

# **The Sacraments**

## **Baptism and the Eucharist**

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**Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)**

*The Sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist*

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@chicagofirstnaz.org)

### **Background Notes**

**Key Scripture Texts:** Various

### **Baptism**

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Baptism brings new converts into identification with Jesus: they re-enact his death, burial and resurrection through this ritual. Baptism is a powerful symbolic action, witnessing to the transforming work of Jesus Christ in a person's life. This sacrament is a powerful punctuation mark within the profession of a new Christian. Through baptism, a new follower goes on record as belonging to Jesus, as one who is a Christian. In the days of the early Church, baptism could be a risky event. It was a bit like changing national citizenship, leaving behind old loyalties and publicly assuming new ones. For many people, it was making the clear pronouncement to the world: Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not.

Baptism brought people into a new relationship with God in His tri-unity, His Trinity, by declaring allegiance to not just any god, but to the true God as revealed in Jesus Christ and presently experienced through the Holy Spirit who lives within and among us. To be baptized "in the name of," meant not merely using the right words during the baptism ritual. Rather, it meant to cast one's lot with *this* God, and no other one. Other gods may once have claimed the new convert's soul, but now his own loyalty lies with *this* God. Even as Jews, they may once have followed what they *thought to be* the one true God. But now, they have seen Him afresh in the face of Jesus Christ. All of which carried risk of alienation from old ties of family and nation.

Baptism, then, is the public symbol administered by the leaders of the mission. It is their way of asking people, "Will you follow Jesus?" And when the convert responds, it is their way of saying, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back." This week's study unfolds during a weekend which celebrates commitment to Jesus Christ through Christian baptism. On this first Sunday after Easter, we witness several people profess their faith publically. That was, after all, the nature of baptism in the life of the church from the earliest days. As we shall see, baptism took the form of *dramatic oath* by which new converts swore allegiance to a new Lord, having renounced the old ones. Baptism dramatizes commitment in the boldest of ways, offering opportunity for personal testimony and re-enacting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who has thereby become the Lord of the Christian.

### **The Good Conscience (1 Peter 3:20-22)**

20 ...God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (1 Peter 3:20-22).

Water was a frequent salvation-image in the Old Testament. It sometimes turned up in unlikely places. How often do we hear a sermon about baptism which takes the story of Noah and the ark as its text? To the ancients,

water was a formative and generative symbol which referred to both Creation and Judgment. Genesis 1 depicts God's creative activity as occurring within the context of water, a substance initially "without form and empty" and called simply "the deep." But it was over the deep formless waters that God's Spirit brooded like a mother bird taking notice for the safety of her nest. Water was the birthplace for Creation.

But to this hopeful image of Creation, Peter adds the story of the Flood, the place of Judgment. The patient Creator God waited for human restoration at a time in history when His good Creation had become the scene of revolt and violence (see Genesis 6). Only a "few persons" found salvation while the old world fell under judgment. For them "the ark was prepared" to bring them "safely through water." Read in this way, the story of Noah and the Flood reveals twin concepts: *salvation* and *judgment*. Water carries the ark safely to its landing on Mount Ararat, buffeted by a torrential downpour and furious waves. The same water plunges the unrighteous rebels against God's purposes into the depths.

From this dramatic re-creation of an ancient story, Peter derives the powerful truth that "baptism...now saves you..." Peter's readers would have known both the story of Noah and the fact of their own baptism. From the first, Peter derives an illustration of truth, namely, that water was a medium for saving lives. From the second, he reminds his audience what baptism *means*. Persons who are baptized, *like Noah and his family*, are saved by God through the medium of water — in baptism. He does not say that *water baptism* is the true source of salvation any more than *Genesis* teaches that flood waters *in themselves* saved Noah. Had not God arranged that the same waters which destroyed the world also saved Noah, no one would have been rescued, and the whole world would have perished. Yet, God so ordered the dual role of the flood such that the one and the same medium achieved two distinct though opposite purposes.

