

### **Church 101: Baptism and Communion (Acts 1-2)**

I don't know that any of us like to be on the losing side or on a losing team. The Green Bay Packers in the 1958 NFL season had 5 future hall of famers on the team but they finished the year with only 1 win and 10 losses, the worst record in team history. The Packers had more losses than wins each of the prior 11 seasons, but this was the bottom of the barrel. For the 1959 season the Packers hired a coach who had never been a head coach before by the name of Vincent Lombardi. He went by Vince and his first year was their first winning season since 1947, taking them from last to 3rd place in one year. They never had a losing season again under Coach Lombardi. His winning percentage was 74% in his career in the regular season, and in the playoffs he had a 90% winning percentage. The first 2 Super Bowls he won and 5 league championships in 7 years. It's no wonder that the Super Bowl trophy for the winners is called the Lombardi Trophy, in honor of this coach

How did a group of losers become a household name and dynasty for years? One telling of the sports legend goes like this: 'after a miserable showing, the players gathered in the locker room in silence waiting for Lombardi to enter and give them the verbal beating of their lives. After a few moments, Lombardi entered the room with a football in his hands. He stood in silence ... The players braced themselves for the worst. Lombardi lifted the football and broke the silence with arguably the most legendary quote in NFL history, "Gentlemen, this is a football!" He then proceeded to explain the boundaries of a football field, the goal line, how putting the ball across the goal line scores 6 points. Those ... legendary words marked Lombardi's legacy ... He would take his team back to the basics ... the fundamentals'<sup>1</sup>

I've heard some say this was the same line coach began every season with in its preseason practices, "this is a football," then pointing to a drawing of the field to explain what the goal is, and reminding those newer to the team and veterans on the team *why they do what they do*. Those who felt they already knew it all in their pride and could tune him out, didn't do well on the team, as the stories go. The same can also be true *in the church*. The fundamentals of our faith are also for both new *and veteran* Christians. If you lack interest in the gospel and essentials of the faith, you won't do well advancing gospel faith, but if you continue to pay attention to key things you've heard before and to be reminded of why you do what you do, and refocused on what the Leader taught on day one, you won't stay stuck in a dismal cycle of defeat. In Acts 2, a group of disciples that the world would have considered losers, became part of a winning team turned around to turn the world upside down

More than a dynasty that would last for years, they became a new entity as the new-covenant spirit-indwelt body of Christ, with a new household name --'the church.' The Greek word *ekklesia* was used in the their OT translation for the congregation or assembly of Israel, but in a greater way God's Spirit came upon and indwelt this new covenant community in a new Jew/Gentile body of Christ. It was more than a team He built. His legendary words were "*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" This church is on the winning side as it says in Revelation. And it says here in Acts 2:42, that as Christ built His church, they were devoted to the basics '*the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread [communion], prayer.*'

These are the fundamentals. Gentlemen (and ladies), this is a Bible. Are you with me? This is the apostle's teaching. This is why we do what we do, why we teach what we teach, why we fellowship, why we observe communion and pray. This book is called "The Acts of the Apostles" and the apostle's teaching takes us back to the basics of the Christian faith as it started in the NT church. Acts 2 has the first Christian baptisms as the church was formed in Jerusalem, and it has the first time the church celebrated communion in obedience to Christ's command in "the breaking of bread." For today and the next few Lord's Day messages, I want to look at the book of Acts as we do a brief series on some of the fundamentals or basics of Christianity in a series I'm calling Church 101. Today Church 101: Baptism and Communion

Ladies and gentlemen, this is God's Word. Before we do what we do as we celebrate communion today, I want to review *why we do what we do*, and what it means and make sure we're not treating it too lightly or thinking of it too lightly or lowly. I hope we see baptism as the first and foremost act of obedience for disciples of Christ. Let's start where the NT church starts in Acts 1 and go back to the basics of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table or communion (what Acts & Corinthians calls *the breaking of bread*). In future weeks, Lord-willing, we'll look at membership and leadership and evangelism and other subjects or studies in Acts, but let's start where it does

