



GRACE CHURCH

The Church: Ordinances That Make Jesus Known

Romans 6:1-11

Grace Church | 9.15.19

Good morning church, and welcome. It's a supernatural thing we get to do today, to come together with a bunch of supernaturally recreated people and orient ourselves around the God of creation. May we never underestimate that, may it never stop blowing our minds. We've come together to remind ourselves of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the divine son of God, become man to live the perfect life we could never attain, die the sinners death we never escape, and defeat the enemy we could never defeat. All for us.

If you're new to Grace Church, or if this is your first Sunday, you are welcome too. This church is a place of refuge for sinners, and so there are no levels of righteousness. There is only one righteousness we hold collectively: that of our savior Jesus. I would love the opportunity to meet you. We have some little cards out in the lobby that will help us get connected, and we have an event coming up that is specifically for you if you are new, our Open House event.

This week we are continuing on in our sermon series "The Church". The purpose of this series is to give you fuel to love one another as you get a glimpse behind the biblical reasoning and purpose behind why we do what we do together. Every aspect of our church should intentionally display the gospel as it serves our mission: to Make Jesus Known in the Church, the City, and the World. We have examined why and how we preach, and we have examined why and how we worship together.

This week we will be turning to Scripture to look at another key piece of the church that many people often overlook, the ordinances of the church. Yes, I am talking about baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is most likely the first sermon you have heard about the ordinances. Which is a bit surprising, considering the fact that these two elements have existed within the church since its inception. Year after year after year, the universal Church has practiced baptism and the Lord's Supper, or communion. For us to do so as a church is one way we reach back into history and recognize we are not alone in this thing—Christ has built his church, and will continue to build his church.

These two practices are called ordinances because we believe that Christ specifically ordains them in Scripture as acts of obedience we partake in together. Some churches or traditions call them sacraments: while there is nothing inherently wrong with that language, I think it can be misleading, because it implies that baptism and the Lord's supper confer the grace of God in and of



themselves, meaning it could easily be assumed that they partaking in them provides salvation. Because we believe that the grace of God is received by faith alone as an act of God's sovereign hand alone, we will use the word ordinance. If you have any questions about that, please come and find me.

But here is the deal this morning. We are not preaching on the Ordinances because it's cool and old-school. We are preaching this sermon because the ordinances are God-honoring commands of Christ that are vital to the life of the church. Every member of our church is a baptized believer, meaning all who we affirm are in Christ have received the sign of baptism. And we take communion every week. Why?

This morning we will primarily be in Romans 6, so turn there if you haven't yet. But we will also be jumping around just a bit. This is due to the fact that there really is no one passage in Scripture that speaks broadly about the ordinances together. You should know if you are a visitor that this is not very common at our church. Usually we preach straight through a specific book of the Bible, verse by verse. In a few weeks we will start our sermon series in 2 Corinthians, and we will be there until March I believe, save for a break for advent. But today we will be needing a lot of background teaching and various texts to show the whole biblical argument.

So here is what I want you to see this morning. The ordinances are three things: 1. Signs of our New Covenant Union with Christ; 2. Acts of Communal Assurance and Perseverance; and 3. Echoes of Eternal Hope.

The Ordinances are Signs of Our New Covenant Union with Christ

Last week we spent a little bit of time talking about the importance of the concept of *covenant* in our worship. Just as the Israelites worshipped by confirming their covenant with God at the mountain of Sinai, so we worship by coming to renew our covenant week after week. And just as their covenant was instigated with blood, so ours is too. We only come to the feast of worship by the blood of Christ. But today I want to highlight a few more differences between their covenant, the Mosaic or Old Covenant as it is called in Scripture, and the New Covenant, the Covenant that is instigated by Jesus.

I would remind you that a covenant is a binding agreement, an agreement that is far more serious than a contract. It's lifelong, and breaking the covenant has serious consequences—in the ancient world, usually death. And the purpose of covenant is relational blessings. The purpose of a covenant is that two parties would be joined together. So in the Old Covenant, God joins himself to his people through his law. They have the words of God to obey, and in obeying, they maintain a special covenant relationship with him. His presence dwells with them in the tabernacle and the temple. They are his people, he is their God. But as we know, the Israelites cannot uphold their end of the covenant. They are not faithful. So what does God do? His plan all along is to bring about a



new covenant, a better one. So keep your finger in Romans 6, we will spend a lot of time there, I am going to read for you from two important passages, Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. It will also be on the screen.

