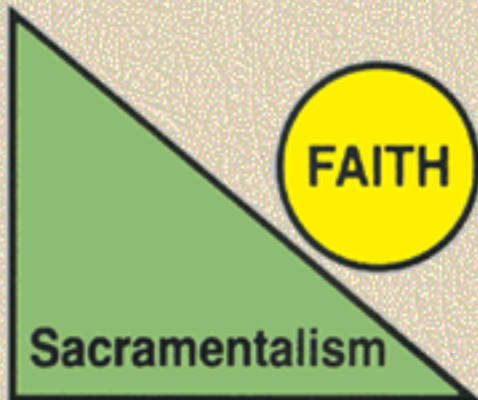


# FAITH IN SACRAMENTALISM



A wrong object of faith is Sacramentalism. The belief in participating in a series of religious rituals to receive God's grace. Belief of a sacrament as "a visible symbol of invisible grace."

Sacramentalism arose during the Middle Ages and was developed by the Scholastics. Thomas Aquinas said that the sacraments have virtue in themselves. They are therefore seen as channels of grace and are

administered by a priest. The participant receives righteousness by using them.

The church has long practiced two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, as commanded in the Bible. It was probably inevitable that some one would mistakenly give these ordinances the same spiritual power as the written Word of God. The Roman Catholic church gave these two ordinances sacramental force and added five others: confirmation, penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage.

## The Seven Sacraments

**Baptism** taught to be the door to the Kingdom of God and to the other sacraments.

**Confirmation** taught to complete what baptism begins and to confer grace in ever-increasing strength.

**Eucharist** believed to confer the food of spiritual life in the body and blood of Christ.

**Penance** believed to remove the guilt of daily sin as baptism is said to remove the guilt of original sin.

**Extreme Unction** believed to heal the soul of sins that are not remitted by penance.

**Ordination** believed to empower a person to administer the sacraments.

**Marriage taught to make the union of man and woman perpetual and bring it into harmony with the picture of Christ and the church.**

The Bible teaches salvation is by grace through faith, and faith alone. Paul declared, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). He also wrote, "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" (Eph. 2:8-9).

The idea that sacraments convey God's grace to us is foreign to the New Testament. Baptism is presented clearly as a symbol of our union with Jesus Christ through faith (Rom. 6:1-5), and the Lord's Supper is shown to be a simple memorial (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-34).

**What does the Bible say?** The following verses show that faith in Sacramentalism is the wrong faith:

- **Isaiah 1:10** You are no better than the leaders and people of Sodom and Gomorrah! So listen to the LORD God:
- **Isaiah 1:11** "Your sacrifices mean nothing to me. I am sick of your offerings of rams and choice cattle; I don't like the blood of bulls or lambs or goats.
- **Isaiah 1:12** "Who asked you to bring all this when you come to worship me? Stay out of my temple!
- **Isaiah 1:13** Your sacrifices are worthless, and incense is disgusting. I can't stand the evil you do on your New Moon Festivals or on your Sabbaths and other times of worship.
- **Isaiah 1:14** I hate your New Moon Festivals and all others as well. They are a heavy burden I am tired of carrying.
- **Isaiah 1:15** "No matter how much you pray, I won't listen. You are too violent.
- **Isaiah 1:16** Wash yourselves clean! I am disgusted with your filthy deeds. Stop doing wrong
  
- **Jeremiah 6:19** My people ignored me and rejected my laws. They planned to do evil, and now the evil they planned will happen to them."
- **Jeremiah 6:20** People of Judah, you bring me incense from Sheba and spices from distant lands. You offer sacrifices of all kinds. But why bother? I hate these gifts of yours!
- **Jeremiah 6:21** So I will put stumbling blocks in your path, and everyone will die, including parents and children, neighbors and friends.

- **Hosea 8:11** Israel, you have built many altars where you offer sacrifices for sin. But these altars have become places for sin.
- **Hosea 8:12** My instructions for sacrifices were written in detail, but you ignored them.
- **Hosea 8:13** You sacrifice your best animals and eat the sacrificial meals, but I, the LORD, refuse your offerings. I will remember your sins and punish you. Then you will return to Egypt.
- **Hosea 8:14** Israel, I created you, but you forgot me. You and Judah built palaces and many strong cities. Now I will send fire to destroy your towns and fortresses.

## SACRAMENTALISM

When the word *sacrament* was first applied to baptism in the latter part of the second century AD, it was associated with some erroneous ideas that had been drawn into Christendom from the Greek mystery religions. The converts from paganism were accustomed to having cleansing ceremonies for spiritual purification, and they began to think of baptism as a means by which the stain of sin was removed. These former pagans had been involved in practices they had looked on as having special powers, so it was only a small step for them to view the waters of baptism as possessing redemptive value.

Constantine, the Roman emperor who made Christianity the state religion in the fourth century, reportedly postponed his baptism until he was on his deathbed. We presume that he hoped all his sins would be washed away just before he died.

By the 12th century, as many as 30 different rites and ceremonies were being practiced in the church. These were called either "mysteries" or "sacraments." That number, of course, has been gradually reduced, but the term *sacrament* has been retained. And for many it still refers to something that provides a special means of grace. These people therefore think of salvation as a combination of faith, good works, and the sacraments. The biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith alone has been lost to them.