**1:1** *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach [this is Luke writing about the gospel of Luke],<sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. [i.e., commands 'make disciples ...baptizing them...teaching to observe all I commanded']<sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

In v. 4 Luke mentions that Jesus told them to wait for the Father's promise. This is what Luke wrote earlier as the exact words of Jesus then, Lk 24:47: *repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*<sup>48</sup> *You are witnesses of these things.*<sup>49</sup> *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.* [i.e., by God's Spirit]

In Acts 1:5 Luke talks about water baptism and the promised Spirit about to come. Luke is talking about what he wrote in Luke chapter 3, the baptism of Jesus by John. He baptized with water, v. 5, but there's a spiritual reality it points to, the Holy Spirit. And in v. 8 Jesus explains: *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

These are the last recorded words of Jesus before He went up to heaven, v. 9 says. It tells the church what it's to be doing until Jesus comes back in the same way, as v. 10-11 says. Don't stand around, make disciples, baptizing, teaching them to obey Jesus, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations starting with the nation of Israel in Jerusalem. In v. 6 they wanted to know if Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel then, but in v. 7 He tells them it's not for them to know the times God has fixed. What they need to know and focus on is v. 8, being witnesses of the King. The exact timetable and dates of end times events isn't for us to know, as v. 7 says. Jesus doesn't tell them there's no future for their nation, but in v. 8 Jesus wants them and us to focus on proclaiming the kingdom to all nations. This verse outlines the book of Acts, and the book ends fulfilling it (28:31).

But look at where it starts in Acts 2, where in 2:4 the promised Holy Spirit comes and fills the disciples and miraculously makes them able to speak in the languages of all the nations that they had never studied. It says in 2:5: *'Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.'*<sup>6</sup> *And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.'*<sup>7</sup> *And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"*<sup>8</sup> *And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?* [Greek *dialektos*, tongues are human dialects]

<sup>11</sup>*both Jews and proselytes* [converts to Judaism], *Cretans and Arabians-we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.*<sup>12</sup> *And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'*

Peter tells them in v. 14-36 that this is what the prophets spoke of, and Jesus is the Messiah the prophets spoke of, crucified, risen and He is Lord, v. 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* <sup>38</sup> *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* [just like Luke 24, repentance, His name, forgiveness, Spirit]

<sup>41</sup> *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* <sup>42</sup> *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread[communion]*

...

We looked at prayer and teaching in the past in separate messages, as means of grace, not saving grace, but ways God communicates sanctifying grace to His church. In other words, God's grace transforms us after we're saved and that grace flows through channels as God has set up in corporate worship, in teaching and fellowship, in prayer. God changes us and grows us through a number of means in His grace, including when we obey gospel ordinances Jesus instituted, baptism and the breaking of bread/communion. Not saving grace, the NT language ties salvation or forgiveness to repentant faith alone, but there is a special spiritual blessing in these gracious ordinances. These aren't only outward symbols, there's an inward reality and spiritual presence

3 basics for our outline in their order: repentant faith, baptism, communion

### **First, repentant faith (this is the #1 fundamental of Christianity)**

The basic meaning of repent is to change (in thinking, heart, life, direction), a turning from your sin to your Savior. True repentance bears fruit (Lk 3:8).

This should come first before baptism. v. 38 couldn't be more clear: *repent and be baptized ...* And it's the pattern in all NT examples, first they repent and believe in Jesus, then they're baptized. What about baptizing babies? I know of godly Reformed covenantal brothers who think v. 39 supports the idea of pedo-baptism (infant baptism) when it says "*the promise is for you and your children...*" But with all due respect, Peter doesn't say *the practice* of baptism is for little children, he says *the promise is*. What promise? The promise of the verse right before, forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit to the one who repents. And you have to read the rest of v. 39: *...your children and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.* It's another way to say everyone who God calls and saves get this promise.

Who's he talking to in context? v. 22 says it's the '*Men of Israel...*' And v. 41 says those who responded to the Word were baptized. Babies can't respond in the sense of what that word means, and they can't repent as v. 38 means. What if you were baptized when you were a baby or before you really fully knew the gospel and responded in saving faith? Should you be re-baptized?