The truth of the matter is that baptism depicts two distinct realities: something is plunged to its death while something else rises in new life. But Peter sharpens that point even further when he writes that baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." What does he mean? The underlying Greek helps us clarify this important explanation. The word "appeal" is from *eperōtēma* which means "that which is asked for, a request, an appeal, pledge, promise." The idea of "pledge" fits the context well, since at the time of early Christian baptism, a series of questions were put to the recipient of baptism and to which they were to offer honest and unambiguous answers. The root of this word in Greek is "ask." Some basic questions are posed at baptism in the Christian tradition. The baptismal liturgy asks that we make six promises:

1. Renounce Satan and the forces of wickedness
2. Renounce the evil powers of this world
3. Renounce sinful desires that draw you from God
4. Turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as Savior
5. Put whole trust in God
6. Promise to obey and follow Him as Lord

That is paramount to asking, "Will you refuse any longer to follow the devil?," and, positively, to transfer allegiance to another, that is, to Jesus Christ.

From the fourth century come portions of a baptismal liturgy in which baptism by immersion in water involves three distinct questions asked as the candidate for baptism is baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

You were questioned, "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?" You said, "I believe," and were immersed, that is, were buried. Again you were asked, "Do you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and his cross?" You said, "I believe," and were immersed. Thus you were buried along with Christ; for he who is buried along with Christ rises again with him. A third time you were asked, "Do you believe in the Holy

Spirit?” You said, “I believe,” and a third time were immersed, so that your threefold confession wiped out the manifold failings of your earlier life.<sup>1</sup>

Each successive immersion punctuates with a question the loyalty of the candidate to his faith in the Triune God. That is what Peter means by *eperōtēma* — a pledge. It is equivalent to a sacred vow or oath taken in the presence of God and witnesses. The text further ties this pledge to “a good conscience,” from the Greek *suneidēsis*. If the conscience serves to govern the whole moral life of a human being — and that is its usual meaning — then baptism is the Christian resolve to live one’s life in wholehearted obedience to Jesus Christ. The Greek word emphasizes that of which someone is consciously aware. We have an English saying, “He went into the matter with his eyes wide open,” and this captures the sense of *knowing participation* in some activity. Whatever the whole person approves, knowingly, belongs to the life of his *conscience*.

Sometimes legal documents will contain verbiage to the effect that a deposition, agreement or other testimony is entered upon with full consciousness of its truth and without intent to mislead or deceive. For the Christian, baptism is a solemn and binding oath that commits to following Jesus without mental reservation and with full commitment.

Peter does not mean that baptism *in itself* saves or that it is capable of ridding the “flesh” (Greek: *sarx*) of its defilement. Baptism is not magic, though it contains wonderful mystery. The power of baptism does not lie in some hidden property in water but, writes Peter, “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The term for “through” is *dia* and points to the *instrument* through which something happens. Water is the *medium* but the resurrection life of Jesus Christ is the *instrument*.

Part of Peter’s appeal to the resurrection lies in the new life it makes possible. But he takes it considerably farther. Following the resurrection of Jesus, he ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God the Father — something which the creeds consistently affirm. The point of Jesus’ ascension is to establish his authority and rule as King. With the ascension of Jesus, he has become King over the kingdom of heaven. Peter describes this by saying:

1. He has gone into heaven.
2. Is at the right hand of God.
3. Angels, authorities and powers are subject to him.

In baptism we celebrate the exaltation of Jesus as King. Through baptism we make the following profession of faith: “Jesus is Lord.” And we declare that he is Lord of not only heaven but also of earth. The moment we enter the waters of baptism with the profession on our lips and in our hearts, we give notice to the world around us that we belong to the Lord Jesus and have renounced all other loyalties. We also put the powers of this world on notice that their power will soon pass, their time will soon be up, and their days are numbered. Because Jesus sits at God’s right hand, earthly authorities no longer have ultimate authority over us. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.