Sacramentalism is still with us today. Because of the misleading connotation attached to the word *sacrament*, I repeat my conviction that we should be very careful to refer to the *ordinances* rather than the *sacraments* of the church. So important is it that we make plain the way of salvation by grace through faith--apart from works or ritual--that even in our terminology we must avoid giving the impression that baptism has any saving power.

We should never baptize anyone who had the idea that doing so would wash away sin. If someone requests to be baptized, first ask him if he or she knew its meaning. Make sure they understood that it has no saving power whatever. I would then want to hear from his own lips a clear testimony that he has recognized what the Lord Jesus accomplished for

him at Calvary through His sacrifice for sin, and that he has placed his trust in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, for salvation. Being assured of that, and satisfied that he recognized baptism as an ordinance rather than a sacrament of the church (that it has no redemptive value), Only then should they be encourage to be baptized.

There are those who insist that baptism, confirmation, penance, the partaking of the bread and the wine, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction are all to be recognized as sacramental. They therefore look on each of these observances as a means by which supernatural grace is received. According to this belief:

- **Baptism** is thought to wash away the stain of sin.
- **Confirmation** (which includes laying on of hands, anointing, and prayers) is said to bestow the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit on the person who has already been baptized.
- In **penance**, the forgiveness of post-baptism mortal sins is supposedly obtained by those who are truly sorry for their sin, make confession, and perform the duties imposed on them.
- In **ordination**, a special grace is said to be given for the work and temptations involved in serving God.
- When the **bread** and **wine** are blessed, it is asserted that they actually become the body and blood of Christ, and that the one who partakes of them receives a measure of grace.
- In **marriage**, the man and woman joined in wedlock are said to receive grace to discharge faithfully the duties of the marital state until death.

In **extreme unction**, those who appear to be near death are anointed with oil and prayed over. This is done, supposedly, to impart special grace, enabling the dying soul to confide in the mercy of God and to resist the final attacks and temptations of the devil.

The idea of supernatural bestowment of grace through the ritual is prominent in each of these seven "sacraments." We don't see it this way. Rather than recognizing seven sacraments which are claimed to impart some spiritual graces, we observe only two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. We see them as symbolizing certain spiritual realities.

Some religious groups recognize a third church ordinance--foot-washing. Following the example of Christ with His disciples, they engage in that practice as an outward

expression of humility, and of their willing submission to one another. Although we may not follow that custom, we do respect those born-again believers who do.

## **WATER BAPTISM**

There are those who make water baptism essential to salvation--who teach that it actually washes away sin or contributes to the new birth. I am further troubled by someone who says, "Unless you are baptized by someone in our group for the remission of sins, you cannot be sure you are going to heaven." So in this chapter and the next, I'd like to concentrate on the following two questions:

- What is the meaning of baptism?
- Does baptism save?

There should be no doubt about the answers.

## **WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?**

The answer is found in Romans 6:1-7. To appreciate what the apostle was saying here, we should keep in mind that in the preceding chapters (Rom. 3--5) Paul convincingly established the truth that salvation is by grace through faith. After indicating the depth of human sinfulness and emphasizing the failure of the law to bring salvation, he made it clear that the only way a holy God declares sinners righteous is through their faith in Christ, the perfect sacrifice for sin (see Rom. 3:19-28). To demonstrate that human works have nothing to do with salvation, Paul pointed out that Abraham was justified *before* he was circumcised (see 4:1-12). He said in Romans 5:1:

**To demonstrate that human works have nothing to do with salvation, Paul pointed out that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised.**

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then drew an analogy between the first Adam, who brought condemnation and death by his one act of disobedience, and Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who provided justification and life for all through His one act of obedience.

In the first five chapters of Romans, the apostle stated clearly that salvation is received by faith and faith alone. Knowing that some people would misunderstand or deliberately

misrepresent his teaching, Paul anticipated an objection by saying:

- **Romans 6:1** What should we say? Should we keep on sinning, so that God's wonderful kindness will show up even better?
- **Romans 6:2** No, we should not! If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning?
- **Romans 6:3** Don't you know that all who share in Christ Jesus by being baptized also share in his death?
- **Romans 6:4** When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Jesus Christ. We were baptized, so that we would live a new life, as Jesus was raised to life by the glory of God the Father.
- **Romans 6:5** If we shared in Jesus' death by being baptized, we will be raised to life with him.
- **Romans 6:6** We know that the persons we used to be were nailed to the cross with Jesus. This was done, so that our sinful bodies would no longer be the slaves of sin.

When a person receives the Lord Jesus as his Savior, he dies to the domination of sin. Yes, in Christ believers have died to sin, and this is the truth signified in baptism. By going down into the waters of baptism, we who have placed our trust in Christ testify that through our union with Him we have been buried with Him in His death. Having died to sin, we are no longer under its condemnation or bondage. Then, our emergence from the waters of baptism signifies that through our union with the living Lord we have been raised from death with Him. We now have new life--that which gives us spiritual victory. Here is what the apostle himself told us:

**Romans 6:4** When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Jesus Christ. We were baptized, so that we would live a new life, as Jesus was raised to life by the glory of God the Father.

