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Living Hope EFC

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The Significance of Christian Baptism and Communion.

ILLUS: Leonardo De Vinci's Cup

When Leonardo De Vinci was 43 years old, the Duke of Milan asked him to paint the dramatic scene of **Jesus' Last Supper** with his disciples.

Working slowly & giving meticulous care to details, he spent 3 years on the assignment. He grouped the disciples into threes, two groups on either side of the central figure, Christ.

- Christ's arms are outstretched. In his right hand he holds a cup, painted beautifully with great realism.
- When the masterpiece was finished, the artist said to a friend, "Look at it & give me your opinion of it."
- "It's wonderful!" exclaimed his friend. "***The cup is so real I can't take my eyes off it.***"

Immediately, De Vince took a brush and drew it across the sparkling cup! He exclaimed as he did so: "NOTHING shall detract from the figure of Christ." - Lee Tan, 653

It is ironic that the two ordinances given the church by Christ, each symbolizing our unity, have caused so much division over centuries.

Arnold Olson: *The Significance of Silence*

"The great majority of protestant bodies have come out of the historic, mainline denominations because of becoming crusaders for some particular practice or isolated doctrine...A brief study of the major tenets of their doctrinal stand will reveal the **elevating of one doctrine above the others resulting in separating believers over minor issues**.

"When it comes to the doctrine of the baptism of believers as opposed to the baptism of children, the list is long...Further, not all are immersionists, some are sprinklers, some baptize forward, some backward, some a second time, some 3 dunks – some 1, etc. (See lists of Baptist Church names.) 19,20.

When it comes to the ordinance of Communion: Olson, 87

"The controversies have centered around five main themes:

1. **The Presence.** Is Christ present physically in the elements? Does the bread actually become at some moment ...His flesh? If remain unchanged, is He present in Spirit or is it merely in remembrance?
2. **The Purpose.** Does participation itself provide forgiveness for sin? Is it merely a service of thanksgiving for forgiveness provided at cross?
3. **The Place.** Must it be served at an altar or will a simple stand do?
4. **The Person.** Who should officiate at the Lord's Table? Is it to be only a duly ordained clergy, or may laymen also serve as hosts?

5. **The Persons Participating.** Should it be restricted to believers only, members only, baptized members only? Should the table be closed to visitors from other churches, not in the same denomination?

"It seems Impossible to understand why our Lord permitted two ordinances He established for the blessing of the fellowship in Christ to become such sources of contention and division. Most of the denomina- tions in existence today have come into being due in a large part to dif- ferences over one or both of the ordinances intended for producing spirit- ual warmth but which instead generated theological heat," – Olson, 86.

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| What does the New Testament say about baptism? |
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1- Matt.28:19. Jesus commanded disciples to be baptized.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

(1) NOTE: it is "disciples/ believers" who are to be baptized, as opposed to children or unbelievers. Why?

(2) Baptism was the recognized means of demonstrating one's alliance, association, and commitment to God or a movement.

- John the Baptist baptized in the Jordan. No indication he *sprinkled*.
- For centuries **Gentile proselytes** to Judaism had been baptized.
- Gentiles went through **3 rites** to become associated with the God of Israel: circumcision, baptism and sacrifice (obedience to the Law).
- **Baptism signified** the proselyte had terminated his relationship with his old society and gods, and was joining himself to the new community of God's people, and to Israel's God.

ILLUS: When Jews/ Arabs become Christians today.

(3) For the Christian to be baptized as Christ's disciple **declared publicly:**

He was leaving his past life and gods, and was identifying himself with Jesus Christ as his savior, and with the community of believers.

(4) It was an outward sign/ demonstration of an inward conversion reality

- **βαπτίζω:** means "**to dip, immerse, submerge.**" This is the standard meaning of the word in the major lexicons, none of which are written by Baptists. It pictured washing away of filth to the Jews (OT).
- **Raw cloth** was "baptized" into bleach & dye, to purify & change it.
- **Paul used "baptism" in Romans 6 to symbolize the spiritual reality of our death & resurrection with Christ, at our conversion.**
- The believer is baptized to outwardly identify himself as one who has **already** entered into this saving work of Christ for his sins.
- Submersion = our burial, emergence from the water = resurrection.

(5) **The formula:** In the name of the Father, Son & Spirit.

- Each plays a major role in the believer's salvation.

COMMON QUESTIONS

1- Is one mode of baptism more biblical than another?

- There is no indication that sprinkling or pouring was ever used. It is not mentioned in church history until the second C.AD.
- Then, it was used only for extreme cases (illness), or misunderstanding of its value as necessary for one's salvation. (ISBE,387)

2- Do you have to be baptized to go to heaven?

