

“ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH”

On March 20, 1531 in the Netherlands a Baptist named Sicke Snyder (proper name, Freerks) was beheaded for being baptized as a believer. In the Criminal Sentence Book of the Court of Friesland, it reads: "Sicke Freerks, on this 20th of March, 1531, is condemned by the Court to be executed with the sword; his body shall be laid on the wheel, and his head set upon a stake, because he has been rebaptized, and perseveres in that baptism."¹

Twenty years later across the English Channel from 1555 to 1558 (the reign of bloody Queen Mary), 288 Protestant Reformers were burned at the stake. Of these, 1 was an archbishop, 4 were bishops, 21 were clergymen, 55 were women, and 4 were children. They included John Rogers, John Hooper, Rowland Taylor, Robert Ferrar, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, John Philpot, and Thomas Cranmer. Why were they burned by the Roman Catholic Queen? There was one central issue: the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Here are the words of John Charles Ryle to explain:

“The doctrine in question was the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not believe that the body and blood of Christ were really, that is corporally, literally, locally, and materially, present under the forms of bread and wine after the words of consecration were pronounced? Did they or did they not believe that the real body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin Mary, was present on the so-called altar so soon as the mystical words had passed the lips of the priest? Did they or did they not? That was the simple question. If they did not believe and admit it, they were burned.”

- Why are these ordinances or practices of the Church important?

“BAPTISM”

Water baptism is an act of devotion to Christ by which new Christians are physically immersed into a body of water then lifted up out of the water to symbolize the rejection of their former way of life and their commitment to follow Christ publicly.

Why Should I be baptized?

Jesus' Authorization of Water Baptism

- By personal example (Matthew 3:13-17)
- By ministry practice (John 3:22; 4:2)
- By final command (Matthew 28:19-20)

How should I be baptized?

The Proper Mode of Baptism: Immersion

The Greek term for baptism (*baptizo*) literally means to “immerse” or “dip.”

The circumstance surrounding baptisms recorded in the New Testament indicate that the mode of baptism was immersion.

- Jesus “went up” out of the water (Matthew 3:16).
- John needed “plenty of water” to baptize (John 3:23).

What does baptism symbolize?

The Symbolism of Baptism

- It symbolizes the believer’s union with the Trinity (Matthew 28:19-20).
- It symbolizes the believer’s cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16).
- It symbolizes the believer’s death, burial and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:3-4).
- It symbolizes the believer’s pledge to live a godly life (1 Peter 3:21).

“COMMUNION”

Read Corinthians 11:17-34.

We believe that Communion or the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace.

The biblical foundation for this understanding of the Lord's Supper is under six headings:

1. Historical origin;
2. Believing participants;
3. Physical action;
4. Mental action;
5. Spiritual action; and
6. Sacred seriousness.

1. The Historical Origin of the Lord's Supper

The Gospels of Matthew (26:26ff), Mark (14:22ff), and Luke (22:14ff) all report the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples the night before he died. Each describes Jesus giving thanks or blessing the bread and the cup, and giving them to his disciples saying that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of the covenant, or the new covenant in his blood. In Luke 22:19, Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” The Gospel of John doesn't report the eating and drinking, but rather the teachings and actions that filled the evening.

As far as we can tell from the earliest records, the church did what Jesus said: They reenacted that supper in remembrance of Jesus and his death. Paul's letters are the earliest testimony that we have, and in 1 Corinthians 11:20, he refers to an event in the life of the

church called “the Lord’s Supper.” It’s called “the Lord’s Supper” probably because it was instituted or ordained by the Lord Jesus, and because its very meaning celebrates the memory of the Lord’s death. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” “I received from the Lord . . .” probably means that the Lord himself confirmed for Paul (who wasn’t at the final supper as the other apostles were) that what the others reported about the Last Supper really happened.

So the historical origin of the Lord’s Supper is that final supper that Jesus ate with his disciples the night before he was crucified. The actions and meaning of it are all rooted in what Jesus said and did on that last night. Jesus himself is the origin of the Lord’s Supper. He commanded that it be continued. And he is the focus and content of it.

2. The Believing Participants of the Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is an act of the gathered family of those who believe in Jesus, the church. It is not an act for unbelievers. Unbelievers may be present—indeed, we welcome them to be present—there is nothing secretive about the Lord’s Supper. It is done in public. It has a public meaning. It is not a secretive, cultic ritual with magical powers. It is a public act of worship by the gathered church. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul says, “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you *proclaim* the Lord's death until he comes.” So there is a proclamation aspect to the supper. Proclamation, not privacy, is the note to strike.

There is a community aspect to communion. Five times in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks of the church “coming together” when the Lord’s Supper is eaten. Verse 17b: “When you *come together* it is not for the better but for the worse.” Verse 18: “For, in the first place, when you *come together* as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.” Verse 20: “When you *come together*, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.” Verse 33: “When you *come together* to eat, wait for one another.” Verse 34: “If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you *come together* it will not be for judgment.”

