

# BAPTISM & COMMUNION

APPRECIATING GOD'S ARTISTRY



**RON SHEVELAND**

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## ***Appreciating God's Artistry***

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## About the Author

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Jesus Christ is the joy of his life. In Ron's words, "It is my passion to know God better and share that knowledge with others." Family is his next priority. Jodi and Ron treasure their relationship and work hard at keeping it fresh. They are partners in all their life endeavors – including ministry. They have been blessed with two teenagers: Luke and Jessica.

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## INTRODUCTION: Appreciating God's Artistry

My dad was an artist. Stop by sometime and I will show you several of his paintings that hang in my house. Among the various mediums, his specialty was chalk art. For decades he traveled around the United States as an evangelist and he'd often illustrate his sermons with brightly colored chalk drawings. Part of them were sketched with black-light chalk and at suspenseful points in his messages he would click on the black-light and the pictures would burst with color and surprise effects. Audiences would "oooooh" and "ahhhh" and I and my family would be so proud of him. He was pretty good... but not as good as my other Father.

The Heavenly Father's artistry is awesome, isn't it? Think about it, when He created this world, He could have made everything in black and white. Instead, he "splendorized" it with diverse colors, intricate designs, lovely scents and musical sounds. He created us as multi-sensory beings and then provided those senses with plenty of gratifications. The Lord made us for His pleasure and then pleased us with all that He made. Splashes of His joy are everywhere for us to enjoy. In the words of Valentin Okorokov, "Without art, without beauty, our life would be poor, dull and unemotional, and it could bring about erosion of the human soul."

Edith Schaffer, wife of the renowned theologian/philosopher, Francis, wrote,

Think of the mobiles of God, the Artist, brought forth by the wind that He created. The wind, blowing in the trees, swaying the grass, bending a field of wheat as a ballet, rising again, bending again. The spray of the ocean, wild waves against rocks bringing forth a curve of spray, a mobile of spray.<sup>1</sup>

And God's creation is just one aspect of His artwork. When it came to communicating with us, the Lord also used pictures. Metaphors and illustrations draw His messages on the canvasses of our hearts and minds. And then there are the audio-video presentations provided through symbols. Here are three examples:

- With tears in her eyes, the bride softly whispered, "with this ring I thee wed..."
- Holding his hand over his heart, the patriot declared, "I pledge allegiance to the flag..."

- Smiling down at the new convert, the pastor said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What do the ring, the flag, and baptism have in common? *They are all symbolic pictures used to portray deeper realities.* "It is through symbols, says Thomas Carlyle, "that man consciously or unconsciously lives, works and has his being." This small book is going to look specifically at the beauty that is found in the symbols of baptism and communion. As you read, feel free to "oooooh" and "ahhhh." Let's start with baptism.

## **TAKE THE PLUNGE!**

### **Picturing Salvation through the Symbol of Baptism**

One of my best buds is Dan Nelson. In my opinion, he is one of the finest artists in America. I have often looked over his shoulder while he's painted some of his works. Many times I have been part of a group of fans -- all of whom marveled as he created spectacular scenes. It was always difficult to walk away; you just wanted to stand and stare.

#### **WHAT IS PICTURED BY BAPTISM? SALVATION.**

I urge you to do the same thing as you focus on baptism. The more you gaze at it, the more you will treasure it. That's because it's a picture of the greatest experience known to man -- salvation. And catch this: baptism is a picture of salvation as a whole and its individual parts.

Last year, on a mission trip to Nepal, I spoke at a baptismal service in a beautiful nature park. The weather was nice and the setting was perfect. Over a hundred of us were gathered to watch about fifteen new Christians get baptized in a river (go to my website and look at the videos). But before we went into the water, I described many of the aspects of salvation and how baptism typified them. I held up a flower (which I later discovered was illegal to be picked!) and asked, "How many flowers am I holding?" "One," said the crowd. "How many petals does it have?" "Five," they shouted. "Well, in the same way, our salvation is one in essence but it has several dimensions that are all illustrated by baptism. You are placed in Christ. You experience the transformation of the new birth. Your sins are washed away. You are baptized by the Holy Spirit. You enter God's family... "

Many told me that the presentation was very helpful for their understanding and appreciation of baptism. Two of my students, themselves pastors, used the same lesson in their own baptismal services the following week. So I am going to share it with you. Want a visual? Just look at the flower on the book cover.

**Petal #1: Baptism Pictures the Believer's Identification With Christ's Death, Burial and Resurrection (Romans 6).**

When you get baptized, your deed sends a variety of messages to the witnesses. First of all, you are proclaiming your identification with Jesus and His great acts in redemptive history. As you stand in the water, you picture Christ's life. When you are submerged, you are symbolizing Jesus' death and burial. The water illustrates the grave. When you ascend from the water you are picturing Christ's resurrection from the dead. Your imagery-in-action proclaims, "I am one with the One who died, was buried and arose for me."

Being immersed in front of others can be embarrassing and frightening for some. But think about the public humiliation of Christ hanging naked and bleeding on the cross and then ask God for the power to make this bold act of discipleship.

### **Petal #2: Baptism Pictures the Believer's Own Spiritual Death, Burial and Resurrection (Romans 6; Colossians 2:11-12).**

II Corinthians 5:17 gives this description of the transformation that occurs at salvation: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" Baptism portrays your death to your old life and your resurrection to a new life. As your entrance into the water pictures, the old you is dead and buried. Your emergence epitomizes that you have now been born again.

### **Petal #3: Baptism Pictures the Believer's Allegiance to Christ (Matthew 28:19).**

What does it mean to be baptized "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?*" It shows that you are pledging your allegiance to the Triune God. You are recognizing that you belong to the Lord. John Balchin states,

The phrase "in the name of" was used legally in those days in a similar way to today. We speak about a piece of property being in 'in someone's name' when we mean that they are legal owners. To be baptized into someone's name equally meant to be baptized unto their ownership or into allegiance to them. This is illustrated for us by one of Paul's arguments with his 'problem children' at Corinth. You will remember that they had divided the church under the labels of the different preachers who had come to them: 'Each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Cephas," and so on. Paul questions their understanding of the basic gospel. 'Is Christ divided?' he asks. 'Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?' ...Paul could legitimately say that he was not collecting personal disciples. They did not belong to him, they belonged to Christ and had demonstrated that fact by being baptized in Christ's name.<sup>2</sup>

**Petal #4: Baptism Pictures the Cleansing of Sin You Experienced at Salvation (Acts 2:38).**

Do you remember that day when you realized that your sins were the barrier to your enjoying a relationship with God. Discovering that Jesus paid for your sins on the cross, you repented and turned in faith to Jesus for your salvation. What happened to all those dirty, ugly transgressions? They were wiped out completely and totally washed away. Baptism can be thought of as representing a spiritual bath. Acts 2:38 teaches that since your sins have been forgiven, you should be baptized.

**Petal #5: Baptism Pictures the Holy Spirit Immersing Believers into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:40-42, Acts 10:47-48)**

I Corinthians 12:13 states. "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*" Water baptism visualizes the immersion with the Spirit that we experienced at the point of salvation. In Acts 10:47-48, Peter argues that it was appropriate to baptize with water those who had been baptized with the Spirit.

