

Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Embodied Christianity

Modern Christianity often struggles to understand the relationship between spiritual reality and physical practice. Some believers treat ordinances such as baptism and the Lord's Supper as little more than symbolic rituals added onto Christianity after the fact, useful perhaps for tradition or personal inspiration but not central to the life of the church itself. Others react in the opposite direction, treating the ordinances almost mechanically, as though the physical acts themselves possess automatic spiritual power apart from faith, repentance, and covenant life under Christ. In both cases, something important can be lost. The New Testament presents baptism and the Lord's Supper not as empty ceremonies or magical rituals, but as embodied covenant practices through which the gathered church visibly proclaims the Gospel together.

This matters because Christianity itself is profoundly embodied. The Christian faith does not present salvation as an escape from physical existence into purely inward spirituality. Scripture begins with God creating a material world and declaring it good. Human beings themselves are created not as trapped spirits temporarily inhabiting bodies, but as embodied creatures designed to live before God in the fullness of human life. Sin brought corruption, death, and disorder into creation, but redemption in Christ does not abandon embodiment altogether. Rather, redemption ultimately restores creation through resurrection.

The incarnation stands at the center of this reality. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Son of God did not redeem humanity through abstract spiritual communication, but by entering fully into human life. Christ touched the sick, washed feet, ate meals with disciples, suffered bodily upon the cross, and rose physically from the dead. Even after the resurrection, Jesus invited His disciples to touch His wounds and ate before them openly. Christianity is therefore deeply incarnational because God Himself has acted within embodied human history through Christ.

This is why the ordinances matter so profoundly. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not arbitrary religious additions detached from the nature of the Gospel itself. They are visible, embodied acts through which the church publicly participates in and proclaims the realities of redemption in Christ.

Baptism stands at the beginning of the Christian life as a public identification with Christ and His people. Throughout the New Testament, those who believe the Gospel are baptized openly as visible participants within the covenant community of the church. Baptism therefore carries both personal and corporate significance. The believer publicly confesses union with Christ in His death and resurrection, while simultaneously being identified with the visible body of believers gathered under Christ's reign.

Paul explains in Romans 6 that baptism visibly proclaims participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Going down into the waters symbolizes death to the old life under sin; rising again points toward new life in Christ through resurrection power. Baptism does not merely communicate private inward feelings. It proclaims publicly that the believer now belongs to Jesus Christ.

This public dimension matters deeply because Christianity is not merely private spirituality hidden within the heart. Christ gathers a visible people. Baptism therefore functions not only as personal testimony, but also as covenant entrance into the gathered life of the church. In Acts 2, those who received the Word were baptized and added unto the church. Baptism visibly marks believers as participants within the covenant community formed through the Gospel.

The Lord's Supper similarly proclaims the Gospel through embodied participation. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples, commanding them to remember Him together. Paul later explains that the church proclaims the Lord's death "till he come" whenever believers partake of the Supper together.

This shared participation matters enormously. The Lord's Supper is not merely a private mystical exercise performed individually within a crowd. Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians that believers partake together because they are one body. The table therefore expresses both communion with Christ and communion with one another through Him. The gathered church remembers, proclaims, and participates together in the saving work of Christ.

This is one reason Paul rebukes the Corinthians so sharply for divisions surrounding the Lord's Table. Their selfishness contradicted the very reality the Supper was meant to proclaim. The ordinance itself visibly testified to their unity under Christ, yet their behavior denied that unity practically. The Lord's Supper therefore cannot be separated from covenant life within the church. It belongs properly to the gathered people of God worshiping together before Christ.

The ordinances also protect the church from drifting into increasingly disembodied forms of spirituality. Modern people often live through screens, abstractions, and digital experiences detached from physical presence. Even Christianity can gradually become reduced to the endless consumption of content without meaningful embodied participation in the life of the church. Sermons may be heard privately, songs streamed individually, and theology discussed online while covenant life slowly disappears altogether.

But baptism and the Lord's Supper resist this drift toward abstraction because they require gathered participation. Water must touch the body. Bread must be broken and shared. The church assembles visibly before God in worship and remembrance together. Christianity cannot remain merely informational because the Gospel itself involves incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and the gathering of a visible people under Christ.

This does not mean the ordinances operate mechanically apart from faith and repentance. Scripture never treats baptism or the Lord's Supper as magical rituals automatically producing spiritual life regardless of the condition of the heart. Israel itself repeatedly experienced judgment for participating outwardly in covenant practices while remaining inwardly rebellious. Paul warns the Corinthians about partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily. The ordinances belong properly within living faith, repentance, worship, and submission to Christ.

At the same time, the ordinances should not be minimized into mere symbolic decoration added onto Christianity after the fact. Christ Himself commanded them. The apostles practiced them consistently. The early church gathered around them continually. Baptism and the Lord's Supper stand at the center of the church's visible life because they proclaim the Gospel through embodied covenant participation.

These ordinances also point beyond themselves toward the ultimate hope of resurrection and restoration. Baptism points toward new life through union with the risen Christ. The Lord's Supper looks backward toward the cross while also looking forward toward the coming Kingdom. Jesus declared that He would drink the fruit of the vine anew with His people in His Father's Kingdom. The table therefore carries both remembrance and anticipation. The church proclaims Christ crucified while awaiting Christ glorified.

This eschatological dimension matters because Christianity ultimately moves toward restoration rather than escape. The final hope of believers is not disembodied existence detached from creation, but resurrection life within the renewed creation under the reign of

Christ. The ordinances therefore fit naturally within the larger biblical story because they proclaim redemption unfolding within embodied human life before God.

The gathered practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper also bears witness publicly before the world. Through baptism, believers visibly confess allegiance to Christ. Through the Lord's Supper, the church continually proclaims the death of Christ until He returns. These practices identify the church as a covenant people ordered around the saving work of Jesus Himself.

Ultimately, baptism and the Lord's Supper matter because Christianity is not merely inward belief floating abstractly above ordinary life. The Son of God became flesh. Christ died bodily and rose bodily. The Spirit forms a visible people under the reign of Christ. And the church gathers physically in worship, remembrance, proclamation, and hope until the risen Lord returns.