**Water baptism speaks of our identification with Christ. By that identification we are delivered from the condemnation and bondage of sin and brought into a life of peace with God and triumph over sin.**

Water baptism speaks of our identification with Jesus Christ. By that identification we are delivered from the condemnation and bondage of sin and brought into a life of peace with God and triumph over sin. Baptism, therefore, has served symbolically as an introductory rite from the Day of

Pentecost onward. It is the new believer's first step of obedience. It is his public identification with Christ. The apostle said:

**Romans 6:3** Don't you know that all who share in Christ Jesus by being baptized also share in his death?

When Paul made reference to believers being "baptized into Christ Jesus," he used an expression that's identical in construction to a statement in 1 Corinthians 10:2, where he said that the Israelites were "baptized into Moses." The Israelites, having already chosen to follow Moses out of Egypt, were openly identified with him when they passed through the Red Sea. In like manner, we become followers of the Lord Jesus the moment we place our trust in Him. And in our baptism "into Christ Jesus," we openly identify ourselves with Him as our leader and guide.

Baptism in water continues to be the outward visible sign by which individuals who believed the gospel of Jesus Christ are publicly incorporated into this spirit-baptized fellowship--"baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27). It must be remembered that in New Testament times repentance and faith, regeneration and conversion, baptism in water, reception of the Holy Spirit, admission to church fellowship are all part of a complex of events that took place within a short time of the church. Logically they were distinguishable, but in practice they were all bound up with the transition from the old life to the new.

Baptism, then, is a testimony of our death to sin, of our severance from its domination, and of our pledge to live a new life through our faith-union with Jesus Christ. During the first century, baptism quickly followed salvation and was closely associated with membership in the local church.

No one should ever make the mistake of depending on baptism as a basis of his hope for heaven. Whether baptized by sprinkling, pouring, immersion, or all three, a person may still be unsaved. The only way you receive the forgiveness of sin and the gift of everlasting life is through a personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

**No one should ever make the mistake of depending on baptism as a basis of his hope for heaven.**

## **BAPTISM & SALVATION**

A priest, called to the bedside of a dying man, promised he would return to serve him communion. Then he offered a formal prayer and left. But the patient failed to find much comfort in the priest's promise. He knew very well he had sinned against God and needed forgiveness. How a ritualistic observance of the Lord's Supper could possibly do him any good made no sense to him, and he couldn't sleep that night. When a nurse came in and

found him awake, she engaged him in conversation, read him some verses from the Bible, and then had the joy of leading him to Jesus Christ. The dying man experienced at once the joy of forgiveness and the assurance of being accepted into the family of God. The next day, as weak as he was, he testified of his faith in Jesus Christ to everyone who entered his room. Then he lapsed into a coma and died without regaining consciousness.

The question arises: Did that man go to heaven? Some people would have serious doubts about it. This is because they believe it's essential to be baptized in order to be saved and to have our sins washed away.

Therefore, I would like us to consider the questions: Does baptism save? Does it wash away sin? Does it contribute in any way to the new birth? The answers will become evident as we review the passages of Scripture that are usually referred to as proof that a person must be baptized by water to be saved.

**Does baptism save? Does it wash away sin? Does it contribute in any way to the new birth?**

Romans 6:3 does not indicate that there is any saving power in water baptism.

Some people believe, however, that several other passages of Scripture do teach or suggest that baptism is essential to being born again. So let's look at those verses to see if they really do portray baptism as having power to wash away sins.

## **ACTS 2:38**

This is the verse most often quoted by those who believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. It says:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In this verse Peter was addressing the same people who not only cried out for the execution of Christ but also declared, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). Here he commanded them to repent--that is, to change their minds--and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ "for the remission of sins." Does that mean that baptism is the agent of forgiveness? In other words, is a person baptized so that he can receive forgiveness of sin? No!

**Is a person baptized so that he can receive forgiveness of sin? No! Baptism is a testimony that the one baptized has already changed his mind about Christ.**



Baptism is a testimony that the one baptized has already changed his mind about Christ. Accepting Him instead of rejecting Him, he has experienced the forgiveness of sin.

What does Acts 2:38 mean when it says, "Repent, . . . and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins"? Here is a possible explanation. A. T. Robertson, a well-known Greek scholar, has pointed out that the Greek preposition *eis*, translated "for" in the phrase "for the remission of sins," may also mean *because of*. An example of this can be found in Luke 11:32, where the text says that the people of Nineveh "repented at the preaching of Jonah." The word *at* is a translation of the same Greek term *eis* found in Acts 2:38. The people of Jonah's day, you see, did not repent *for* his preaching but *because of* it.

Then too, according to some Greek scholars the word *eis* (translated "for" in Acts 2:38) may also mean, "with a view toward." According to that possible meaning, the people to whom Peter was preaching were to repent and be baptized *with a view toward* the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2:38 does not teach that baptism brings the remission of sins.

When Peter preached the gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius, the Holy Spirit came upon the entire household when they believed (see Acts 10:44-48). Even during that transition period in the early days of the church, therefore, people were saved and received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized in water.

A second verse quoted by those who teach that water baptism has some special spiritual efficacy is:

## ACTS 22:16

In this passage, Ananias said to the recently converted Saul of Tarsus:

Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

In trying to understand the meaning of the words "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins," we must follow this basic rule of Bible study: Interpret every verse in the light of the clear teaching set forth in the rest of Scripture. Since the truth of justification by faith is

**Interpret every verse in the light of the clear teaching set forth in the rest of Scripture.**

declared plainly in the Bible, we know that Saul was forgiven the very moment he met Christ on the Damascus Road and believed on Him. We are therefore safe in concluding that his baptism was the outward and physical sign of his inward and spiritual cleansing

from sin by the grace of God.