We have been baptized by one Spirit into one body. Baptism depicts our immersion into the family of God. Acts 2:40-42 presents this pattern: People were saved, baptized, and added to the church. Commenting on these verses, Beasley-Murray states, "By their baptism the converts thus separated themselves from their unbelieving compatriots and numbered themselves among the followers of the Messiah Jesus... It is noteworthy that Luke's statement that three thousand souls were 'added' must be completed by the words 'to the church'..."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to say,

The really important fact, then, of which we have to take account is the indivisibility of the two aspects of baptism: it is baptism to Christ and into the Body. It is at once intensely personal and completely corporate, involving the believer in relationship simultaneously with the Head and with all members of the Body.<sup>4</sup>

Yet baptism takes place in water, a visible act among a visible community of Christ's people; by it a man that was formerly not a member of the people of God is identified with the Lord and his people, and in an open, visible, public fashion he is admitted to the Church... In the will of God the outward act of baptism, witnessing the outward entry into the Church, should coincide with the baptism of the Spirit and incorporation of the believer into the Body of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The early church did not view an unbaptized professor of Christ as a part of the church. They questioned the sincerity of a person who refused to show his allegiance to

Christ through baptism. For lack of a better term, baptism was viewed as "initiation" into the body. Bruce Shelley states,

Baptism is an act of initiation. Union with Christ means union with His people. Early Christians were familiar with the initiation ideas of Judaism, if not those of pagan religions, and they almost certainly considered baptism as the Christian initiation ceremony. Paul points in this direction when he writes, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slave or free." (I Cor. 12:13) ... Look upon baptism as the door of entrance into the church. By means of it men and women are united in one body, the fellowship of all who love the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

A church's oneness is partially dependent upon each of its members being baptized. Ephesians 4:4-6 teaches that the true unity of the church is built around a sevenfold uniqueness that all believers should share. Three of these seven elements refer to the Triune God (one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father), the remaining four convictions (one body, one hope, one faith, one baptism) deal with our Christian experience in relation to the members of the Trinity.

In that the "one Spirit" is already mentioned, the "one baptism" refers to the rite of water baptism, not to baptism with the Spirit. It is the outward, visible picture of the believer's inward salvation. It visualizes our identification with Christ and our immersion into His body. It is the doorway through which believers in Christ are admitted into the fellowship of the church. Henry Alford describes it as "objective seal of the subjective faith, by which, as a badge, the members of the Christ are outwardly and visibly stamped with His name."<sup>7</sup>

So there you have the five petals of the flower. Did you know that baptism visualized so much? Salvation is a marvelous gift. And as a gift, it's easy to get. God offers it and you accept it. But when you start opening the present, you discover how big and multi-dimensional it is. Baptism is a tool that helps you and others grasp it. The next time you see a baptism, praise the Savior for paying for this gift on the cross and giving it to you. And the next time you look at the petals of a flower, don't say, "He loves me. He loves me not..." Instead, say, "He loves me. He loves me. He loves me. He loves me. He loves me!" Your salvation proves it and your baptism shows it.

### **WHY SHOULD A PERSON GET BAPTIZED? *O*BEDIENCE.**

One afternoon I happened to be in a drug store when I overheard a conversation initiated by a young college student who had been invited to a baptismal service that night.

From the other side of a greeting card rack, I couldn't resist the urge to eavesdrop, for I was the one who would conduct the service.

"I'm a Christian who loves Jesus," she said to her companion, "but I don't see why people have to be baptized. The thought of getting dunked in front of a bunch of people is so embarrassing."

I went unnoticed from the store, but that night I had the privilege to share with her and the rest of the audience the following answer to her question. According to Matthew 28:18-20, baptism is not an option for the believer, it is a command.

*"Then Jesus came to them and said, `All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'"*

This passage, commonly known as "The Great Commission," has three parts. First, we are to make disciples. This imperative compels us to reach out to the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ. Then, there are two things we are to do with these new followers of the Lord: baptize and teach them (the construction of these two present participles are identical in the Greek). An outline of the literal structure would be, "Going, make disciples..., baptizing them..., and teaching them..."

Many treat this text in a smorgasbord fashion. They obey the Lord when it comes to making disciples and teaching them but they choose to ignore the mandate of baptizing the disciples. "The second aspect of this Commission is just as much a part of this Commission and as important as the other two. It is just as essential that it be obeyed as the others. The great task of the church is that of evangelizing the world. When souls are won to Christ, they are to be baptized in obedience to the Word, brought into the local church, and taught the Word of God."<sup>8</sup>

The early church showed their loyalty to Christ by following these directions to the letter. Acts 2:40-42 states, "*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching...*"

This is not an isolated incident; it's the norm. F.F. Bruce, in his commentary on Acts, states, "...the idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the N.T."<sup>9</sup> Author William Pardee concurs,

Baptism was never considered a matter of personal choice on the part of converts. It was not that they could be baptized if they wished, baptism was the first step of obedience following their conversion, and it was a sign of their submission to the Lord of Glory. Their willingness to submit to baptism was an indication of the reality of their salvation. It testified to the world that they belonged to Christ."<sup>10</sup>

Baptism is called an ordinance because it is "ordered" by Jesus Christ. Will you be obedient?

*Do you consider Jesus to be your friend?*

Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command." (John 15:14)

*Do you consider Jesus to be your love?*

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15)

*Do you consider Jesus to be your Lord?*

Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Obedience is a good reason to be baptized, but it's not the only one. Baptism is a precious privilege, a meaningful event and a joyful experience. Even if God offered it as an option and not a command, it would still be a wise, wonderful choice.

People often talk about how good it felt to be baptized. That's not because grace is bestowed during the event. It is because blessing and joy result when you are walking in accordance with the Master's plan. When one is in alignment with God's will, there is a sweet spirit of harmony with the Lord.

Christ followers follow... in baptism and every dimension of their lives.

## **WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED? *BELIEVERS.***

### **Biblical Examples**

From Matthew 28 and Acts 2, it is clear that baptism follows salvation. Two additional incidents in Acts give further evidence to conclusively prove this contention.

In Acts 8:36, the Ethiopian eunuch turned to Philip who had been witnessing to him and asked, "*Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?*" In verse 37, Philip said, "*If you believe with all your heart, you may.*" The official answered, "*I believe that Jesus*

*Christ is the Son of God.*"<sup>1</sup> At that point they stopped the chariot that they had been riding in and they went down into the water where Philip baptized him.

Before looking at another passage, consider this question: "Do only Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them?" If your answer is "yes" (and that certainly is the Biblical answer), then you will find Acts 10 a crucial chapter for this issue.

In synopsis, God sent Peter to bring the message of salvation to a Gentile named Cornelius. Cornelius gathered his friends and relatives together and Peter preached a sermon that concluded with this statement in verse 43: *"All the prophets testify about him (Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

The next three verses reveal that their faith resulted in salvation. An evidence of their salvation was the reception of the Holy Spirit. In verse 47, Peter asked the Jewish believers who came with him this question: *"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ..."*

The Scriptural evidence is clear. A person puts his faith in Jesus Christ and receives salvation. Then, as an obedient disciple, he, or she, is baptized.

This point must be stressed because there are many Christians that misunderstand it. There are two major false views that violate this principle: baptismal regeneration and infant baptism.