- **Acts 2:38-39?**

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

- Because baptism was so closely perceived as the way of publicly identifying with someone, the idea of an unbaptized Christian in the 1st C. wasn't even a consideration.
- If salvation is by grace, it cannot include any work. (Thief on cross.)
- Peter later clarifies what kind of baptism saves: **1 Pet.3:21**. NOT water, but something that happens within the conscience.
- Spirit baptism carries out judgment of our sins & saves us from them.
- **Col.2:9-13 Paul** teaches it is the Spirit's "baptism" that saves us.
- **1 Cor.1:14-17 Paul makes it 100% clear that baptism does not save.**

¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel— ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

3- Should infants be baptized?

There are no passages in the NT that give evidence infants were baptized.

(1) It is sometimes compared with circumcision. But...

- Circumcision was done 8th day, to identify with Abrahamic Cov't.
- Baptism is done to believers who become Abraham's spiritual sons.
- We become spiritual sons by new birth, through faith in Christ.
- Paul makes it clear that no man-made ceremonies affect the spirit.

(2) Even the Reformers were not convinced it was Scriptural. -Olson, 61

- Zwingli: "If we were to baptize as Christ instituted it, then we would not baptize any person until he reached the age of discretion; for I find it nowhere written that infant baptism is to be practiced."
- Luther: "There is not sufficient evidence from the Scriptures that one might justify the introduction of infant baptism at a time of the early Christians in the apostolic period"
- Calvin: admitted to the validity of the immersion of adults and that the early church understood baptism to mean immerse. "It is not the mode but the message of baptism that is important," *Institutes*

Why did they do it? "In the concept of the State Church infant baptism was the cement which held the territorial church together. The birth of a child was legally registered with the state when he was baptized by an official priest appointed by the state. = A matter of citizenship.– Olson, 59

- A child's civil rights of citizenship were dependent upon birth record.

- Even those who turned to believers' baptism had to obey the law to give their children legitimacy. –Olson, 62

CONCLUSION:

For the Christian, baptism is commanded: (1) To identify ourselves publicly with Jesus Christ as our Savior, (2) Symbolizing an inward reality of conversion that has already taken place. **ILLUS:** Wedding ring.

What about baptizing children? This can be treated as baby dedication.

COMMUNION: THE LORD'S SUPPER

We stated earlier that division in the church in relation to communion exists over 5 areas: 1- Christ's presence. 2-Its purpose. 3-The place. 4-The person serving. 5-Who can participate.

Major Church Positions & Teachings on Communion

1- Roman Catholic: Doctrine of Transubstantiation official since 1214

Council of Trent (1545-63): The official unalterable position of the church. Canons 2,5,6 state:

- That the whole substance of the bread is converted into the body & the whole substance of the wine is converted into the blood, when the priest blesses the elements.
- "If any one saith, either that the principal fruit of the most holy Eucharist is NOT the remission of sins, or that other effects do not result therefrom: let him be anathema." – Canon V.
- **Result:** each communion service became a repetition of Christ's sacrifice & the means of salvation. This strengthened the power of the priests who could actually withhold salvation from petitioners by denying them communion. –Olson, 89
- The Church of Rome bestowed authority on **the priest**. He became the one on whom the individual had to depend for the forgiveness of sin. If he withheld the 'sacrifice' he would deny to the worshipper divine forgiveness," 91.
- If a person found salvation by faith in Christ and avoided the Holy Communion he would be identified as **a heretic** by the church and guilty of state treason.
- ***This became the center of controversy during the Reformation.***

2 - THE REFORMATION (Olson, *Significance of Silence*, 95-97)

John Calvin, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli are the 3 best-known names of the Reformation period.

- They agreed as to the truth that justification was by faith and not be some rite of the Church. Nevertheless, they were far apart in their interpretation of the extend of the presence of Christ in Lord's Supper.

Luther (1483-1546). German reformer. A monk in the R.C. Church who found salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone!

- In 1517 nailed his 95-theses to the church door in Wittenberg, which sealed his fate with R.C. Church.
- ***Out of these came the three great principles of the Reformation:***

1- Man is justified by faith alone. 2-Every believer has direct access to God. 3-The Bible is the sole source of authority for faith and life.

- He rejected "transubstantiation," for "[consubstantiation](#)." The elements became the body & blood once eaten by the believer.

Zwingli (1484-1531). Swiss Reformer.

- Trained for priesthood, left the R.C. Church in 1522.
- In 1525 he was the first reformer to replace Catholic Mass with the Lord's Supper in Zurich. [He saw it as a memorial feast](#).
- **Declared:** "Christ, who offered himself once on the cross, is the sufficient and perpetual sacrifice for the sins of all believers. Therefore, the mass is no sacrifice but a commemoration of the one sacrifice of the cross and a seal of redemption through Christ."- 1523
- Again in 1526: "The mass as now in use, in which Christ is offered to God the Father for our sins of the living and the dead, is contrary to the Scriptures, a blasphemy against the most holy sacrifice, passion and death of Christ and on account of its abuses, an abomination before God."

Calvin (1509-1564). A leader of the Reformation in Geneva.

