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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

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Chapter Twenty-Three

The Sacraments

Jesus gave the church only two sacraments: water baptism (see Matt. 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23-26). We will first study water baptism.

Under the new covenant, every believer should experience three different baptisms. They are: baptism into the body of Christ, baptism in water, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

When a person is born again, he is automatically baptized into the body of Christ. That is, he becomes a member of Christ's body, the church:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13; see also Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24).

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is an experience subsequent to salvation, and this baptism can and should be received by every believer.

Finally, every believer should be baptized in water as soon as possible after he repents and believes in the Lord Jesus. Baptism should be the first act of obedience of the new believer:

And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and *has been baptized* shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16, emphasis added).

The early church regarded Jesus' command to baptize as very important. Almost without exception, new converts were baptized immediately after their conversion (see Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-16, 36-39; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 16:31-33; 18:5-8; 19:1-5).

Some Unscriptural Ideas About Baptism

Some practice baptism by sprinkling the new convert with a few drops of water. Is this correct? The verb translated *baptize* in the New Testament is the Greek word *baptizo*, which literally means "to immerse." Those who are baptized in water should, therefore, be immersed under the water and not simply sprinkled with a few drops. The symbolism of Christian baptism, which we will study shortly, also supports the idea of immersion.

Some practice the baptism of infants, yet there are no scriptural examples of infant baptism in the Bible. Such a practice has its origins in the false doctrine of "baptismal regeneration"—the idea that a person is born again the moment he is baptized. Scripture

clearly teaches that people should first believe in Jesus before they are baptized. Thus, children who are old enough to repent and follow Jesus qualify for baptism, but not babies and small children.

Some teach that, although a person may believe in Jesus, he is not saved until he is baptized in water. That is not true according to Scripture. In Acts 10:44-48 and 11:17, we read that the household of Cornelius was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit *before* any of them were baptized in water. It is impossible for anyone to be baptized in the Holy Spirit unless he is first saved (see John 14:17).

Some teach that unless a person is baptized according to their particular formula, he is not really saved. Scripture provides no specific ritual to be followed for correct baptism. For example, some say that a believer is not saved if he has been baptized “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19) rather than “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:16). These people demonstrate the same spirit that dominated the Pharisees, straining out gnats and swallowing camels. What a tragedy it is that Christians debate over the correct words to say during baptism while the world waits to hear the gospel.

The Scriptural Symbolism of Baptism

Water baptism symbolizes several things that have already occurred in the new believer’s life. Most simply, it represents that we have had our sins washed away, and now we stand clean before God. When Ananias was sent to Saul (Paul) soon after his conversion, he said to him:

And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away your sins*, calling on His name (Acts 22:16, emphasis added).

Second, water baptism symbolizes our identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Once we have been born again and placed into the body of Christ, we are considered by God to be “in Christ” from that point on. Because Jesus was our substitute, God attributes all that Jesus did to our account. So “in Christ,” we have died, been buried, and have been raised from the dead to live as new persons:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:12).

Every new believer should be taught these important truths when he is baptized in water, and he should be baptized as soon as possible after he believes in Jesus.

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper has its origins in the Old Testament Passover Feast. On the night when God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery, He instructed each household to slay a one-year-old lamb and sprinkle its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their houses. When the “death angel” passed through the nation that night, killing all the first-born in Egypt, he would see the blood on the Israelites’ houses and “pass over.”

Furthermore, the Israelites were to celebrate a feast that night by eating their Passover lamb and also by eating unleavened bread for seven days. This was to be a permanent ordinance for Israel, celebrated the same time each year (see Ex. 12:1-28). Obviously, the

Passover lamb was representative of Christ, who is called "our Passover" in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He and His disciples were celebrating the Passover Feast. Jesus was crucified during the Passover feast, truly fulfilling His calling as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The bread that we eat and the juice we drink are symbolic of Jesus' body, which was broken for us, and His blood, which was shed for the remission of our sins:

And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness 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" (Matt. 26:26-29).

The apostle Paul told the story this way:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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." In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

When and How

Scripture does not tell us how often to partake of the Lord's Supper, but it is clear that in the early church, it was done with regularity in the house church meetings as a full meal (see 1 Cor. 11:20-34). Because the Lord's Supper has its roots in the Passover Meal, it was part of a full meal when instituted by Jesus, and was eaten as a full meal by the early church, that is how it should be practiced today. Still much of the church follows "the traditions of men."

We should approach the Lord's Supper with reverence. The apostle Paul taught that it was a serious offense to partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner:

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the 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, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

We are admonished to examine and judge ourselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper, and if we discover any sin, we need to repent and confess it. Otherwise, we can be "guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."

Because Jesus died and shed His blood to free us from sin, we certainly don't want to partake of the elements, which represent His body and blood, with any known unconfessed sin. If we do, we can eat and drink judgment upon ourselves in the form of sickness and premature death, as did the Corinthian Christians. The way to avoid God's discipline is to "judge ourselves," that is, acknowledging and repenting of our sins.

The primary sin of the Corinthian Christians was their lack of love; they were bickering and fighting with one another. In fact, their lack of consideration even manifested itself during the Lord's Supper when some ate while others went hungry, and some were even drunk (see 1 Cor. 11:20-22).

The bread we eat represents the body of Christ, which is now the church. We partake of one loaf, representing our unity as one body (see 1 Cor. 10:17). What a crime it is to partake of that which represents the one body of Christ while involved in fighting and disharmony with other members of that body! Before we partake of the Lord's Supper, we need to make certain we are in right relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.