## **False Views**

Those believing in baptismal regeneration believe that baptism is required for salvation. A favorite verse is Acts 2:38, *"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (NASV).*

The little word "for" has sparked a lot of debate. In the Greek, the preposition can mean "in order for" or "on account of." The option you choose greatly affects the meaning of the verse. In the footnotes of my Interlinear Greek New Testament (displays the NT in both Greek and English), I just found a fun description:

"For" (as used in Acts 2:38 "for the forgiveness") could have two meanings. If you saw a poster saying "Jesse James wanted for robbery," "for" could mean Jesse is wanted so he can commit a robbery, or is wanted because he has committed a robbery. The later sense is the correct one. So, too, in this passage, the word "for"

signifies an action in the past. Otherwise, it would violate the entire tenor of the NT teaching on salvation by grace and not by works.<sup>12</sup>

According to Harold L. Fickett, Jr., "Here Peter was telling those Jews that the moment they repented, i.e. turned from following the path of evil and began to walk by faith as God desired, they were to be baptized because their sins had been remitted. It was on the basis of their repentance, not their baptism, that remission of sins became a reality in their lives."<sup>13</sup> We should be baptized because our sins have been forgiven, not in order to have our sins forgiven.

The second false view is infant baptism ("paedobaptism"). The Roman Catholic Church and a number of protestant churches hold this position in a variety of forms. In the Catholic stance, no faith is involved. This is another variation of the incorrect view of baptismal regeneration.

Protestants promoting infant baptism usually do not throw faith away. They hold that due to the faith of parents, the promises of the covenant belong to the infant in a formal, objective sense but that later, upon the age of understanding, there must be a personal acceptance by faith.

The infants are, according to Louis Berkhof, "...children of the covenant, and are as such heirs of the all-comprehensive covenant-promises of God."<sup>14</sup> A proof text is Colossians 2:11-13. The logic used is that baptism is to the New Covenant what circumcision was to the Old: the outward symbol of the covenant. And since circumcision was performed on infants, it is reasonable to assume that this is also proper for baptism.

It is true that baptism is linked to circumcision in Colossians, but not to physical circumcision. The passage refers to the circumcision of the heart ("without hands") that takes place at the point of salvation. This text provides even more evidence for believer's baptism.

Another argument used by some is that the Scriptural mention of "household baptisms" must include any infants residing in the home. But an examination of each of the pertinent texts (Acts 10; 16; 18 and I Cor. 1:16) demonstrates no mention of children or infants. Where the texts are descriptive (e.g., Acts 16:31-34), it is clear that each member of the households (which included servants) possessed faith before they were baptized.

Some proponents cite Matthew 19:14, "*Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" But these are not infants. The word is used of children up to twelve years old. Furthermore, nothing is said in this passage (or 18:1-10) about salvation or baptism. Archbishop Hughes, a Roman Catholic, candidly

admitted, "It does not appear from Scripture that even one infant was ever baptized..."<sup>15</sup> Not only is infant baptism absent from the New Testament, it was nonexistent in the early church. The practice of infant baptism wasn't followed during the first 200 years of the church. After some adopted the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration, infant baptism evolved to give a sense of security that their infants would not perish if they died young.

Children should not be baptized until after they have personally accepted Christ as their Savior and then reached the maturity to grasp the doctrine of baptism. Though I would recommend a minimum age of around eight to ten, Christian parents may be the best ones to judge the level of their child's understanding and commitment.

What if your baptism occurred before you were saved? Then it is "out of order" and needs to be fixed. You will want to be baptized again -- this time with believer's baptism.

Let me offer some practical advice to those who may have been "baptized" as infants. Even though that baptism wasn't biblical and you should now be baptized again as a believer, please be very sensitive towards your parents and family. With full sincerity, they did what they thought was best for you. Be gentle and appreciative as you explain your understanding of Scripture and your desire to be totally obedient to God.

## **HOW SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED? *IMMERSION.***

Christians subscribe to various modes of baptism. Some churches practice immersion, while others just pour water over the participant. And then there are those who just sprinkle a few drops of water. Still others argue that it is a matter of preference; the quantity of water involved isn't important.

So which mode are you going to choose? And what factors will you use to make your choice? Some choose based on upon their faith tradition, or due to convenience or personal comfort. I am hoping that you, in turn, will use one criteria to make your decision: the teaching of the Bible.

And if you do, *you will take the plunge!* You won't water down your baptism by substituting sprinkling or pouring for immersion. Really, come on in -- the water is fine.

That is not just the best choice, it's the only right choice. That sounds pretty dogmatic, doesn't it? With such great diversity of opinion, it may sound rigid and even arrogant to insist that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism and that "all the other guys" are wrong. But the following evidence proves that baptism by any other means than immersion is not baptism at all.

## The Literal Meaning of "Baptism" Is Immersion

If immersion is required of God, why didn't the Great Commission just plainly state that believers should be immersed? It did! The Greek word for "baptize" (baptizo) means "immerse." When our English Bible was first translated in 1611, the church of that time practiced sprinkling. The translators either had to be honest and translate the word "immerse" and get in trouble with King James and the English church or they had to translate it inaccurately and get in trouble with God. In their attempt to escape their dilemma, they didn't translate the term at all; they transliterated it. They Anglicized the Greek word and passed the debate on to others. But those who are forthright with the text know that immersion is part of the command of Matthew 28:18-20.

This isn't just a personal or partisan opinion. Put on your seatbelt for one paragraph as we rumble through some heavy academia. Over fifty reputable Greek lexicons or dictionaries state that the meaning of the Greek word "baptizo" is "immersion."<sup>16</sup> This includes lexicons compiled by scholars from a vast range of denominations. For example, one of the most famous lexicons was written by Liddell and Scott, men who belonged to the Church of England. Thayer, a scholar of the Congregational Church wrote the New Testament Greek Lexicon. Cremer, a German Lutheran penned another lexicon of theological terms.<sup>17</sup> Most of the major figures behind the denominations that do not practice immersion agree that "baptizo" means "immerse" and that immersion was the New Testament mode of baptism. Luther, Calvin and Brenner (a Roman Catholic) are examples. Gordon Johnson concurs with all these theologians when he says, "The words sprinkling or pouring are never used in the New Testament for the rite of baptism."<sup>18</sup>

I am often asked various questions about baptism that would be answered easily if we would simply use the word "immersion" (the correct translation) in place of the word "baptism." Here are a couple of examples: "Is it wrong to *baptize* (immerse) a person by sprinkling?" Is an unimmersed believer an *unbaptized* (unimmersed) believer?" When we use Biblical language, confusion is removed. To answer those two questions using accurate and specific terms, one would have to say that it is impossible to immerse by sprinkling and an unimmersed believer is just that: an unimmersed (unbaptized) believer.

If the mode of baptism wasn't important, God could have used a different Greek word than He did. But if you, like Jesus and the apostles, believe that God inspired every word of the Bible, then the word "immerse" is crucial.

The bottom line? Jesus commands that we "immerse" believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Every Baptism in the Bible Was Done by Immersion

John 3:23 states, "*Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.*" Instead of the convenience of being baptized in the city, people had to walk for miles to this location. Why? Because immersion required "*plenty of water.*"

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, he immersed Him. Mark 1:9 states, "*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in* (Greek word "eis" means "into") *the Jordan.*" Jesus was lowered literally into the Jordan River.