Another passage often misinterpreted as teaching that baptism plays a part in saving us is:

## **I PETER 3:18-21**

The passage reads as follows:

For Jesus Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What did Peter mean in verse 21 when he said, "There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism"? Was he indicating that water baptism in itself has any saving power? No, not at all! Rather, he saw the waters of baptism in much the same way he did the deluge in Noah's day. Although those floodwaters destroyed a wicked world of sinners, they in turn saved Noah and his family by buoying them up as they rode out the storm in the ark. In that sense, Peter could say in verse 20 that "a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water." We know, of course, that the waters saved them indirectly. They escaped by floating in the ark while everything else was being submerged. And the deliverance of Noah's family under those circumstances reminded Peter of baptism. Referring to the "eight souls . . . saved through water," he said, "There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism" (1 Pet. 3:21). Even as Noah and his family in the ark were "saved" by the very same waters that judged the rest of the world, so also the waters of God's judgment poured out on Christ at Calvary for the sins of the world became the means whereby all who are in the ark of safety, the Lord Jesus Christ, are saved.

Please notice that Peter went on to say baptism "saves us," figuratively. It is "not the

removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 3:21). Peter was not talking about the outward washing of the body; he was speaking of what is really necessary--an inward spiritual cleansing that is experienced only by those who have received Christ's forgiveness. No, baptism itself does not remove sin. It is a symbolic testimony of an inner cleansing that has already occurred.

**Peter was not talking about the outward washing of the body; he was speaking of what is really necessary – an inward spiritual cleansing that is experienced only by those who have received Christ's forgiveness.**

Now a few comments about one other passage that is sometimes mistakenly related to water baptism.

## **TITUS 3:5**

The verse reads:

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.

Paul indicated in this verse that God has saved us "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." This has been taken by some as a reference to baptism, and they therefore conclude that baptism is essential to regeneration.

In speaking of the "washing of regeneration," however, the apostle was referring to a cleansed life, not baptism. In verse 3, he had spoken of the unsaved as "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." In verse 5, he went on to declare that "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration." That speaks of the cleansing that accompanies the new birth.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

The implied reference to water in the word *washing* in Titus 3:5 should be understood in the light of the Old Testament. In the ritual of the Mosaic economy, as recorded in Leviticus, water was used as a symbol of cleansing. And when the prophet Ezekiel portrayed Israel's future conversion, he quoted God's promise as follows:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols (36:25).

The washing of regeneration, therefore, is a fitting symbol of the cleansing that the believer receives from God through the new birth. With this in mind, read what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word (Eph. 5:25-26).

**The washing of regeneration, therefore, is a fitting symbol of the cleansing that the believer receives from God through the new birth.**

The "washing of water by the word" is related to spiritual cleansing. Water baptism is not a means of regeneration or spiritual cleansing; rather, it is symbolic of salvation and the spiritual cleansing we enjoy through our union with Christ by faith.

**Although it's true that baptism is not essential to salvation, this does not make it merely an option for Christians. Doing the will of God is never an optional matter.**

Even though baptism has no power to save us from our sins, we must be careful not to minimize its place in the life of a Christian. Because baptism has no saving efficacy and is not mandatory for salvation, some believers have concluded that it's really quite

unimportant. But they're wrong! Although it's true that baptism is not essential to salvation, this does not make it merely an option for Christians. Doing the will of God is never an optional matter. The Lord Jesus gave His disciples this clear command:

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 (Mt. 28:19).

And on the Day of Pentecost, the record says:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

These 3,000 people converted on the Day of Pentecost are models for us. They believed, they were baptized, they gathered for instruction, they broke bread with one another, and

they prayed together.

Baptism is important. It's a testimony to the believer's identification with Christ. And if you know Him as Savior, the Lord wants you to be baptized and to identify with a local assembly of believers who meet for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the ordinances, and the practice of mutual nurture, admonition, and discipline. If you are born again but have not been baptized, or have not united with a local church that is true to the Word, I urge you to do so.

Perhaps you have never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. I would remind you that salvation through a personal belief in Christ is first and foremost. Admit your spiritual need. Acknowledge that the Lord Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for your sins. Agree that He arose from the dead as proof that the death penalty was paid in full. Then receive Him. In other words, by an act of faith, place your trust in Him. The Bible says that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). After you have done that, your next steps should be baptism and church membership--not in order to be saved but because you have *already* experienced the saving grace of God by placing your faith in Christ. The Bible gives this promise:

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

### A SYMBOLIC OBSERVANCE

The elements of the Table of the Lord are symbols of what was involved in His sacrifice as the Lamb of God in providing our salvation.

The *bread* represents the *body* of Christ. In chapter 2 of his first epistle, the apostle Peter said this about the Lord Jesus:

Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed (1 Pet. 2:22-24).

Jesus, the sinless One, took our sins upon Himself. Yes, He became our substitute, bearing our sins in His own body on the cross. He died to provide forgiveness and life for a world of sinners. This is what we should remember when we partake of the bread in our observance of the Lord's Supper.

The *cup* symbolizes the *blood* of the Lord Jesus, which was shed to pay for the sins of the world. In verse 24 of Mark 14, we are told that as Jesus and His disciples were eating the Passover meal He said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many." Therefore, in the communion service, as we hold the cup in our hands, we should thank God for the blood of Christ, which was shed to secure our redemption and to cleanse us from sin.

