Confessing Jesus (through baptism and communion) Reading: Acts 2:22-47

Christian Life Disciplines No. 2

Pictures are powerful tools. Christians have received in the New Testament two important and commonly held symbolic practices which proclaim certain truths: baptism and "communion" (or "the Bread and Cup"). Both were practiced from the earliest time in the church and we see both in Acts 2 when the church began (Acts 2:38, 41, 42, 46). (For baptism see also Acts 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5. For the bread and cup see also Acts 20:6 and 1 Corinthians 10:16-21; 11:20-34.) It is therefore important to give thought to these two practices, what they mean and how we are to respond to them. Both are ways in which believers profess certain truths about Jesus Christ. Believers confess publically in baptism their commitment to follow Jesus and profess corporately in communion the work of Jesus in their lives by His death and resurrection.

I. **Baptism**

1. *Baptism was not only practiced in the early church, it was commanded by Jesus.* In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus commanded to make disciples (learners or followers of Jesus Christ) and included baptizing them. Submitting to baptism is part of being a disciple.
2. *In baptism believers publically confess their turning from their old ways to follow Jesus, as Savior and second person of the triune God.* Before Jesus commanded Christian water baptism, John was baptizing those who came to him (*cf.* Mark 1:4-5). Others had practiced baptism before him, so his audience understood that they were visually declaring that they were turning away from their old sinful practices. John's listeners were repenting because they were anticipating the coming of the Messiah, who would bring in a rule of righteousness. Christian water baptism added that the anticipated Messiah was Jesus Christ, God who had come in the flesh (Mt. 28:18-19). Those who had received John's baptism were baptized again in the name of Jesus when they received Him (Acts 19:1-5).
3. *In baptism the church acknowledges the new believer as one of them.* Peter answered objections to having gone into the home of Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11:3) by explaining what had happened and concluding that he could not oppose God (Acts 11:17). This appears to refer to baptizing Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47). This satisfied those objecting, who admitted that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles. It was right to baptize them and that made it acceptable to stay with these Gentiles believers and eat with them. They were now one of them.

It is the responsibility of the church to baptize those who turn to Christ in faith and treat them as one of them. It is the responsibility of believers to submit to baptism.

II. **Communion**

1. *The practice of taking the bread and cup to remember Jesus was given by Jesus and was commanded as a continuing practice.* Matthew, Mark and Luke all report how Jesus instructed his disciples to take the bread and the cup in remembrance of Him (e.g., Luke 22:19-20). Paul also passed these instructions on to believers (1 Cor 11:23-26).
2. *In the bread and cup believers remind one another what Jesus had done for them.* Jesus died for us making possible God's promise (the new covenant) to forgive our sin, to give us a new heart that would want to obey, and to be our God (*cf.* Jeremiah 31:33-34). Jesus was raised from the dead and is coming back. Until He returns, we remind ourselves of these truths.
3. *A common loaf taken from a shared meal reminded the believers of their unity in the common life given by Christ.* The common meal (1 Corinthians 11:20ff; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:6; Jude 12, *cf.* 2 Peter 2:13) should have expressed their love & common life in Christ and anticipated their future with Christ. The common loaf reminds believers that we form one body, the Body of Christ, because we share His one body (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

It is our responsibility to remind ourselves continually of the centrality of Jesus Christ, what He has done and who we are in Him. We do this in sharing together the bread and cup.

III. **The effectual significance of baptism and communion**

As symbolic practices baptism and communion are materially ineffective, but none-the-less spiritually significant.

1. *Being baptized does not save and taking the bread and cup does not grant forgiveness of sin.* Consider the examples of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11), of Simon (Acts 8:1-23), or the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).
2. *Their role as symbols does not mean lesser spiritual significance.* Symbols which we see on signs are not less meaningful because they are symbols. Symbolic practices in the O.T. were similarly meaningful and could not be treated lightly (*cf.* Hebrews 10:4; Mark 7:15-23; Colossians 2:16-17). Similarly baptism and communion, though symbolic, should not be taken lightly. The abuse by the Corinthians brought God's judgment on them. What we do here is also viewed by the invisible world (*cf.* Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:12; Luke 15:10).

There is no mystical power in the physical elements of water, wine or bread. But there is great significance in what we <u>profess</u> when we baptize or celebrate the bread and cup.

Baptism and communion are two powerful symbolic practices which are intended to enrich our faith and are commanded. Baptism allows you to profess publically your commitment to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Communion should not be neglected nor practiced thoughtlessly. We proclaim Jesus Christ as central to our lives, as the One whom we follow and as the One in whom we have forgiveness and a new life. We should live in accord with what we proclaim.

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