Matthew 3:16, a parallel passage, says, "*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out* (Greek word "ek" means "out from within") *of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.*"

The baptisms of Acts took the same form. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch describes him going down into the water and coming up out of the water -- expressions that are consistent only with the mode of immersion. Arthur P. Lindsay states, "There can be no question that the original form of baptism -- the very meaning of the word -- was complete immersion in the deep baptismal waters; and that, for at least four centuries, any other form was either unknown or regarded..."<sup>19</sup>

It may seem nit-picky and intolerant to declare that an unimmersed believer has never been truly baptized and yet that can be the only biblical conclusion.

"What about the invalid that can't be immersed?" someone protests. In the rare situation where this scenario might be played out, God knows that they would be baptized if they could be and is surely satisfied with that. Take, for example, the thief on the cross. There is no value in substituting an incorrect mode. The mode (immersion) of baptism is far more important than the element (water).

"Yes, but what about people who were sincerely trying to please God even if they, in their ignorance, were baptized in the wrong way?" That question reminds me of a couple of dear friends. They were saved as young adults and immediately made it their whole-hearted desire to live for Jesus. When their pastor told them about baptism, they allowed him to take them into a river and pour water over their heads. It was a special day that they cherish. They didn't want to get "re-baptized" by immersion because they felt this would devalue their earlier experience.

What counsel should be offered to individuals like these? I assured them that God was probably pleased with their hearts at their earlier *baptism*. That is because they were

following God to the full level of their understanding at the time. But now that they had greater understanding, they must continue to follow Him to a new level. They should please the Lord with obeying His command that they be immersed. Sincerity is no substitute for obedience. You see, when it comes down to it, the issue isn't the amount of water as much as it is the amount of obedience.

Obedience sometimes isn't convenient or comfortable. And there are even times when it is costly. On a cold January day in 1527, a Swiss Protestant minister named Felix Manz was put to death by drowning in the River Limmat. His crime? He wouldn't compromise on his conviction that baptism was for believers, not infants and was to be by immersion, not sprinkling. In his words, "We bring together those who are willing to accept Christ, obey the Word, and follow in his footsteps. We unite them by baptism, and leave the rest to their present conviction." He was killed by other "Christians" for seeking to obey God with a clear conscience.

Now that we have established that baptism should be by immersion, you might be wondering if there are right or wrong venues. Should it be in a river? A lake? The ocean? A baptismal tank?

There is no right or wrong answer here; you can do whatever you prefer or is provided by your church. Take me for example; I happened to be baptized in an elevator. *No fooling; I'm not pulling your leg.* My home church had a large, round auditorium shaped like a pie cut up in several pieces. But -- so that everyone could get a good look -- they put the baptismal tank in the very center of the church. The big, round baptismal was like a hub in the center of a wheel. Then, so that people wouldn't have to walk dripping down an aisle after getting baptized, they put the baptismal tank in an elevator shaft.

Those getting baptized would enter in the basement of the church and then the tank, like a giant cereal bowl, would be elevated up into the auditorium, where the participants would be baptized one at a time. It was a kick.

But that isn't something I advocate. My personal preference is outdoors. On a fishing trip in Canada, Max took me and our companions to his favorite place in the world. A small waterfall flowed into a pond surrounded by a forest of beautiful trees.

When I mentioned that it reminded me of a spot in Colorado where I had baptized some people, Max's eyes got big and he said, "You can do that?"

"Sure."

"Can we do it now? I want to get baptized."

I had come into contact with Max and his family earlier that year after his son was almost killed in a snowmobile accident. During the months that followed they had given their lives to the Lord. So I thought it would be great if Max got baptized now. We sat down and I explained baptism while using a stick to draw illustrations in the dirt. And then I got to baptize Max. Our small group of guys then whooped it up. It was absolutely wonderful.

Every spiritual journey is. People come to Christ at different ages, through different circumstances but every time someone gets saved, it is party time in heaven. And baptism is a great time to celebrate their spiritual birthdays here on earth.

Have you followed Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you have, it is now time to get into the picture of baptism.

### **Only Immersion Provides the Symbolic Picture of Salvation that God Intends**

Technically, baptism could be called an "abbild," that is, a representation, a picture, a symbol, or an acted out parable. As such, its strength is based on how well it resembles what it represents. If a picture does not resemble reality, it is a poor picture. If I said, "Let me show you a picture of my wife," and then held out a photograph that didn't resemble her, you might wonder if I got my photos mixed up (or, if I am a polygamist).

As we've already shown, baptism doesn't provide salvation but it does picture salvation. That is why the imagery of immersion is so important. Unlike the other modes of baptism, it pictorially illustrates many aspects of our salvation -- such as our identification with Christ's burial, our own spiritual burial, and our immersion by the Spirit into the body of Christ. Since God personally picked immersion to be the picture that we should use, we should not deviate from His design.

The wonders of salvation are beautifully pictured by baptismal immersion.

\* \* \*

Although baptism is an experience that most Christians embrace as one of the highlights of their life, others view it with apprehension and some even debate its nature. That's sad. God wants you to treasure baptism and its beautiful depiction of your salvation. To help you better understand and appreciate baptism, we've looked at the answers for four critical questions. Read them again and see if you can remember the answers for each.

1. What is pictured by baptism?

2. Why should a person get baptized?
3. Who should be baptized?
4. How should a person be baptized?

In summary, God commands baptism. The Christian who loves God will be obedient to this spiritual requirement. Baptism is the immersion of a believer in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The beauty of salvation is pictured through the acted out parable of immersion. It is the outward symbol of the inward reality. Those who love their salvation should also love baptism.

\* \* \*

*Ready to take the plunge? If you would like to follow the Lord in believer's baptism, please talk to a pastor. After hearing your story about how you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, he will explain the details of a baptismal service. When you are baptized, invite your friends so that you can give a public testimony of your love for Christ.*

## **SUPPER TIME!**

### **The Past, Present & Future Focus of the Lord's Supper**

*Let's pay a visit to Grace Chapel. Like the song title made famous in the '70s by the band, "Love Song," Grace is the "Little Country Church" at the edge of town. It is a small, traditional congregation. Even the various choruses of "Love Song," composed over forty years before, are more contemporary than what they usually sing. But they do have this in common with Chuck Girard's lyrics, they are a good hearted people that talk "about revival and the need for love" and come together from miles around just because they want to "praise the Lord."*

*Once a month, their church becomes an art gallery. They showcase just one picture and it's always the same one: Communion. In that they have done this for over a century, you would think the custom has grown old by this time -- and for some, it probably has. But others have discovered some secrets for keeping it fresh, and for them, the practice is consistently a moving, vital worship experience that they treasure. As we study the Lord's Supper, we will periodically drop back into one of their communion services...*

\* \* \*

It has been said, "a picture paints a thousand words." Sometimes they do far more than that; they sketch vivid impressions on the heart and mind that would be difficult to do with mere words.

God has ordained two "symbolic" services for the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism contains pictures that are pertinent to your spiritual birth. The celebration of the Lord's Supper provides past, present, and future images that are helpful for your spiritual growth.