The bread and the cup are symbolic of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. They remind us of what He endured to provide salvation, pointing to that event on which we base our hope for all eternity.

**The bread and the cup are symbolic of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. They remind us of what He endured to provide salvation, pointing to that event on which we base our hope for all eternity.**

Some people claim that when the bread and wine are consecrated, they change into the actual body and blood of Christ. They object to our speaking of the bread and wine as symbols. To support their claim, they remind us that Jesus said in reference to the bread and the cup, "This is My body" and "This is My blood." He did not say, they argue, "This bread symbolizes My body" or "This wine symbolizes My blood." We should remember, however, that the Lord Jesus on occasion used symbolic or figurative language. In John 15, for example, He referred to Himself as "the vine." I'm sure His disciples knew that He was speaking figuratively. They certainly did not expect to see Him as an actual vine! Rather, they recognized what He was saying to be symbolic. With Christ portrayed as a vine, and His followers as the branches, the truth of our union with and dependence on Him is taught in a forceful and unique manner.

Our Lord also used figurative language when He said, "I am the door" (John 10:9) and "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Now, no one, in Jesus' day believed that Jesus was claiming to be an actual door made of wood or an actual piece of bread. He was speaking figuratively. And when He referred to the bread and the wine, He declared, "This is My body" and "This is My blood." We should understand that He was simply using figurative language.

I should also point out a serious error in doctrine related to the claim that the bread and the

**The Bible makes it very clear that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was a once-and-for-all payment for sin.**

wine actually become the flesh and blood of Christ. Some who take this view go on to conclude that the Lord Jesus is crucified again every time the bread and the wine are partaken of. The Bible, however, makes it very clear

that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was a once-and-for-all payment for sin.

- **Romans 6:10** When Jesus Christ died, he died for Sin **ONCE and for All**. And now he is alive, and he lives only for God.
- **Hebrews 9:25** Jesus Christ did not have to offer himself many times. He wasn't like a high priest who goes into the most holy place each year to offer the blood of an animal.
- **Hebrews 9:26** If he had offered himself every year, he would have suffered many times since the creation of the world. But instead, near the end of time he offered himself once and for all, so that he could be a sacrifice that does away with sin.
- **Hebrews 9:27** We die only once, and then we are judged.
- **Hebrews 9:28** So Jesus Christ died only once to take away the sins of many people. But when he comes again, it will not be to take away sin. He will come to save everyone who is waiting for him.
- **Hebrews 10:11** The priests do their work each day, and they keep on offering sacrifices that can never take away sins.
- **Hebrews 10:12** But Jesus Christ offered himself as a sacrifice that is good forever. Now he is sitting at God's right side,
- **Hebrews 10:13** and he will stay there until his enemies are put under his power.
- **Hebrews 10:14** By his One Sacrifice he has forever set free from sin the people he brings to God.

Jesus Christ died only once. He arose from the grave only once. He ascended into heaven only once. He is now seated at the right hand of God, where He will remain until He raptures His saints, judges them, and returns to earth as its rightful king. He is in glory, exalted at the Father's right hand--and He's there in His glorified physical body. He is spiritually present everywhere, but in His glorified body He lives in heaven. The idea, therefore, that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, that He is somehow crucified repeatedly, is completely foreign to the teaching of the Bible.

**The idea that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, that He is somehow crucified repeatedly, is completely foreign to the teaching of the Bible.**

In addition to being a memorial and a symbolic observance, the Lord's Supper should be:

# A CONTINUING OBSERVANCE

The Lord Jesus Himself established this ordinance:

- [Luke 22:13](#) Peter and John left. They found everything just as Jesus had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.
- [Luke 22:14](#) When the time came for Jesus and the apostles to eat,
- [Luke 22:15](#) he said to them, "I have very much wanted to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer.
- [Luke 22:16](#) I tell you that I will not eat another Passover meal until it is finally eaten in God's kingdom."
- [Luke 22:17](#) Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and gave thanks to God. Then he told the apostles, "Take this wine and share it with each other.
- [Luke 22:18](#) I tell you that I will not drink any more wine until God's kingdom comes."
- [Luke 22:19](#) Jesus took some bread in his hands and gave thanks for it. He broke the bread and handed it to his apostles. Then he said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this as a way of remembering me!"
- [Luke 22:20](#) After the meal he took another cup of wine in his hands. Then he said, "This is my blood. It is poured out for you, and with it God makes his new agreement.

Following the example of Jesus Christ, assemblies of believers from the earliest days of the church to the present time have observed the Lord's Supper. We are told that the first company of believers, those 3,000 men and women converted on the Day of Pentecost, "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, *in the breaking of bread*, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). And that practice continued. In Acts 20:7 we are told that "on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

In Paul's first epistle to the believers in Corinth, he made it evident that the Lord's Supper was still being commemorated. In fact, the apostle said:

[1Corinthians 11:26](#) The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about his death until he returns.

And that is why believers everywhere continue to remember Jesus' death through this ordinance.



# A CHURCH OBSERVANCE

Communion should be observed in or under the supervision of the local church whenever possible. Celebrating the Lord's Supper is a solemn matter. It's rich in significance and awesome in what it portrays; so much so that carelessness in its practice among the Corinthian believers had resulted in illness and even death for some of them. Paul wrote:

**Communion should be observed in or under the supervision of the local church whenever possible.**

- **1Corinthians 11:29** If you fail to understand that you are the body of the Lord, you will condemn yourselves by the way you eat and drink.
- **1Corinthians 11:30** That's why many of you are sick and weak and why a lot of others have died.