In other words, they were debasing the Lord’s Supper by connecting it too closely to their regular supper, and some people had lots to eat and others had nothing. So he said, Eat your own supper at home and come together to eat the Lord’s Supper.

And notice the word “church” in verse 18: “when you come together as a *church*.” This is the body of Christ, the assembly of the followers of Jesus. Those who have turned from idols and trusted Jesus alone for the forgiveness of their sins, and for the hope of eternal life, and for the satisfaction of their souls. These are Christians. So the participants in the Lord’s Supper are the gathered believers in Jesus.

3. The Physical Action of the Lord’s Supper

The physical action of the Lord’s Supper is not the consumption of a seven-course meal. It is very simple. It is eating bread and drinking the cup. Verses 23b-25, “He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

Nothing is specified about the kind of bread or the way it is broken. The only statement about what was in the cup is given in one verse each in Matthew, Mark, and Luke: “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). So it is called “the fruit of the vine.” We shouldn’t make a big deal over whether simple grape juice or wine is used. There is nothing in the text that commands or forbids the one or the other.

What we should be concerned about is playful substitutes—say, bagels and coke around a campfire. The Lord’s Supper is not a plaything. We should celebrate it with a sense of weightiness—which we will talk about in just a moment.

The New Testament states that we should take the Lord’s Supper “as often as meet.” Therefore though the frequency isn’t specified, the New Testament encourages the Church to have communion on all occasions when the entire Church meets for Worship.

4. The Mental Action of the Lord’s Supper

The mental action of the participants of the Lord’s Supper is to focus the mind on Jesus and especially his historical work in dying for our sins. Verses 24 and 25: “Do this in *remembrance* of me.” As we do the physical act of eating and drinking, we are to do the mental act of remembering. That is, we are to consciously call to mind the person of Jesus as he

once lived and the work of Jesus as he once died and rose again, and what his work means for the forgiveness for our sins.

The Lord's Supper is rooted in historical facts. Jesus lived. He had a body and a heart that pumped blood and skin that bled. He died publicly on a Roman cross in the place of sinners so that anyone who believes on him might be rescued from the wrath of God. That happened once and for all in history.

Therefore, the mental action of the Lord's Supper is foundationally remembering. It is a conscious directing of the mind back into history to Jesus and what we know about him from the Bible.

5. The Spiritual Action of the Lord's Supper: Partaking of Christ's Body and Blood, Spiritually, By Faith

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-18:

When believers eat the bread and drink the cup physically we do another kind of eating and drinking spiritually. We eat and drink—that is, we take into our lives—what happened on the cross. By faith—by trusting in all that God is for us in Jesus—we nourish ourselves with the benefits that Jesus obtained for us when he bled and died on the cross.

This is why we lead you in various focuses at the Lord's table from week to week (peace with God, joy in Christ, hope for the future, freedom from fear, security in adversity, guidance in perplexity, healing from sickness, victory in temptation, etc.). Because when Jesus died, his shed blood and broken body, offered up in his death on our behalf, purchased all the promises of God. Paul says, "All the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Every gift of God, and all our joyful fellowship with God, was obtained by the blood of Jesus. When Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation in the blood of Christ?* The bread that we break, is it not a *participation in the body of Christ?*" he means: Do we not at the Lord's table feast spiritually by faith on every spiritual blessing bought by the body and blood of Christ? When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we feast spiritually by faith on all the promises of God bought by the blood of Jesus.

6. The Sacred Seriousness of the Lord's Supper

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 warns that if you come to the Lord's Supper in a cavalier, callous, careless way that does not discern the seriousness of what happened on the cross, you may, if you are a believer, lose your life, not because of wrath, but as an act of God's fatherly discipline. Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner [*that is, not trusting and treasuring the precious gift of Christ*] will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, [*not to see if you are good enough, but to see if you are willing to turn away from yourself trust Jesus for what you need*] and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body [*that is, without being aware that this bread is not to be treated like a fish sandwich, the way some were doing in Corinth*] eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 [*And here is what he means:*] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died [*not to be sent to hell; the next verse explains*]. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined [*that is, some are weak, and ill, and dying*] so that we may not be condemned [*that is, go to hell*] along with the world.

Application

The Lord's Supper is really about what you do when you are not at the Lord's Supper. It's about the threat of idolatry in your life every day. It's a word from God that says, What you just experienced with Christ in the Lord's Supper dare not—cannot—be profaned this week by your sitting down at the feast of idols. You know what they are in your life. So I say in the name of Christ and in the words of Paul: Flee from idolatry this week. For at this table this morning you have sat with Jesus at the banquet of the benefits of his death, and such an experience dare not be profaned.

Don't take the Lord's Supper lightly. It is one of the most precious gifts Christ has given to his church. Let's eat it together.