Baptism announces both Salvation and Judgment. Through baptism we dramatized our identification with the Jesus who died but is alive forevermore — and we with him. At the same time we announce that the old world has fallen under the judgment of God, much in the same way as Noah and his family pronounced judgment on the old world through the flood, and then announced the arrival of new creation when the ark docked on Ararat and they emerged as the new earth’s residents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *De Sacramentis* 2, 7 cited in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition, Continuum, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Peter will later further develop his imagery of water as belonging both to *creation* and *judgment* (see 2 Peter 3:5-6).

Emerging from the waters of baptism, the Christian awakens within God's New Creation, announcing to the world that God's Kingdom has already dawned. Swearing allegiance to Jesus as Lord, the Christian declares his commitment to work *for the kingdom*, even as he constantly prays, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And to that theme we now turn.

### **Commitment to the Kingdom**

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2)

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the first world war, many Christians imagined that human progress was the same as the arrival of God's kingdom. This belief had its roots in the myth of progress birthed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not everyone who believed in human progress believed in the Gospel. Secular forms of the kingdom existed even during the enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, a series of crises in the modern world prompted a reassessment of the form God's kingdom would eventually take. One term frequently applied was *eschatological* — from the Greek word *eschatos* which means "the end" or "the last." The emphasis fell on the suddenness and the abruptness of God's coming kingdom. Even as Jesus unexpectedly rose from the dead in *the present time* — an event only imagined *at the end of days* — so also the arrival of the kingdom would assume the form of *crisis* rather than simple *progress*. Faced with enormous decisions about human survival, God's people would need to become *people of the end* as well as *people of new creation*.

The church is the *eschatological* people of God, birthed by the dying and rising Jesus who already sits at God's right hand. They live in the *last days* of the old world while all the time bearing witness to the *first days* of the new creation. By living the life of Jesus even now, Christians provide evidence of what God's new world will look like when it finally comes. To say that we are *eschatological* people means that we are, in the present, showing to the world the hopeful signs of God's wonderful future plans for His world.

This also offers insight into the ways baptism functions as a *sign* of the future. When we are baptized, we become signs of God's dawning kingdom. One way to express this is to recite Paul's famous announcement:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The phrase "in Christ" closely comports with what happens in baptism. In a dramatic re-enactment of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are united with him and become part of his body as the people of God. Theologians refer to this as the *corporate identity* of Jesus and his followers. What happened to Jesus now happens to us. Or, to borrow the language of the *Our Father*, what happens "in heaven" also gets implemented "on earth." In explicit terms, Paul makes this connection:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God (Romans 6:1-10).

Notice the juxtaposition "just as Christ" with "we too."

1. If we are baptized into Christ, then we are baptized into his death.
2. If we are buried with Christ in the baptism of death, then we are raised with Christ in newness of life.
3. If we are united in Christ's death, then we are united in Christ's resurrection.
4. If our old self is crucified with Christ, then we are no longer slaves to sin.
5. If we have died with Christ, then we will also live with him.

6. If Christ is raised from the dead, then he will no longer die again since death no longer has dominion over him.

Baptism, under this framework, becomes the announcement that death no longer has kingdom authority (“dominion”) over Christ, but he has authority over it. Through baptism, we announce new life to the world, but we also announce the kingdom authority of Jesus over the “last enemy, death” (see also 1 Corinthians 15:26). This defeat of death, along with all false claimants to the throne, finds support throughout the New Testament. Baptism portrays an ordeal — a war — in which Jesus does battle with the forces of evil and defeats them. What circumcision symbolized in the Old Testament, baptism does in the New Testament. One passage illustrates this point:

11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Colossians 2:11-15).

When we are baptized, we bear witness to “the powerful working of God” in our lives and to the forgiveness of our sins. Paul uses distinct legal language to describe how the death of Christ cancelled the debt of sin. He also makes clear that “rulers and authorities” have been “disarmed” and “shamed” by the triumph of Christ over them. Once again, baptism is seen as the witness of Christ’s supreme authority not only in heaven but on earth.