#### **COMMEMORATION: The Supper's Focus on the Past**

(Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 5:7; 11:24-25; Matthew. 26:26-28)

John was an old man on the Isle of Patmos when God gave him the visions and instructions that make up the book of Revelation. In the fifth chapter he witnesses four living creatures and twenty-four elders bowed down before Jesus, the Lamb. They are singing "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and

*people and nation" (9). After being joined by over 100,000 angels, this mammoth choir sings "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"*

While listening to the lyrics of this concert, John's mind must have been replaying the heart-breaking weekend when he had witnessed the Lamb being slain. It was a flash-back he'd surely experienced thousands of times before. He could close his eyes and visualize Jesus and his band of followers at the Lord's Supper. The Lord's candid prediction of his coming execution left him dazed and confused. Then they moved to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a dark evening but the shadows on his Master's face came not from the night but from within. Jesus gripped His agony with resolve and submitted it to the Father in prayer. Heavy footsteps and loud voices moved up the hill; they came from religious leaders and soldiers. Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss and then, though the Lord could have called a dozen legions of angels, Jesus surrenders. Then it get even worse. John remembers Jesus being spit upon and beaten. He sees a crown of thorns pressed into Christ's skull. And then he sees, over and over in his mind, the painful, graphic events that made up the crucifixion.

I know that his recollections must have been painful, but, at the same time, can you imagine how helpful these memories must have been in John's Christian life? They constantly reminded him of Christ's love. They motivated him to be dedicated in service. They provided an example when times were tough. They filled him with constant praise and thanksgiving.

The memory of the cross can do the same things for us. And that is one purpose of the Lord's Supper. Luke 22:19 and I Corinthians 11:24-25 both quote Christ's command, *"This do, in remembrance of me."* James Montgomery wrote,

Remember Thee, and all Thy pains,  
And all Thy love to me;  
Yes, while a breath, a pulse remains,  
Will I remember Thee.

In what way does the Supper celebration bring recollections of Christ's death? Matthew 26:26-28 reads, *"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.'"*

The bread represents Christ's body which was broken upon the cross. The cup represents his blood that was shed. I stress the word "represents" because it stands in

contrast with the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation, which wrongly holds that the bread actually becomes Christ's body and the cup becomes literal blood. Also to be rejected is the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation, which maintains that Christ's body and blood are mysteriously present in the elements when they are consumed. Though there is no transformation of the elements, Jesus' body and blood are said to be "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

The biblical record makes it obvious that the cup and bread are meant to be symbols. As Christ spoke, He was physically present. As the disciples ate and drank they were beholding Him. They knew that they were not literally consuming His blood and body. Such a cannibalistic view would not only have been repulsive to these Jewish followers, it would have also broken Old Testament Law (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14).

The transubstantiation view teaches that Christ is crucified anew every time there is a communion service. This concept is directly contradicted by the writer of Hebrews, who taught that Christ was sacrificed "once for all" to take away our sins (9:25-28; 10:10).

Christ is speaking symbolically -- just like he did when he called himself "a door" or "a rock." If I were to take you to the Lincoln Memorial and say, "there is Abraham Lincoln," you would know that I was just speaking about a memorial statue. God gives many memorial symbols: the rainbow, the Passover meal, the Feast of Tabernacles, etc.

The symbols in the Lord's supper are particularly crucial because they bring to our "remembrance" the most important event of all history---the crucifixion.

The blood that flowed for sin,  
In symbol here we see;  
And feel the blessed pledge within,  
That we are loved of Thee.

Have you ever listened to an old song that was popular during your teen years and suddenly found your mind dwelling upon some past nostalgic memory? Leafing through a yearbook can have the same effect. Or better yet, take time on your anniversary to sit with your spouse and gaze at your wedding album. Memories of that wonderful day will rekindle the romance.

The pictures of the Lord's Supper are designed to transport your concentration back through time and wrap it around the cross. It is a sad phase in the life of a believer

when he or she starts to take the crucifixion for granted...when the thought of Golgotha doesn't deeply stir emotions. Participation in the Lord's Supper should melt one's heart and make Jesus' death vivid and meaningful once again.

"Lest I forget Gethsemane, lest I forget Thine agony  
Lest I forget Thy love for me – lead me to Calvary."

A rallying cry from early American history was "Remember the Alamo." The rallying cry for all Christian history is "Remember the Cross!" Communion is a service of remembrance -- of commemoration.

\* \* \*

*Pastor Smith loved communion Sundays. He wished that Grace Chapel did the Lord's Supper every week like some churches do. But he figured there wasn't a right or wrong way, Scripture just says, "as often as you eat... and drink." Once a month probably fit in the category of "often." Sometimes, the communion sermon was his whole message and other times the Lord's Supper was just a smaller part of the service. Again, no right or wrong. And for a traditional church, they had gradually allowed him some freedoms as to how he went about conducting the Supper. Today they just passed the plates of elements down the rows, but other times, people would move, when personally led, to the front during the celebration and dip bread into a large container of juice and consume it there. Every Thanksgiving, they would do it around smaller tables in the Fellowship Hall with elders leading each table. He liked the variety; but one thing never changed. Pastor Smith always used the service to help everyone look back at the cross. Always. And every time he choked up. The thought of their dear Lord Jesus going through those extreme agonies overwhelmed him. What love! What sacrifice!*

\* \* \*

**PROCLAMATION:  
The Supper's Focus on the Present**

1 Corinthians 11:26 states, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The Greek word translated "proclaim" was used when a king would enter a region or town. His herald would go ahead of Him and announce the pending arrival so that his subjects could be ready to come out to the street or courtyard and joyfully extol him.

John Piper's words help me understand the positivity of this proclamation:

So, even though I think it is dangerously wrong to say that the bread and the blood turn into the physical, incarnate body of Jesus, nevertheless, I am not saying that what happens in the Lord's Supper is mere, intellectual recall of facts. The supper *proclaims*. And *faith* comes by hearing and seeing and tasting that proclamation. And faith is a spiritual feasting on the risen, living Christ so that all that God is for us in him satisfies our soul, and sweetens our love for him, and breaks the power of sin in our lives. Let's love the Lord's Supper together. And let's love Christ more and more as we meet him there together.<sup>20</sup>

The Lord's Supper is more than a memorial, it is a present tense "living sermon" of the consequences of Christ's death. And it's definitely not a funeral; Jesus is alive and in Him, you are, too. As a result of the Lord's sacrifice, believers enjoy an eternal covenant with God and the potential for intimate communion with Him and His people. That's something to celebrate. Mourning has turned to joy (John 16:20). Jesus *conquered* death and has set us free from the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15). Feast on those truths!

The great classical composer Joseph Hayden was criticized because his church music was too cheerful. He replied: "I cannot help it. I give forth what is in me. When I think of the Divine Being, my heart is so full of joy that the notes fly off as from a spindle. And as I have a cheerful heart, He will pardon me if I serve Him cheerfully."