Look at Acts 19. Paul meets disciples or followers of John in Ephesus who apparently hadn't believed in Jesus or received the Holy Spirit as Christians. They say in Acts 19:2b '*we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.*'<sup>3</sup> And he said, "*Into what then were you baptized?*" They said, "*Into John's baptism.*"<sup>4</sup> And Paul said, "*John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to **believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.***"<sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul realized they had been baptized in John's baptism but they weren't yet believing in the Christ John was telling people to believe in, and weren't yet Spirit-indwelt Christians. So Paul explains to them about the Jesus that John wanted people to believe in, and v. 5 says they *heard* (same word as 2:37 as they heard the gospel and responded in faith, the idea is *heard and heeded*), and then they received Christian baptism, i.e., in the name of the Lord Jesus

In a room this size I'm sure some were baptized when you were young but only later in life did you really *hear and heed, repent and believe in Jesus as Lord*. If that's you, you may have gotten wet in the past but you haven't had Christian baptism. If as you look back on when you were baptized, you hadn't heard or heeded Jesus as Lord, no evidence of the Holy Spirit in you then, I would urge you as the NT does to be baptized as Christ's disciple. I don't say that by my authority, I urge you to be obedient to Him who said: '*All authority has been given to Me...make disciples...baptizing them*' Mt 28

Application to unbelievers: repent, turn from your sin, follow Jesus in faith  
 Application to unbaptized (since salvation): be baptized, don't disobey Jesus  
 [we can talk afterward, we have a baptism opportunity August 3rd]

### **Which brings us to the 2nd fundamental back in Acts 2: Baptism**

After someone becomes a disciple, they're to be baptized. It's the first and foremost step of obedience that Jesus put great importance on in the Great Commission. There are a lot of things Jesus commanded that He didn't point out in His last words before He went to heaven. But Jesus singles out '*make disciples...baptizing them...and teaching them to obey all I commanded.*' He mentions baptism before all the other commands. He elevates it, not baptists

In v. 41 it's the first thing they did in the early church. In v. 38, it's the first thing Peter calls them to do after they repent. What about '*children*' in v. 39?

If little ones profess faith, should we baptize right away? Our study guide says "There are differences among those who embrace believer's baptism concerning the timing of baptism for children who profess faith in Christ. Some argue for "immediate participation," meaning that children should be baptized as soon as they can confess faith in Christ. We lean toward the second view, which suggests waiting to baptize children until there is evidence of regeneration and the ability to reason independently in spiritual matters ... [the church writing it says] our practice is to wait until a child is at least 11 years old before considering for baptism. More importantly, it is our practice to wait until there is evidence of regeneration and enough maturity to articulate the gospel and give a credible profession of faith."<sup>2</sup>

[Mt 3 calls for fruits of repentance, public confession]

GCC in Sun Valley, CA: 'without putting an age-requirement on baptism, the Bible indicates that a person must understand the gospel, repent of his or her sin, and savingly trust in Christ before being baptized ... Again, Scripture gives no specific age limit. In our experience, however, we have found that most children do not really begin to objectively evaluate their own thoughts until they reach junior high [for some it's later before the faith becomes their own or not. The biblical culture saw 12 as a young adult transition]. Before then, [little ones] usually feel little concern over the contradictory values to which they cling. Seldom during elementary years do they conscientiously think about and spiritually evaluate life's demands independently of their parents. This does not mean that all young children are incapable of committing the rest of their lives to Christ and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit...[baptism does not save, but mature commitment and meaningful testimony is vital, so] ... (1) has the child actually rejected a worldly set of values in making his commitment to Christ? (2) can he project far enough into the future to make a lifelong commitment? If these issues are resolved, we proceed to evaluate whether or not the child has an understanding of salvation by grace apart from works, and we seek verification from others that he or she demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit ... The temptation for many parents is to rush their child's baptism...[GCC elders] believe it's better to wait, and be absolutely convinced of a child's conversion, than to baptize the child prematurely — and thereby potentially give an unsaved child a false sense of assurance."<sup>3</sup>

[I don't tell my kids they're not saved, but I keep doing Mt 28:19]

Now, of course, you can be saved before you're baptized (you must be for it to be Christian baptism, I believe). Baptism is a statement vividly visually 'I died to sin and self, I'm covered in Christ, and I'm raised to newness of life.'