Now if Christ has triumphed over the evil powers and if we united with him (as symbolized in baptism), then baptism becomes our entrance into the victorious life — the life where sin is defeated and God’s righteous life starts taking shape in our lives. But this is more than mere symbol; it is concrete reality. God does for us in Jesus Christ what He promised to do for His people on the “last day” (the *eschaton*). We are the first-fruits of his coming kingdom. The church is His down payment on what He plans to do for the whole world. Much as Noah and his family emerged from the ark to populate the new world after the flood, so we emerge from the waters of baptism, dramatizing our commitment to the kingdom which God is even now bringing to earth.

A few words about the term “sacrament” are in order here. When we say that baptism is a *sacrament*, we are saying something about the dedication of our lives to the service of God. The Latin word *sacramentum* originally referred to an oath taken by all Roman legionaries on entering the Roman army. On the rare chance of punishment by Decimation, the surviving legionaries were often required to renew this military oath, which was the foundation of Roman military discipline. It was created by Augustus during his military reforms in the early first century. Such punishment was applied to deserters or cowards. Divided into groups of ten, a *decimatio*, each group would draw lots and the person on whom the lot fell would be executed by the other nine. The remaining soldiers were required to take the *sacramentum*. It is important to note that the lots fell regardless of guilt, innocence or rank. Conceivably, an innocent soldier might bear the guilt for something he did not do — the innocent dying in place of the guilty.

As applied to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist), they are “sacraments” which declare oaths of allegiance to the dying and rising Lord whose innocent life paid the debt of the guilty. Fresh from the waters of baptism, followers of Jesus swear anew their allegiance to the one who died for them and rose again. Their baptism is equally an act of consecration. Meredith Kline, writing about baptism as the “oath-sign of the new covenant,” says: “Christian baptism is thus the New Covenant sign of consecration and discipleship. It is immediately evident in the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) that consignment under the authority of Christ is the chief thing in Christian baptism. For there baptizing the nations takes its place alongside teaching them to obey Christ’s commandments in specification of the charge to disciple them to him who has been given all authority in heaven and earth.... Baptism is a sacrament in the original sense of *sacramentum* in its

etymological relation to the idea of consecration, and more particularly its employment for the military oath of allegiance.”<sup>3</sup>

Through baptism, we swear public allegiance to our covenant Lord in whose service we gladly find ourselves. Once sinners, having deserted God’s human creation, we are now brought back into the cohort of God’s coming kingdom, part of His advance guard announcing the forgiveness of sins to a world held captive to the enemy’s will. Our message, the Gospel, is the royal announcement that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah and Lord of the world. On earth God has established a colony of heaven with all the privileges of kingdom children in the service of the King. We confess that, on our own, we cannot *build the kingdom*, but we can certainly implement it through the achievements of Jesus Christ. Because God promises resurrection life to us, we are confident that the work we do here will last forever, and none of our labor is “in vain” (see 1 Corinthians 15:58) when done “in the Lord.”

God’s new world has already dawned, and the Christian community, united through baptism, is the sign that it has. What God does in and through baptized believers, He fully intends to implement throughout the whole world. While it is true that our work here for the advancement of the kingdom is marked by suffering, we also know that the Holy Spirit shares that suffering, as does the creation itself which waits for God to finish in us what He has begun (see Romans 8:18ff).

What do we mean when we use the word “kingdom” and apply it to what God is doing in the world? When we think of “kingdom,” images spring to mind of titles and lands and power, of armies too, all the symbols of authority. But Jesus of Nazareth shows us what God’s kingdom is like. It’s different from all others. He invites us to become his subjects on earth and in heaven. Scholars point out that “kingdom” refers more to “reign” than to “realm;” more to a “person” than to a “place.” That can be an oversimplification. The kingdom of God is His *reign over His realm*. By submitting to the rule of Jesus Christ we come under his reign in advance of the rest of his creation. We must grapple with these questions: Who reigns over us? Who makes the decisions that affect us day by day? The government? Our bosses? Ourselves? Our desires? If we are to live in God’s kingdom, Jesus of Nazareth says the he must reign over us.

