meaning “to immerse, to put under.” If the Christian will allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves, he will conclude that scriptural baptism is done by immersing. Note the following references:

Matthew 3:6 - “...baptized...in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

Matthew 3:16 - “Jesus when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.”

Acts 8:36-39 - “...and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water...he went on his way rejoicing.”

4. **What is the purpose of baptism?** According to Romans 6:1-6, baptism’s purpose is to picture the Christian’s death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Baptism is a way for the believer to be identified with Christ. It pictures Christ’s death (standing in the water), burial (placed under the water), and resurrection (coming up out of the water).

Church membership should come only after baptism because the latter is the first step in a walk of Christian obedience. In order to be obedient to Christ’s command in Matthew 28:19-20, the believer must be baptized.

Acts 2:41 presents the pattern, “Then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Notice in this verse that there is (1) salvation, (2) baptism, and (3) adding “unto them” (*i.e. the church, Acts 2:47*).

THE LORD’S SUPPER

Dinner time is a special time for a family. It presents an opportunity to reflect upon the events of the day, restore family relationships, and to gain the energy needed for future challenges. The Lord’s Supper is a time when Christians gather together to reflect, restore, and be revitalized.

The Bible tells us that just prior our Lord’s crucifixion, He met with His family of disciples for dinner in an upper room (Luke 22:15-20). At that supper the Lord used the broken bread and the drink to symbolically represent His body which would soon be broken and His blood which would soon be shed. Our Lord instituted a sacred object lesson. He commanded that His disciples perpetuate this coming together for “communion” in order to reflect upon His sacrifice (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:26)

The following questions regarding the Lord’s Supper are frequently asked.

1. **What do the elements of the Lord's table picture?** Bread pictures Christ's broken body. In Matthew 26:26 we read, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." Christ's blessed body was broken just hours later for our sins (Isaiah 53). He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). The bread should remind us of Christ's body broken for us.

The cup pictures Christ's shed blood. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Hebrews 9:22 says, "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission." The blood of Christ was shed for the remission of our sins.

2. **Who should partake of the Lord's Supper?** The Bible warns prospective participants to proceed with caution. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper "unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27).

The guidelines for participation in communion are found in Acts 2:41-42. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"(Acts 2:41-42). These verses reveal an order for those who would be participants at the Lord's Table. Participation should come after salvation (they "received") and baptism (they "were baptized"). Only after salvation and baptism should there be :breaking of bread."

3. **What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?** The primary purpose of the Lord's Supper is found in the words of our Lord, "this do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). As Christians gather together to partake of the Lord's Table, they must focus retrospectively on the great sacrifice of the Savior.

A second purpose for the Lord's Supper is found in 1 Corinthians 11. The communion service allows Christians to focus introspectively on their dedication to the Savior (1 Cor. 11:23-32). No one should partake of the Lord's Table casually (1 Cor. 11:29-30). In fact, casual participation can bring dreadful consequences including sickness and death (1 Cor. 11:30).

FROM YOUR READING

1. An "ordinance" is _____
_____.
2. Communion is an ordinance of _____ and
_____.
3. Who should be baptized? _____.
4. Why should we be baptized? _____
_____.
5. The Greek word baptized means _____.
6. What is the purpose of baptism? _____

_____.
7. What instructions does I Corinthians 11 give regarding communion?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____



The following material is given for your personal Bible Study and Christian growth. The basic assignments for the course are given and a special “achiever” assignment is suggested for those who desire to go the extra mile. Before you begin, pray that God will allow you to really grow through this endeavor.

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SCRIPTURE ASSIGNMENT

Because God has done so much for us, we should desire to serve Him. As you study this material, you will learn about baptism and the Lord’s supper. Read the verses carefully and ask God to help you to always respond to Biblical instructions.

1. According to Acts 8:12, when were the people baptized? _____

2. Philip was certain of one thing before he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. What was that (Acts 8:36-37)?

a. _____

What do you learn about infant baptism from these verses?

b. _____

3. Romans 6:3-4 teaches us that water baptism is a picture of what takes place spiritually when we are saved. How is our spiritual baptism pictured by water baptism?

a. _____(Death)

b. _____(Life)

4. What are the two conditions for church membership found in Acts