Baptism is to be a memorable meaningful commitment of Christ's disciples.  
 - Col 2:12 says we were '*buried with him in baptism*' (our old life is buried)  
 - Gal 3:27: '*as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*'  
 - Rom 6:3 '*all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*'<sup>4</sup> *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised ... we too might walk in newness of life ...*<sup>6</sup> *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.*<sup>7</sup> *For one who has died has been set free from sin.'*

Application here for all of us who've been baptized since that happened: remember your baptism and what it represents, a decisive once-for-all break with your past life, a cleansed new identity in Christ who you are immersed in and have pledged to follow before witnesses. You died to and left your old self, as if buried in those waters, and you don't have to go back. Live in the reality your baptism pictures, a new person cleansed, covered in Christ! And come to every baptism you can, to be reminded of that reality (Rom 6).

**The next fundamental for today is: Communion** (look back at v. 41-42)

<sup>41</sup> *So those who received his word were baptized ...* [then v. 42 says they devoted to teaching and to fellowship and to the 3rd one] *breaking of bread*

...

That's a phrase used for communion in Acts in the NT. 1 Cor 10:16 (NKJV) '*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*'

I think it's good to keep these fundamentals in the order the early church did  
 - repentant faith comes first in the first part of Acts 2:38, that's church 101  
 - baptism came next in v. 41, nothing should be more basic to Christianity  
 - then in v. 42 communion. Baptism should be the fundamental first step of obedience when someone becomes a disciple, then all other observances. In Mt 28:19-20 Jesus said *make disciples* (that starts with repentance and faith) then He said *baptizing them ... teaching them to observe all I commanded* (which would include observing communion as He commanded '*Do this in remembrance of Me*'). Same order: faith, then baptism, then communion. It was also the same order and pattern in baptist history till the mid-late 1900s

Some churches alter the normal order by baptizing little ones who they hope will demonstrate saving faith later (a few practice communion for little kids or even babies). Maybe more common in less historic circles would be kids who take communion once they profess faith, maybe years before baptism?

I've said before I think it's best to keep NT order, faith-baptism-communion. I don't think we should lower the bar on either ordinance Jesus instituted for His disciples and I don't think it's healthy to start taking communion years before getting baptized, as some do. As if communion is no big deal and not too serious, but baptism is a big deal for when your faith gets really serious?

I don't think that's the right way to look at it. I've pointed out before that it's communion that actually has the serious warnings: *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord ... For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick [some dead!]. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned'* (1 Cor 11:25-32)

When it says *a man must examine himself*, in their culture one as young as 12 could be considered a man (so we don't need to think 18 like our culture or that it only means men and not women). But the text requires a maturity and sobriety and ability of discerning the body rightly, to avoid an unworthy treatment of serious sacred things. When a young adult can make a credible testimony of faith in baptism I think is a logical time to take that first step of obedience then communion if they are regularly examining themselves and repenting before the Lord and others on their own, independent of parents. Our baptism study guide in back may help evaluate, Grudem on assurance.<sup>4</sup>

[if you're not sure or have questions, better to pass and ask afterwards]

Some of you may not be as young, but you haven't been obedient in baptism and you feel it right now. You realize you were saved *after* your baptism, or you've never been baptized in the biblical pattern or at all, but you come to church and take communion as the rest. Whatever is holding you back from obeying Christ's great commission, if fundamental things are out of order or out of balance in your life, I urge you today to talk to myself or another to make things right. If you pass today don't let another month pass before you obey the Lord in baptism in 4 weeks (or if you can't then, let us know). If you won't obey the first ordinance, I can't encourage you to take the other.