- [He believed that Christ was present in His Spirit](#) so that, though the Lord's Supper was commemorative, it went deeper than that.
- **Schaff:** "This was an ingenious compromise between the realism & mysticism of Luther, and the idealism & spiritualism of Zwingli. It aimed to satisfy both heart and reason.
- The bread & wine remained unchanged, but the live giving presence of Christ's spirit was received. For unbelievers = just bread & wine.

What does the New Testament say about communion?

[1 Cor.11:17-34](#).

Paul's words are very close to Christ's in the Gospels.

1 – Vs.17: Note the unusual introduction to this topic: A rebuke!

2- The reason for Paul's rebuke of the communion celebration: vs.18-22

[Church Context:](#) The church was full of problems & divisions in the body

- 1:10-12; 3:1-4. [Divisions](#). You are worldly! Mere infants quarreling.
- 4- Full of pride. 5- Immorality in their midst. 6- [Lawsuits](#). 7- Marital separation/ [divorces](#)/ negligence. 8 –10 – Divisions over food sacrificed to idols & [disputable issues](#). 11- Women's [submission](#). 12 – [Tongues](#) and other gifts being abused. 13- Lack of love.
- [Specific Context in Chap.11:](#) The love feast at which the church celebrated communion turned into one more example of discrimination, lack of love, division, between believers.

3- **Do you remember what happened at the Last Supper**, with the disciples? **[Luke 22:24](#)** = **A dispute** over which of them was greater.

- **John 13:** Jesus washed their feet. What was that all about?

- “Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.” “You should wash one another’s feet.” = [Maintain your fellowship & unity](#). 13:34-35. 17:23.

POINT: The Last Supper became the Lord’s Supper.

- ***The Lord’s Supper celebrated Christ’s death upon the cross, which brought men into fellowship with God, and with one another.***
- The church in Corinth was not celebrating fellowship with God & with the newly born church members, but was actively making cliques & divisions, humiliating some believers, and despising the value of believers who were bought with the blood of Christ!
- They did not celebrate redemption & reconciliation, but acted as if they did not need Christ or other believers. A complete mockery!

4- The true significance of communion stated: vs.23-26.

(1) It is [in remembrance](#) of Christ giving his body (life) for our sins.

(2) It is [in remembrance](#) that by His blood we are in a new Cov’t relationship with God. Heb.9:15.

(3) [We proclaim](#) His death as the only means of reconciliation between God and man, until he returns!

5- We are warned against participating in communion in an unworthy manner, vs.27-34.

- What is an “unworthy manner?” – Vs.29,33-34.
- **“Without recognizing the body:”** = (1) Christ’s sacrifice. (2) Perhaps in the context meaning the body of Christ, the Church; **12:12-13,25.**
- Many MSS contain only = διακρινω το σωμα. (Not: “the Lord’s body.”)
- The church is **“one”** with Christ. 1 John 5:1-3. Eph.5:31-32
- Before eating we are to **“examine ourselves,”** Vs.28. [Matt.5 & 18.](#)
- [The main issue Paul was rebuking was divisions in the local body of believers, which is also a symptom of devaluing Christ’s sacrifice.](#)

POINT: **The local church body is so important to God, that we cannot devalue one another without devaluing the sacrifice Christ made for us.**

- Consider your attitude toward Christ’s sacrifice for you, and your relationship with others in the body – before you take communion.
- Judge yourself, or God may have to discipline you.

ANSWERING THE FIVE QUESTIONS:

1-**Christ’s presence?** A memorial feast. Christ is always present with us.

2-**Its purpose?** Giving thanks for Christ’s death for our sins & his return.

3-**The place?** The early church met in homes for communion.

4-**The person serving?** Home churches were served by elders & laymen.

5-**Who can participate?** Anyone who is a believer, & who can examine himself so that he eats in a worthy manner.

- [I encourage parents to discuss this with their kids, teach them what this entails, in order to determine if they can participate.](#)

WHAT IS THE EFCA POSITION ON THESE MATTERS?

The Church What is the EFCA Statement?

7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly & tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm & nourish the believer.

If Christ accepts a believer, how can the church reject him?

"The idea is to make room for all who believed in Christ and who accepted the Bible as the Word of God. It sought no separating shibboleths in doctrine or confession to which applicants for membership had to subscribe...[It was argued that if Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church, admitted all who believe in Him in the Church](#) which is His body, upon what authority then could an earthly organization exclude such believers?" - Olson, *The Significance of Silence*, 13

"The Evangelical Free Church is for believers only & for all believers.

"In drafting a simple statement to support this position the founders did not overlook certain doctrines. They simply decided to be silent. They would not introduce the historic divisive elements into the fellowship but would respect the views of all believers even though not all could join in such a broad theological base.

"The doctrinal statement is therefore silent on such matters as the time & method of baptism; the Lord's Supper as to the extent of the presence of Christ in the elements; Arminianism VS Calvinism- and the pre-trib VS the mid-trib position in eschatology. " 17,18

"Were not all these also believers? Why should believers separate themselves from each other over differences which had existed unresolved for centuries," 27