### **Covenant** (Matt. 26:28; I Cor. 11:25; Jer. 31:31-34)

Matthew 26:28 states, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" Covenants are very important to God. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the people of Israel. But even then He said that it would be replaced with a much better "new covenant." Listen to the Lord's words in Jeremiah 32:31-34, "*The time is coming,*" declares the LORD, "*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,*" declares the LORD. "*This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,*" declares the LORD. "*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,*" declares the LORD. "*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*"

The new covenant consists of that special relationship -- the marriage that believers have with God. How could sinful men and women be united with a Holy God? By the forgiveness of sins accomplished by Christ's death on the cross.

In the inauguration of the first covenant, the terms were first spelled out and then the blood of an unblemished animal was shed and sprinkled for its ratification.

The new covenant was also ratified by blood -- Christ's blood. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" We who know the Lord have a contract with God -- an eternal covenant -- a promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). And that covenant has been signed with the blood of Christ.

It is for this reason that we are instructed to give thanks for the cup and the bread. The Greek word for this thanksgiving is "eucharisteo" (Matthew 26:27; I Corinthians 11:24), from which we get the word "eucharist." This term became the most commonly used expression for the Lord's Supper in ancient times. Just as the Passover Feast celebrated the day the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, so Eucharist celebrates the event that delivered believers from sin. Since the Lord's Supper is a jubilant anniversary, participants should be filled with deep praise and appreciation. Through Christ's past death we have a forever present relationship with God.

There is no one formal title for this ordinance. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul calls it a "cup of thanksgiving." In verse 21, he calls it "the cup of the Lord" and "the Lord's table." Acts simply refers to the breaking of bread. But the three most common designations are Eucharist, the Lord's Supper and Communion.

### **Communion** (I Corinthians 10:16-17)

I Corinthians 10:16-17 states, "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*" This passage shows that the Lord's Supper portrays our fellowship with our Lord and also with our fellow believers.

### **Vertical Communion With God**

*Communion with God requires conversion* (Matt. 26:28). When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we express the vital relationship with Christ that began when our sins were forgiven at the point of our salvation. If you have never accepted God's free gift of salvation, you should delay your participation until you have. It is a family meal designed for those who have been born into God's family.

I will never forget the church service back in my little church plant in Gunnison, Colorado, in which a man who had been attending realized he should not take communion because he had never given his life to Christ. As he thought about this he

realized that he really wanted to have a personal relationship with the Lord. So he silently bowed his head, asked Jesus to forgive his sin and enter his heart as Savior and Lord. When the tray got to him, he, a brand new child of God, was thrilled to participate!

*Communion with God not only requires conversion, it also necessitates examination* (I Corinthians 11:27-31). If I understand I Corinthians 11:30 correctly, some in the Corinthian church had gotten ill and some had even passed away because they had treated Communion lightly. Since the ceremony pictures the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sin, it is a mockery to participate while you are harboring sinful thoughts or practices. So before you partake, do a personal spiritual inspection and confess any known sin. As verse 28 states, "*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*" Though I try to prepare my heart before every church service, during the passing of the elements, I often pray the words of Psalm 139:23-24, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" When God reveals a sinful attitude or action, I confess it and claim His cleansing (I John 1:9).

Earlier in the book I mentioned a baptism in Nepal; now it's time for a communion recollection. My most meaningful worship service of the last year was at the Himalayan Evangelical Church of Kathmandu. As I was listening to the message being "proclaimed" through the Lord's Supper, the Spirit of God spoke deeply to my heart about affirmations that I longed to hear and corrections that I needed to make. It was powerful and it drew me into much deeper communion with the Lord. As you participate in communion, I urge you to listen, really listen, and then respond appropriately.

**Horizontal Communion With Believers** (I Corinthians 10:15-17; 11:17-22, 33)

When Christians come together to partake of the Lord's Supper, it is done within the relational bond of common fellowship. We are one in fellowship, one in purpose and one in Christ. Look at verse 17, "*For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*" The bread pictures two things: 1) as it is broken, it illustrates Christ's body being broken on the cross, and 2) the one loaf pictures the unity that should exist in the church, the body of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Christ broke his physical body so that his followers could become one unified body.

Therefore communion should be a time when believers should express their union with one another. This is in contrast to the situation in the Corinthian church where Paul condemned the people for participating while they were ignoring divisions in

their church. In an article on Communion in the *Zondervan Pictorial Biblical Encyclopedia*, J. B. Funderburk wrote,

Jesus said to His disciples, "you have one teacher, and you are all one brethren" (Matt 23:8). Just as disciples are fellow students, those who partake of the communion are fellow worshipers. "Consider the practice of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?" (1 Cor 10:18). Paul admonished worthiness of fellowship, "with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," to which he adds, "one body and one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph 4:1-6).<sup>22</sup>

It is also important to note that the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance; it is designed for local churches. Regardless of good intentions, it is probably inappropriate to use communion in weddings, family devotions, etc. As has been shown, the loaf symbolizes the body of Christ -- the church. And once the church was formed in Acts 2, Scripture only shows the Lord's Supper being conducted in church meetings.<sup>23</sup>

It is for this reason that many Christians believe a Communion service should only be conducted at a gathering to which the whole church is invited. With respect for their position, I believe their stance is a little too rigid. The Jerusalem church, having over three thousand members and no large building, met in the temple courts and in a variety of homes. I do agree that though they met in numerous locations, there was still a oneness of heart (Acts 2:44) as "*they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*" (Acts 2:42).

The fact that the Lord's Table is a church ordinance does not mean churches should practice "closed communion," that is, restrict it to their own members. Acts 20:4-12 shows the local church in Troas breaking bread with Paul, Luke and representatives from a number of other local churches. Based on this passage, Dic Eccles gives this illustration,

But the church may invite visitors to join in the fellowship of the Supper if it so desires...The situation is analogous to that of meal enjoyed by a family. Each member of the family has the right to sit down at the table for the meal... but, insistence on the rights of the members of the family does not preclude the possibility that they may extend such an invitation to a visitor if they so desire.<sup>24</sup>

Most evangelical churches invite visitors to participate as long as they are believers who have confessed their sins and are walking with the Lord. Though not members of that particular church, they are still members of God's larger family.

\* \* \*

*Helen sat in the same row every week at Grace Chapel. There was a time when she, her husband and their four kids left little room for others in their pew but time had moved her children out of town, and in the case of her hubby, out of this world. Now the spots beside her were filled with members of her church family. They helped fill the void of loneliness she sometimes felt. And then, of course, there was the Lord. She was overwhelmed with the sense of His presence. And the communion service reinforced that. Before she had even come this morning, she had prepared her heart for this service. She had repented of some ways that she had recently let God down, celebrated spiritual cleansing and enjoyed her time with her Savior. Now as trays of grape juice and bread were being passed up and down the pews she again prayed intently and internally. "Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into this world, dying on the cross for my sins and springing back to life three days later. Thank you for making me part of your family." Then opening her eyes, she looked around the room at her fellow believers and her frail, age-spotted hands grasped the hands of those beside her. "And, thanks, too, Lord, for each of my spiritual family members. I love them so much."*

\* \* \*

### **ANTICIPATION:**

#### **The Supper's Focus on the Future**

(I Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:28-29)

I Corinthians 11:26 tells us to celebrate the Lord's Supper "*until he comes.*" The first time Jesus came to this earth, He came as the Suffering Servant. The next time, He will come as the Conquering King. Communion is an observance to remind us that Jesus will come again. And then it will be replaced by a better meal.