We must therefore be careful to make the observance of the Lord's Table a meaningful experience. We must issue warnings against entering into it carelessly or irreverently. We must also realize that this can best be done under the supervision of the local church.

I'm not saying that the Lord's Supper can only be observed in a church. There are times when believers might be isolated from an organized body of believers because of distance or circumstances. I'm thinking of Christians who are confined to homes or hospitals because of illness. These believers should not be deprived of the privilege of remembering our Lord's death, though I believe they should be served the elements by a representative of the local church.

Before concluding, let me say just a few words about the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper. Some believers "break bread" every Sunday, others do it monthly, and still others only once a quarter. The Scriptures give no command as to how often it should be observed. We therefore cannot dogmatically say that one is right and the others are wrong. Rather, "let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). Regardless of any differences we may have about the frequency of the communion service, we should all agree on this: It must be conducted with reverence and with a solemn reflection upon the great price paid for our salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ.

To summarize, the Lord's Supper is a memorial observance, a symbolic observance, a continuing observance, and a church observance. It reminds us of the great sacrifice involved in providing for our salvation. The bread and the cup are symbols of the body and blood of Christ. We are to continue our remembrance of Christ "till He comes." And, if possible, the observance of the Lord's Supper should be under the supervision of the

local church.

## THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

In many churches today, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is simply tacked on to the end of a regular service. It's almost like an afterthought. A few verses of Scripture are quickly read, a brief prayer is offered, and the elements are distributed. In this kind of atmosphere it is doubtful that anyone can give much serious thought to the significance of the occasion. As a result, many worshipers leave their churches holding the same grudges and nursing the same hatreds they had when they entered.

Not everyone, of course, takes such an attitude toward the observance of the Lord's Table. In fact, some go to the opposite extreme. They are so conscious of their imperfections, and so frightened by Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11 about eating and drinking "unworthily," that they either take communion with great fear or they stay away from the service altogether.

To help avoid these two extremes, I would like to suggest three characteristics of a proper observance of the Lord's Supper. A correct understanding of its significance will not keep us away from the communion table; rather, it will draw us to it and encourage us to participate in a conscientious and meaningful way.

## SINCERE APPRECIATION

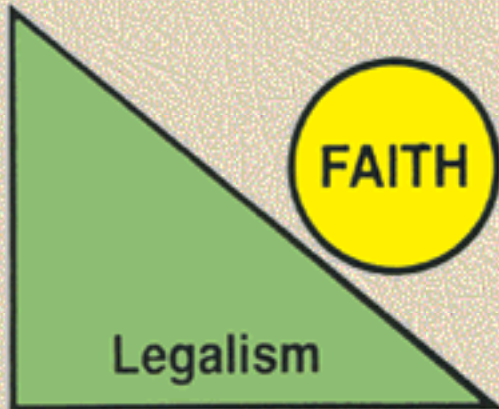
The very sight of the bread and the cup (symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, reminding us of His great sacrifice at Calvary) should fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. Referring to the Lord Jesus, Luke told us:

- [Luke 22:17](#) Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and gave thanks to God. Then he told the apostles, "Take this wine and share it with each other.
- [Luke 22:18](#) I tell you that I will not drink any more wine until God's kingdom comes."
- [Luke 22:19](#) Jesus took some bread in his hands and gave thanks for it. He broke the bread and handed it to his apostles. Then he said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this as a way of remembering me!"

Please notice that we are told in verse 17, Jesus took the *cup and gave thanks*. And in verse 19 we read that He took *bread and gave thanks*. When our Lord gave thanks, He

was not "asking the blessing" at a dinner. He and His disciples had already finished the Passover feast. What our Lord prayed over was only some unleavened bread and a cup of wine. He may have been offering thanks for what the bread and the wine signified--the sacrifice that would provide redemption for mankind. Regardless of the subject of our Savior's thanksgiving, however, there should be sincere appreciation and thanks in our hearts as we partake of the elements.

## FAITH IN LEGALISM

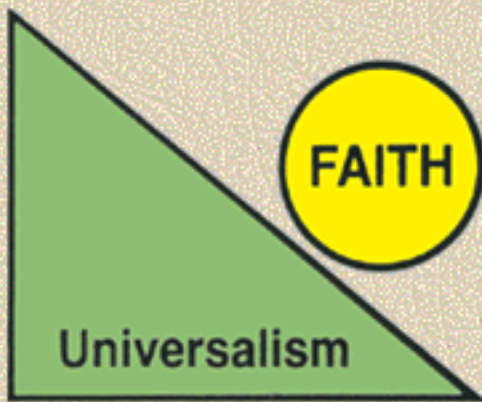


Another false object of faith for many people is their own good works. People like to think that they can please God by their own efforts. It may be something as simple as giving up smoking, or something as self-sacrificing as giving everything away. Some people think that if they obey a long list of do's and don'ts they will impress God with their sincerity. In any case, legalism is a religion of human achievement. It is man trying to earn salvation by something he does.