What would *justice* look like in a world where God is once more King? If God reigned on earth as He does in heaven, would peace break out? Would justice rule? Would all this world’s wrongs be righted? Did not Jesus of Nazareth ask us to pray for and to work for such justice day after day? It’s an invitation, a desire expressed: “come.” Something from deep inside, the call wells up, “come.” Let it be soon, may it be now, may your kingdom come, father God, for too long we’ve waited, for too long we’ve longed. Come quickly Jesus of Nazareth and bring God’s kingdom with you.

Our will is our desire, our drives, all the things we wish for and work for, all the things we want to make happen. So what is God’s will? It’s His desire: all the things He wants to make happen. Our will is to make His will our own will. In every town, in every country, on every continent, in fact, over all the earth there’s a battle being waged, a struggle between good and evil, and the battlefield is the human heart. If God wins the battle, His kingdom comes on earth. The world inside affects the world outside.

A popular song says “Heaven’s a place on earth.”<sup>4</sup> But we know that heaven is where God is in charge, where He is supreme ruler. He is a king with an agenda. He plans to reign on earth and in heaven, so we pray, “May your kingdom come.” In baptism, we make the declaration with confident commitment.

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<sup>3</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, Eerdmans, 1968, p. 79-81.

<sup>4</sup> By Belinda Carlisle.

## Eucharist

Before I was baptized and became a member of the church where I grew up (I was nine years old at the time), participating in the Eucharist — we called it Holy Communion — was not something I could do *on my own*. Frankly, I don't think anyone would have minded had I reached over and took the bread and the cup from the gold trays being passed down our row. After all, I sat between my parents and could have pulled the deed off without detection. But, wanting to honor the local traditions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at the time, my parents didn't let me take my own elements from the trays. However, Daddy, being a bit of a non-conformist in his own way (he was a Methodist by birth), found a way to get around the rules. When the tray for the bread was passed, he would take his piece, and quietly break it in half, handing me one portion to hold until we all ate together. Taking the cup was a bit trickier, but he managed to share that too, drinking only half and then letting me finishing the rest. Things like that you don't forget — ever. From that experience I learned an important lesson about Communion: it's about sharing in the symbols of Christ's dead with another human being — in this case, my father.

The power of that experience brought to light for me new understandings with time. God was my Father as well, and Jesus was the gift he broke and shared with me on the cross. Every time I took those symbols, it was as if the whole story was told again. Strangely, that's precisely what the Eucharist does: it tells the story again as if it were all happening right now for the first time. When the followers of Jesus sat with him in the Upper Room on the night he was taken from them and went to the cross, they watched such a story being told as they had seen it and heard it from as far back as they could remember. They were Jews, and they knew a great deal about special meals. One meal in particular transformed one night such that it became “unlike any other night.” They call that feast *Pesach* — the re-telling of what happened to their ancestors some fifteen hundred years before.

In great haste, as the last great plague descended on Egypt taking the lives of all the firstborn of the Egyptians — including the Pharaoh's — the Israelites celebrated Passover (*Pesach*) in anticipation of leaving Egypt free persons after four hundred years of slavery. Their bread was baked without yeast — there was no time for it to rise. Blood was spilled as the lamb was slain as the sign of their redemption and its costly price. Once free, they plunged into the waters of the Red Sea, only to discover the seabed dry and the Sea rolled up around them like walls of clear crystal in the blazing sun of the desert. All of them “passed over” to the other side, leaving the Pharaoh and his armies to face the falling waters which pronounced judgment for the sin of slavery. Passover. That's what we call it in English — the passing over from slavery to freedom, from death to life, from Egypt to the promised land.