First, there was the Passover Feast. It celebrated the Israelites' deliverance from Israel. It was replaced by the Lord's Supper, which celebrated the believer's deliverance from sin's *penalty*. When Christ returns, the Lord's Supper will be replaced by the marriage feast of the Lamb. This great event will celebrate the believer's deliverance from sin's *presence*. It will give a forward look at an endless eternity of the perfect fellowship and intimacy that will exist between Christ and His bride, the Church.

An *Our Daily Bread* devotional (April 5, 2012) described a day in 2010 when German officials closed a thirty-seven mile stretch of the Autobahn so they could set up 20,000 tables and create "the longest table in the world." Two million people from a variety of cultures, generations and countries came to enjoy this giant mixer. Author David McCasland drew this analogy: "The Lord's Table unites everyone Christ has

redeemed by His blood 'out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation' (Rev. 5:9). One day, in a scene of reunion and joy, all who belong to Jesus will sit down together with Him at a table that will dwarf the Autobahn gathering. We joyfully anticipate sharing that table together!"

This anticipation should lead every person taking the bread and cup to pray along with John, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Revelation 22:20).

\* \* \*

*Tim was hungry. Even though he knew Communion wasn't meant to be a replacement for lunch, he still thought the cup was too small and the square piece of bread was way too little. Grace Chapel must really be hard up for money to provide such a measly communion. He wished they could supersize it for him. And that thought made him think of McDonalds. He was no longer eligible for the kids' meal that came with a toy but he still loved the Chicken McNuggets, the golden fries and the strawberry shake. He wished he could talk his folks into going there after church but knew that was a lost cause. Then he thought about what Pastor Smith had said about the coming mega Supper they would be having in heaven someday. To think, that someday could be really soon. He loved this life but to see Jesus face-to-face, to explore heaven, to get a new super body that could go right through walls and maybe even fly. Now that was cool. Real cool. Tim licked out his communion cup one more time and thought, "I can't wait!"*

\* \* \*

In the chorus, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Jack Wyrzten reminds us that, "Yesterday He died for me -- This is history... Today He lives for me -- This is victory... Tomorrow He comes for me -- This is mystery..." When you gather with your church family for "supper time," remember to celebrate this past, present and future focus of the communion service.

## ***SPECIAL BONUS!***

### **Chapter One of the Book: “The Perfect Gift”**

# **THE PERFECT GIFT**

I grew up in a family that loved to give gifts during the Christmas season. My father got into it the most. He would make sure that tons of brightly colored packages were piled up high around the Christmas tree -- a rotating, silver aluminum beauty lit up by a color wheel (I get nostalgic when I remember that retro era).

Do you remember that scene with Chevy Chase during the movie *Christmas Vacation* (and please, don't take this as an endorsement) where he placed so many lights on his house that it caused a city power outage? Well, my dad was like him, but not with lights; rather with gifts. He sometimes bought them but more often made them. I wish you could see the ventriloquist dummies he made for my brother Jerry and me. With all the moving parts he built into the heads, they ended up as big as pumpkins. Then he formed the faces with auto putty and made hair out of cut up bathroom rugs. The end result was that the dummies were as big and heavy as his young sons. It took all my might just to hold mine up. They were ultra cool!

And there were many other memorable presents like a unicycle or the giant slot car race track that was built on an eight-foot table that used a pulley system to descend from our basement ceiling. I especially remember the wiggly box that contained Sam the beagle puppy. And then there was...*well, I think you get the idea*. Bottom line: I have received many wonderful gifts.

But the best present that I have ever received wasn't placed under a tree; it was hung on one. And the giver wasn't my earthly dad; it was our Heavenly Father. The gift of which I am speaking is the eternal life that is available through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many get a little skeptical when they hear terms like "eternal life," "salvation," "conversion," or being "born again." I understand that; those terms carry some negative stereotypes, don't they? And beyond that, a belief that one can have a forever friendship with God may sound like nothing more than a "pie-in-the sky in the sweet-bye-and-bye" hope for people afraid of death. A religious pacifier, perhaps?

But what if it's true? What if there really is a gift of spiritual intimacy that the God of the universe wants to share with you? I know that we are told that "if it seems too good to be true, it probably is," but what if...? Seriously, what if it's true and you miss it?

Isn't it worth taking a little time exploring what this gift is all about? This little book will help you do just that. It will begin by explaining how to start a relationship with God. Then it will deal with many of the common objections that discerning people have. I think you will discover compelling reasons for accepting God's gift.

Before I tell you about the day that I received this present, let me share a few of the reasons why I love it so much...

## REASONS THIS GIFT WAS SO GREAT

The first big reason is that this gift lasts forever! Most presents wear out, rust out or are eventually thrown out, but the Bible says, "...*the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). My "forever" relationship with the Lord Jesus has filled my life with genuine meaning, purpose and joy. I could go on and on about this because there is no way that I can exaggerate how wonderful this is.

The second reason is this is a present that I didn't deserve. Some people have the mistaken notion that they can earn salvation by being good or religious. Good works follow salvation but they don't bring salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). God says that "*the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...*" (Romans 6:23). As you know, there is a big difference between "wages" and "gifts." Wages are earned and deserved but gifts are free and undeserved.

According to the above verse, if I got what I deserved, it would be death -- and not just physical death, but spiritual and eternal death. Spiritual death refers to the death of our relationship with God. Eternal death refers to the fact that this painful separation from God will last forever.

Death is the wage that I deserve due to my sin. I, like everyone else, am guilty of violating God's perfect standards with my wrong actions and attitudes. The Lord says that "*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). In another Scripture He says that all sinners "*shall find their place in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. This is the second death*" (Revelation 21:8).

But instead of this death that I deserved, God offered me the free gift of eternal life which I didn't deserve and could never afford. This brings up the third reason I appreciate this gift so much: IT IS VERY EXPENSIVE!

The price tag was the very life of Jesus, the Son of God. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16).

I was astounded to realize that Jesus loved me so much that He willingly experienced the death that I deserved so that I could begin a new life with Him. Can you see why I love this gift so much? Now let me tell you how it became mine...

## HOW I RECEIVED THIS PERFECT GIFT

I had what I like to call "a personalized truth encounter." It was at a meeting that the lights came on for me. The speaker opened up the Bible and explained clearly how I could enter into a real relationship with God. I discovered that the gift of salvation couldn't be earned by good works or through religious activity; it could only be received by a simple prayer of faith. Romans 10:13 states: "*Everyone who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" What do you pray? Well, according to the God's Word, that's as easy as ABC:

**A**dmit that you have sinned. God calls this sorrowful apology "repentance." All of our sins are an offense against God and it is only right to apologize. They have separated us from Him and our repentance results in His complete forgiveness.

**B**elieve in the resurrected Christ as your Savior. This belief goes beyond mere "head" faith. It includes trusting in Him with your whole heart. "*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved*" (Romans 10:10).

**C**onfess Jesus as the Lord (Master) of your life. *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:13). This is a serious step. You are giving your whole life to Jesus to do with as He pleases.