The Pharisees were extreme legalists. They added hundreds of minute regulations to the Mosaic law and tried to get others to live by them. At the same time, they were fiercely proud of the righteousness they felt they had earned because of their meticulous obedience to all the regulations. But Jesus firmly denounced these men. He publicly rebuked them for putting their laws and regulations above the people. He showed them that God receives sinners who come to Him humbly, but He rejects the proud who place confidence in their good works.

Some converts to the Christian faith in the early church, still influenced by their background in Judaism, thought that the apostles should require the circumcision of Gentile believers (Acts 15:1). Others felt that salvation was still linked to the observances of the Jewish dietary regulations. The church council under the leadership of James, however, made it clear that legalistic rules were not to be imposed on Gentile believers. And the apostle Paul repeatedly rebuked those who were trying to mix law-keeping with the gospel of God's grace. In Colossians 2:16-17 he wrote, "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (see also Rom. 14; Gal. 1--3).

## FAITH IN UNIVERSALISM



A very popular faith many people have adopted is that of Universalism. It is the idea that because God is all Love, He will never send anyone to hell. They believe that a loving God would never sentence one of His creatures to eternal destruction. Everyone, according to this view, will ultimately spend eternity with God.

Now the Bible does teach that God is love (1 Jn. 4:8,18). No one can deny that. But God is also a God of holiness (Lev. 11:44-45; 16:2; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:16).

Because He is holy, He cannot ignore sin. He must judge it. He must bring punishment to the sinner. The Bible teaches that the one who sins will die (Ezek. 18:4), and that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The issue of our sin must therefore be settled. That's why God in love did provide for us a way of salvation, as we will see in the next section.

## **CHECKING YOUR FAITH**

**Evaluate your Faith by placing a check in the appropriate boxes.**

My faith is not in my ability to control my own destiny.

My faith is not in my good name and good living.

My faith is not in my church or its ceremonies.

My faith is not in my ability to improve myself.

My faith is not in my ability to push all negative thoughts out of my life.

My faith is not in my own sincerity.

My faith is not in my power to tap some inner, godlike resources.

My faith is in Jesus Christ.

The danger of being religious can be seen as early as our first parents. Adam and Eve's fatal mistake occurred in an attempt to be more like God. Their error was not that they stopped believing in God, but that they began believing in a way that had been forbidden.

Their first son also tried to trust God on his own terms. The Lord rejected Cain's bloodless sacrifice but honored the sacrificial lamb offered up by his younger brother. Burning with anger, Cain became so jealous that he killed Abel and ruined his own life in the process.

**Our worst errors are always religious ones.**

The people of Israel also got in trouble for trying to serve and worship God on their own terms. On the threshold of the Promised Land, some Jewish men accepted an invitation from the local women to be guests at a pagan religious event. Within hours, thousands of Jewish people had died (Num. 25).

Saul, the first king of Israel, was no different. He lost his kingdom by making religious errors. When Samuel the priest didn't show up in time to offer a pre-battle sacrifice, Saul thought it was necessary to offer the sacrifice himself. He was wrong (1 Sam. 13:8-14; see also chapter 15).

**Danger follows those who trust God on their own terms.**

Even David got in trouble for being religious. After being confirmed as King of Israel, he called for the sacred chest that contained the Ten Commandments of God. With enthusiasm, he led all Israel in a procession to bring the holy object to Jerusalem. Yet when the oxen bearing the ark of the covenant stumbled, and when a priest named Uzza put out his hand to make sure that the ark did not fall, God struck the priest dead. David reacted with fear and anger. How could he live with such a God? Only after rereading the Law of God did David realize he had done the right thing in the wrong way (1 Chron. 13; 15:12-15).

Why does God make an issue of what we believe and how we serve and worship Him? Because He is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24), not ritualistically and ignorantly. God wants to be worshiped from a heart that is responding to the truth about His love and grace.

It may sound complex, but it isn't. All God really wants is for us to know and love His Son. Good religion will follow (James. 1:26-27).

## **WHAT'S THE REAL DIFFERENCE?**

Religion and Christ are not mutually exclusive, but they are very distinct. James, a New Testament writer and brother of Christ, wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Religion can be many good things, but it cannot be a substitute for Christ.

## **Religion is something to Believe and Do (Works):**

- Attending religious services
- Enrolling children in religious schools
- Showing acts of kindness
- Avoiding immorality
- Believing in God
- Having religious affiliation
- Being baptized
- Receiving communion
- Studying doctrine
- Reading the Scriptures
- Offering prayers.
- Celebrating religious events
- Teaching religious classes
- Giving aid to the poor
- Singing in the choir
- Being recognized as a godly person

## **Jesus Christ is Someone to Know and Trust:**

- Someone who is very near
- Someone who has authority to help us
- Someone who can forgive us
- Someone who can declare us righteous
- Someone who can set us apart for God
- Someone who can bring God to us
- Someone who can bring us to God
- Someone who can include us in His will
- Someone who can guide us
- Someone who can teach us
- Someone who can be our example
- Someone who never leaves us all alone
- Someone who can be trusted
- Someone who can defend us
- Someone who can intercede for us
- Someone who can enable us
- Someone who can respond to our emotions
- Someone who can feel our pain
- Someone who can give us joy
- Someone who can give us peace
- Someone who can give us hope
- Someone who can give us love

- Someone who has proven His love for us
- Someone who has died for us
- Someone who rose from the dead for us
- Someone who can live His life through us
- Someone who can take us all the way Home
- Someone who can assure us of heaven

## LEARN LESSONS FROM A CONVERTED RELIGIONIST

There were about six thousand Pharisees at the time of Jesus Christ. As we have noted, they had a reputation for holding lengthy discussions on such "fine points" as whether it was lawful to eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath.