Once a year that story gets told in Jewish households, and has been for thirty-five hundred years. “What makes this night different from every other night?” The same question is posed by the children and the same answers are given, declaring the love of God for His people and His commitment to rescue them from sin and death. Therefore, when Jesus met with his followers in the Upper Room, they behaved together like a family — a new family, celebrating *Pesach* as they had before. Oddly, this night became, in its own way, unlike the other nights of *Pesach* celebrated in the past. Reclining at the table, handling the familiar symbols of Passover, praying the same prayers and engaging in the same symbolic actions, Jesus led his followers in what looked on the surface to be a normal *Pesach*. However, something was wrong. At crucial moments in the traditional Passover Seder, Jesus started saying things about a piece of bread and one of the cups (there were several used during the Seder) that sounded new, different.

“This is my body,” he would say. “This is my blood,” he ominously declared as he passed these particular symbols to the disciples. The story seemed to change — the old, old Passover story underwent a major re-working that night as it passed through the hands and lips of Jesus. He was known for changing the ordinary stories and making them end in surprising ways. He had done it with the parables he told, shifting the plot or altering the climax, and making the wrong characters say and do all of the right things. Remember the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan? In many ways, what Jesus did that night had the force of a parable, introducing in

the story of Passover a fresh element. Suddenly Passover was no longer the story of just national Israel — it was the story of Israel as it reached its climax in the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world.

Paul had reason to comment about the Eucharist in his letter to the Corinthians. Most of his audience were not Jewish and had to be taught by Jewish-Christian teachers the old stories of Israel and what the stories had to do with pagan Gentiles like them. Actually, the Corinthians were no strangers to religious meals since most of the temples built to the Greek and Roman deities had rituals involving bringing food and offering it in sacrifice. Sometimes the devotees would share in these meals, believing that something magical might happen because the food had been influenced by the temple surroundings or by the gods themselves. When some of these Gentiles became Christians, they had to re-learn the stories which they had once heard told by Homer or Hesiod or Virgil. Now they had new stories, taken from the Jewish Bible but applied to them. Having a special feast to celebrate the central story of the Christian faith made sense to them. Of course, it required a little explaining when they heard the words “this is my body” or “this is my blood.” From a pagan perspective they had a whole different meaning. In Christian terms, this simply meant sharing in the life of Jesus.

To clarify what Jesus actually told his followers about the Eucharist, Paul gave this teaching to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 11:23-28 23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

The tradition Paul cites traces back to the apostles themselves, and that is the meaning of the words “I received from the Lord....delivered to you.” The key elements of the tradition include:

1. The original setting for the Eucharist: the night Jesus was betrayed, after “the supper.” The Greek form is an infinitive construct (*to deipnēsai*), behaving like a noun. We suppose that he refers to the Passover meal itself.
2. The symbolic actions taken by Jesus: took bread, took the cup. These would have been in accordance with the pattern of the Jewish Pesach meal, selecting from the usages of bread and wine particular ones which corresponded to the sufferings of Jesus, most likely coinciding with the *afikomen*<sup>5</sup> and the third cup — the cup of redemption, also called the cup of blessing.
3. The breaking of the bread teaches the broken body of Christ, pierced in hands, feet and side.
4. The wine is connected to the *new covenant* which God is making through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Against the background of ancient treaty ratification, this has the form of a covenant renewal ceremony, but with the prerogative of the treaty-maker (suzerain) to alter the terms of the original covenant in light of new realities. In one sense, each time we share in the Eucharist we renew the covenant as well.
5. The language “in remembrance of me” is also covenant language. It likely has two meanings. First, like the Passover feast, the Eucharist is an event which “makes present” an event which has already taken place. We do not *re-offer* Christ on the altar, as some traditions claim, but we do *re-present* the events surrounding his sufferings and death so that the benefits of God’s grace might *become present* for “your soul’s comfort and joy.” Secondly, the language reminds us of the covenant faithfulness of God. The

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<sup>5</sup> The last piece of matzah eaten at Passover is called the *afikomen* and is substituted for the lamb: it even has to be eaten before midnight, just as Moses commanded, "You shall let none of it remain until morning" (Ex. 12:10). Three matzahs sit prominently on the Passover table. Why is this final piece of matzah called the *afikomen*? It is curious to find a Greek work in the middle of a Hebrew feast. Its Greek meaning can be understood as "that which is coming", i.e. dessert, yet some have seen the possibility of taking it as "he who is coming." According to Jewish tradition, Messiah will come at Passover to bring a redemption like the redemption brought through Moses. This is why a place is left at the table for Elijah, the forerunner of Messiah (Malachi 4:5).

word “remember” takes the form of a prayer which seeks God’s covenant action in remembering Jesus, raising him from the dead and bringing in the kingdom.