[the same if you refuse to deal with your sin toward others]

Refusing to obey Christ or committing sins of disunity are unworthy of this. The idea of unity is right after v. 42 talks about breaking bread/communion:  
<sup>44</sup> *And all who believed were together and had all things in common* [same root word as the word translated 'communion' in Corinthians, *koinonia*, our common union, a sharing or participation or partnership in a common life]



If you turn to 1 Corinthians 10, there's more applications to remember as we prepare for communion. The Acts 2 church is a pattern, here's a principle in Cor 10:16 *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation [NKJV 'communion' or, others 'sharing'] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?* <sup>17</sup> *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

[this is not only a memorial, there's a real spiritual sharing/participation, too]

Unity in the body of Christ is so important. Communion is so vital because it pictures our vital common union with Christ's blood and Christ's body in the local church. Just as a piece of bread or cracker can be broken into many pieces from one source, Paul says this is a reminder we're of the same body.

**11:18** *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you ...* [this is how Paul began the letter, the schisms and divisions in the body of those who forgot the gospel, 1 Cor 1-2] ... *11:20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat* [he goes on to rebuke them for making this about them and their desires, not the Lord and His desires. By the way, this verse tells us the Lord's Supper is for the church when it gathers together, not just a bunch of believers wherever]

v. 23 is what Paul records for the church, not just in Corinth, all churches: *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,* <sup>24</sup> *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."* <sup>25</sup> *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."* [the key in disunity and the cure for disunity is remembering the gospel. The mention of the new covenant was a mention of the forgiveness of sins in the gospel, and Christians can't dwell on God's forgiving us our sins and refuse to be forgiving the sins of others]

You can study that more in chapters 1-2 but I think Paul does the same there in the context of their factions, he reminds them of the gospel as *'the power of God for us who are being saved...the word of the cross'* (1:18). He says *'Christ crucified'* is the *'power of God'* (v. 23-24). He starts chapter 2 with *'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God* [in context, the gospel, Christ crucified, the word of the cross is our power]

Again in chapter 11, in context of division, the power of the cross is central.

If another has sinned against you, communion in remembrance of Christ is a reminder that He bore our sins in His body on the cross, and we don't need to crucify others for sins. It reminds us that we as the church are His body. When we want justice, the remembrance of Christ's blood represented in the cup, reminds us that we didn't receive the justice we deserved for our sin, so we can be merciful, thankful, joyful. It doesn't mean you can't address sin or seek to make things right, there are times when we must confront sin but it must be in a right spirit. And we must be seeking to live right with Christ and His church to worship right. There should be an element of celebration once we've examined ourselves as v. 28 says and made sure we've discerned the body of Christ around us, v. 29 says, as we confess sin to God or others.

If you have done that, or can do that before, or can commit to obey Christ in whatever way He's prompted you to respond afterward, come by His grace:

Come then, my soul, partake, the banquet is divine  
His body is the choicest food, His blood the richest wine.

Ye hungry starving poor, join in the sweet repast,

View Jesus in these symbols given, and His salvation taste (B. Beddome, 1818)<sup>5</sup>

We began in Acts 1:8, a call to be witnesses and proclaim the gospel till He comes, and this is part of it to a watching world: <sup>26</sup> *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

That brings together the banners on the back wall: The Lord Jesus has risen, now reigns, will return. The Lord's Table is the King's Table and He is coming. Let's remember these truths as we *do this in remembrance of Him*.

As we pray, I invite the men serving communion today to gather in the back and I invite all of you to speak to God where He's spoken to you today ...

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.propreacher.com/preaching-101-back-basics/>

<sup>2</sup> *Preparing Young People for Baptism*, by Bethlehem Baptist Church.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.raisinggodlychildren.org/2013/05/how-young-is-too-young-children-and.html>

<sup>4</sup> See below for online version of Children Desiring God article and Grudem's article:

<http://media.sermonaudio.com/articles/gc-7241315522-2.PDF>

<http://media.sermonaudio.com/articles/gc-7241314373-1.PDF>

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Beddome, *Hymns Adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), Hymn no. 669.