Saul of Tarsus (later known as the apostle Paul) inherited this religious tradition. He described himself as a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Before his life-changing encounter with Christ (Acts 9), Saul believed that his standing with God was determined by his relationship to the Law.

After his conversion, Paul defined his standing with God in new terms. Now what counted was his relationship to Christ. He became concerned about faith in Christ, showing the love of Christ to others, and reminding fellow believers that all of us will one day answer personally to Christ the Lord.

**Paul's frame of reference changed from the Law to Christ, from fine points to fundamentals, and from externals to internals.**

When it came to arguable issues of scriptural application, Paul was no longer preoccupied with the legal rulings of the scribes. Instead he pled with other members of the family of God not to judge one another in questionable matters. In his letter to the Romans he wrote, "Who are you to judge another's servant? . . . So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this,

**Replacing the love of Christ with keepable lists is a sure way to become like a pre-Christ Paul.**

not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way (14:4,12-13).

Many of us need to learn from Paul's "after Christ" point of view. In an attempt

to protect ourselves from compromise, we adopt his "pre-Christ" perspective. Adopting the way of the Pharisees, we have developed our own lists of what a follower of Christ will or will not do. The only trouble is that someone could keep every point on some of our lists and still be no closer to God. A person could "religiously" refrain from alcohol,

rock music, tobacco, gambling, and going to movies and still be godless. A person could attend church, give money, offer prayers, and read the Bible while still being angry, critical, and mean.

What counts, however, is what comes from the Spirit, not what comes from the flesh. Christlike attitudes of love are so different from our natural inclinations that they drive us to the Spirit of Christ for wisdom, enablement, and a fresh assurance of forgiveness. It is better to let our struggle with unkeepable principles drive us to Christ than to occupy ourselves with the formalities of religion and miss Him altogether.

## **THE DANGERS OF APPLICATION**

Many of us believe that Bible study must be accompanied by questions like, "What difference does it make?" and "How does it apply to my life?" We have seen how prior generations could preoccupy themselves with a study of Revelation, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets without coming to terms with the problems that were making them anxious, hierarchical, competitive, unemotional, demanding, critical, mean, and possessive.

**When rules of application become our principles, and when actions replace attitudes of the heart, then we have lost a grip on our religion, and it now has a grip on us.**

Certainly, it is good to struggle with questions like, "What will this truth look like in my life?" But that is also how prior generations came up with their lists of what Christian living "looks like." They don't smoke (unless they're burning with anger), they don't drink (unless they're getting wired with coffee), they don't enjoy questionable entertainment (unless it involves gossip). That's what the Pharisees were so good at.

When rules of application become our principles, and when actions replace attitudes of the heart, we have probably given in to a religion that has replaced Christ rather than one that serves Him.

## **WHY IT MAKES SENSE TO KEEP OUR FOCUS ON JESUS CHRIST**

In exchange for our trust in Him, Jesus Christ does many things for us that religion cannot do. For example:

- He loves us (John 15:13; Rom. 8:35).
- He brings us to God (1 Tim. 2:5).
- He brings God to us (Col. 1:15).
- He bought us for God (Eph. 1:7).
- He defends us before God (1 John 2:1).



- He declares us "not guilty" (Rom. 3:24; 5:1).
- He reconciles us to God (2 Cor. 5:19).
- He sets us apart for God (1 Cor. 1:30).
- He gives us peace with God (Rom. 5:1).
- He makes us acceptable to God (Eph. 1:6).
- He forgives us (Eph. 1:7).
- He frees us from bondage (Rom. 8:2).
- He qualifies us for adoption (Eph. 1:5).
- He makes us heirs of God (Eph. 1:11).
- He gives us His Spirit (John 14:16-17).
- He gives us a new focus (Col. 3:1-2).
- He lives within us (Col. 1:27).
- He brings us into God's family (John 1:12).
- He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34).
- He rescues us from Satan's power (Col. 1:13).
- He places us into God's kingdom (Col. 1:13).
- He gives us eternal life (Rom. 6:23).
- He shows us how to live (1 John 2:6).

## THE TEST OF RELIGION

Imagine that you are making application for heaven. What would you list as your qualifications?

- I have always believed in God.
- I'm thought of as a religious person.
- I have tried to live a good life.
- I have been baptized.
- I go to church.
- I haven't done anything really bad.
- I have friends who will vouch for me.

I hope by now you realize that if you were to list any of those qualifications on an application for heaven, it would indicate that you don't yet understand the worthlessness of religion.

The only application that would be accepted by heaven would be one on which you listed your qualifications as follows:

- **I can cite no merit of my own.**
- **I have been a sinner from birth.**
- **I am coming not in my name but in the Name of Jesus Christ.**

- **I believe He is the Son of God and my Savior.**
- **I have accepted His sacrifice for my sins.**
- **I believe He rose from the dead.**
- **I have put my trust in Jesus Christ to save me.**
  
- **Ephesians 2:8** You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own.
- **Ephesians 2:9** It isn't something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about.
- **Ephesians 2:10** God planned for us to do good things and to live as he has always wanted us to live. That is why he sent Jesus Christ to make us what we are.