6. This latter point brings us to the proclamation aspect of celebrating the Eucharist: we look forward to the time which Jesus will bring in the kingdom, climaxing with the fulfillment of the feast in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Jesus alluded to this in Matthew 26:29, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”
7. The Eucharist is an occasion for Christ followers to “examine themselves” in preparation for an honest and sincere partaking of the elements. Sins are confessed, hearts are made clear, surrender to Christ is made complete, and broken fellowship with others is restored during this time of examination.

A word about the term “Eucharist.” It is usually translated as “Great Thanksgiving,” because it offers thanks for the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ for our sins.

The Nazarene ritual of the Lord’s Supper includes the following language:

The Lord himself ordained this holy sacrament. He commanded His disciples to partake of the bread and wine, emblems of His broken body and shed blood. This is His table. The feast is for His disciples. Let all those who have with true repentance forsaken their sins, and have believed in Christ unto salvation, draw near and take these emblems, and, by faith, partake of the life of Jesus Christ, to your soul’s comfort and joy. Let us remember that it is the memorial of the death and passion of our Lord; also a token of His coming again. Let us not forget that we are one, at one table with the Lord.

Glory to God! Amen.

**Digger Deeper: *The Sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist***  
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *The Sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

**Baptism**

1. What importance did Jesus place on the baptism of his followers (Matthew 28:18-20)? What important commitments does baptism require of us? What promise comes along with Jesus' commission to baptize his followers?
2. According to 1 Peter 3:20-22, what is the purpose of baptism? What does baptism *not do*? Why do you suppose Peter used the metaphor of Noah's flood and the ark to talk about baptism? What gives baptism its power?
3. In what ways does baptism fulfill the intention of Matthew 6:10 (Luke 11:2)?
4. How is baptism a dramatic way of communicating the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17?
5. Read Romans 6:1-10. What does Paul teach about the symbolic significance of baptism? What connection does he draw between what happened to Christ and what happens to us? How does baptism say that?
6. Carefully read Colossians 2:11-15. In what ways does baptism replace circumcision in the new covenant?

**Eucharist**

1. Using a hardcopy or online dictionary, explain the meaning of the word "Eucharist," and explain how this meaning is an appropriate way to refer to the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.
2. What are some the most basic reasons we take Communion? In what way is doing so a "re-telling" of the original story of Jesus' death for us? Why are such re-tellings important events in our Christian experience?
3. Eucharist has its roots in the ancient Jewish feast called Passover. Refer to the *Background Notes* for this week, and review the importance of Passover (or Pesach) to the Jewish people. How is the Passover story similar to the Jesus story?
4. Paul has preserved for us the main traditional account of the first Eucharist meal, embedded as it was, in the Passover Seder. Read what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:23-28. Briefly list the key purposes for taking the Lord's Supper, as set forth in Paul's account.
5. Explain the meaning of the phrase "in remembrance of me." How does this differ from a simple "fond memory of Jesus"? How can we "remember" since we weren't present for the original events surrounding Jesus' death?
6. Why does Paul say "As often as you eat...drink"? Does this imply frequency of observance?
7. How can taking Communion help us keep our lives in good order before the Lord?
8. What connection does Paul make between Communion and the Second Coming of Jesus? Compare this with Matthew 26:29 and comment on the similarity.
9. Make a few observations noting how Baptism and Communion are different, and how they serve different purposes in the Christian life. How does 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 bring these two sacraments together, and how does the example of Moses and Israel help us make the connections?