At the conclusion of that meeting, I decided to pray that prayer. Even though I was a religious church attender, I knew that something was missing in my life. But after I prayed to invite Christ into my heart, everything changed and Jesus became very real for me. My ABC prayer was worded something like this:

*"Dear Jesus, please forgive me for sinning against you. I now put my whole faith in You and accept You as Lord and Savior. Thank you for the gift of everlasting life. Amen."*

How do I know that this prayerful act of faith enabled me to receive the gift of salvation? Because God never breaks a promise! And He promised that *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Romans 10:13).

The day that I made that decision, I was so excited that I immediately went to a friend's house and shared the good news with him. The result? He, too, accepted this gift and became an enthusiastic Christ follower. Now I would love to share my gift with you. If you will sincerely pray the above prayer, you will immediately receive the *perfect gift!*

If you are ready to do so, let me urge you to do it now. But if you still have doubts, then keep reading. This chapter has explained "how" to accept the gift of salvation. Chapters two through eight, written by Robert Laidlaw, provide some rational reasons for "why" you should...

**To download the rest of "The Perfect Gift,"  
go to [www.i-training.info](http://www.i-training.info).**

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## Other Books

***Discover Your Ministry Niche*** helps Christians find the “personal mission” that best matches their God-given design and resources. God has a special role for you that is fruitful and fulfilling! For further information, go to [www.i-training.info](http://www.i-training.info).

***The Perfect Gift*** is a ten-chapter book co-written by Ron Sheveland. It gives head-and-heart reasons for why you should accept God’s gift of eternal life and a simple understanding of how to accept that gift. *For a limited time you can receive a FREE copy by going to* [www.i-training.info](http://www.i-training.info).

***The Potluck People*** is a humorous novel that has been collecting “5 Star” reviews.

Every church has some quirky people. But at Meanwhile Baptist Church, there is an overabundance of offbeat personalities -- and their antics, both funny and frustrating, are a challenge for their young, new pastor, Mike Lewis, and his fun-loving wife, Sandy.

You will meet "Counselor" Carol, a woman who keeps herself busy providing unwanted therapy to her fellow church members. And then there is Whit Carson, a mystery teen who shows up out of nowhere and proceeds to prank everyone with his mind-games. Old Margaret McElroy runs the kitchen and supervises some of the best Potluck Dinners in the Midwest. But she also uses seventy-two years of crusty gumption and a megaphone voice to handle anyone that gets out of line. The "Perfect Gift" drama production is coming and Harold T. Broadmoor, a self-professed marketing genius, has a secret, unorthodox publicity campaign to insure that everyone in West Michigan hears about it. These characters (and yes, they are characters!) are the kind of people you just want to hug... or sometimes kick. Take your choice.

Take a relaxing break and laugh your way through escapades of *The Potluck People*. In this dish you will find a variety of ingredients, such as the comic outlook of Garrison Kiellor's Lake Wobegon, the biting humor of Phillip Gulley's Harmony series and some of the warmth of Jan Karon's Mitford books. Try a helping of *The Potluck People*. And when *Back for Seconds* comes out, you will definitely want to make your way back to the table.

*The Potluck People* is an unforgettable comedy peppered with moments of love, tenderness, and lives being changed. Get it at [www.potluckpeople.com](http://www.potluckpeople.com) or at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Edith Schaeffer, *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971).
- <sup>2</sup> John F. Balchin, *What The Bible Teaches About The Church*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), p. 59.
- <sup>3</sup> Beasley-Murray, G. R., *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 283.
- <sup>4</sup> Beasley-Murray, G. R., *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 282.
- <sup>5</sup> Beasley-Murray, G. R., *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 284.
- <sup>6</sup> Shelley, Bruce, *What Baptists Believe*, (Wheaton: C. B. Press, 1973), pp. 45-46.
- <sup>7</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. III*, (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1862), p. 114.
- <sup>8</sup> Pardee, William H., *Baptism, Its Importance, Its Subjects, Its Mode*, (Schaumburg, ILL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), pp. 9-10.
- <sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book Of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 77.
- <sup>10</sup> Pardee, William H., *Baptism, Its Importance, Its Subjects, Its Mode*, (Schaumburg, ILL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), p. 11.
- <sup>11</sup> While verse 37 is not in some of the early manuscripts, Dr. Bruce Shelley argued that, at the least, its inclusion in many manuscripts demonstrates that believer's baptism was the practice of the early church.
- <sup>12</sup> Frederick Henry Ambrose, *Interlinear Greek New Testament* (Scrivener).
- <sup>13</sup> Harold L. Fickett, Jr., *A Layman's Guide to Baptist Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 79.
- <sup>14</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 638.
- <sup>15</sup> Gordon Johnson, *My Church*, (Chicago: Harvest Publications, 1963), p. 46.
- <sup>16</sup> Harold L. Fickett, Jr., *A Layman's Guide to Baptist Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 72.
- <sup>17</sup> Gordon Johnson, *My Church*, (Chicago: Harvest Publications, 1963), p. 41.
- <sup>18</sup> Gordon Johnson, *My Church*, (Chicago: Harvest Publications, 1963), p. 41.
- <sup>19</sup> Arthur P. Stanley, *History of the Eastern Church*, (Oxford: University Press, 1873), p. 117.
- <sup>20</sup> John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org).
- <sup>21</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 1987), p. 1126. "As to whether it is necessary to use one loaf of bread and one cup, there is some latitude. Paul does speak of the 'one bread' of which all partake (I Cor. 10:17), but this does not necessarily dictate a whole loaf. There is no parallel statement about 'one cup,' so the use of individual cups does not compromise the symbolism."
- <sup>22</sup> G. B. Funderburk, "Communion," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1975), I, p. 930.
- <sup>23</sup> Erickson, "The Lord's Supper is, or represents, the Lord's body. It is also for the body, that is, the church. In I Corinthians 10:15-17 Paul argues that since all partake of one loaf, which is Christ's body, they are all one body. This is the background to Paul's statements in I Corinthians 11:17-22. For members of the church to be divided into factions and to despise others who partake with them of the one loaf is an abuse and contradiction of the sacrament. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church. It cannot be appropriately practiced by separate individuals in isolation. It is the property of the functioning body of Christ. (p. 1112)" The Lord's Supper "symbolizes the unity of believers within the church and their love and concern for each other. (p. 1124)" "What does appear in the Gospel accounts and in Paul's discussion is that the Lord's Supper has been entrusted to, and is presumably to be administered by the church. It would therefore seem to be in order for the persons who have been chosen and empowered by the church to supervise and conduct its services of worship to superintend the Lord's Supper as well. Thus, at least some of the duly chosen leaders of the church should assist in the observance of the sacrament; the pastor should take the leading role. (p. 1124)"
- "Paul noted with chagrin that there were some divisions within the Corinthian church (v. 18). Some of the members in partaking of the elements were not really eating the Lord's Supper (v. 20), for they simply went ahead without waiting for the others (v.21). Disregard for fellow Christians and for the church is a contradiction of the Lord's Supper. So the Lord's Supper is as much a symbol of the present vital fellowship of believers of believers with the Lord and with one another as it is a symbol of the past death of Jesus. (p. 1111)."

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<sup>24</sup>Baruch Maoz, ed., *Local Church Practice* (Haywards Heath Sussex: Carey Publications, 1978), p. 85.