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

And Ezekiel 36, God speaking through the prophet again about this “New Covenant”.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So here we find what is a covenant that, although full of similarities, is still inherently different. See with me the two main differences. The first is a difference of purpose. In the Old Covenant, God writes the law down and gives it to his people. In the New covenant, God promises not only to give his people a written law, but to write the law on their hearts. This is a new way of God dwelling with his people. He does this by giving them a “new heart, a heart of flesh” and by putting his Spirit *within* his people.

The other major difference is who this covenant is for. A difference of people. In the Old Covenant, there were members of Israel who did not know God. Their relationship with God was purely religious, cultural, a heritage of their own. But in the new covenant, the family of God is only made up of those who *know* God. Again, the reason that the people of the new covenant know God is not because of their sudden ability to fulfill his commands, but because, from the least to the greatest, they have new hearts by the Spirit of God.

Bear with me here. Remember again the purpose of covenant: relational blessings. The people of the covenant have a *relationship* with the living God. And since every covenant relationship is intended to bind to parties together for life, every covenant has some sort of sign to indicate that relationship. My wedding ring lets the world know that I am *bound* to my wife. It is the outward sign of our covenant. I receive the blessings of covenant with her, and no one else. Why? Because I possess the sign of our covenant. God’s covenants with his people also have signs. In the Old Covenant the primary sign was that of male circumcision. Circumcision separated all those in the



covenant from those outside the covenant. It was the outward sign that they were people who had a special relationship with God, people of the book, people of the Law. This sign was given to all those who entered into the covenant community, including children, who were taught to obey God as part of the family. This sign was an act of adherence to the law of God. It showed their identification and participation with God as his covenant people. But remember, they did not have the Spirit—not all who possessed the sign of the covenant were faithful. God came near to his covenant people by way of chosen mediators and priests. God did not dwell with them directly.

The New Covenant also has signs. These signs are meant, in the same way as the Old ones, to convey our identification and participation with God. These signs are our ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are outward, visible representations of our covenant relationship with God. But our new covenant relationship is not like the old one. The old covenant people did not all know God. The new covenant people *all* know God. Why? Because the New Covenant is a better covenant, not maintained by adherence to the law, but by the Spirit of God dwelling in the hearts of the people to give them faith in Jesus Christ. This is why we only administer the ordinances to believers, and not to infants or unbelievers. The ones who receive the signs of the new covenant are those who *know* God by the Spirit.

Listen closely. The newness of the New Covenant is simply this: by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we identify and participate in the Triune God not by way of mediator, but by way of union. We have access to the Father, in union with Jesus, which happens by the Spirit who seals us. Jesus comes to live and die and rise in order to fulfill the promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36: to give us a new heart of flesh and give the Spirit of God which unites us to him. The New Covenant is a covenant of unbreakable covenant union, because our relationship to God is not determined by our ability to obey, but by God's act of grace to grant us the obedience and righteousness of Christ by the Spirit. Your brain is probably getting a little mushy by now, this is heady stuff. Did you know so much was wrapped up in these ordinances?

Now we turn to Romans 6. Paul is assuming this very argument. **Read Romans 6:1-4.** Do you see it there? The ordinance of baptism, says Paul, is an obvious sign of what happens at the instigation of the new covenant. All those who are baptized are proclaiming to the world that they identify with Christ. When he died, I died with him. When he was buried, I was buried with him. When he rose, I walked too in a *new* life. Do you see the parallels here between Paul's argument and the prophecy of Ezekiel? Ezekiel promised new hearts, new life. Paul is saying that we *have* new hearts and new life, because for all who put their faith in Jesus, our old hearts and our old lives are dead, killed on the cross with Jesus and buried with him in the tomb!

When you repent of your sin and turn to Jesus, what happens is you are experiencing the reality of new birth. The Spirit of God, like Ezekiel promised, has broken your old stony heart and given you a new one, sealing you forever as a new creation. Your new heart is not just any heart. It's a heart that is *bound* to Jesus Christ and *found* in Jesus Christ. You have entered into the family by his blood, the family of the New Covenant. The family who has access to God, the family who is kept



by God forever, the family that delights in all the relational blessings of covenant with the magnificent triune God.

Let me press in the significance of this reality using the example of baptism. When you are baptized as a believer, you are participating in an outward sign of a supernatural reality. Many take this to mean that baptism is a simple profession of faith, i.e. “hey everyone, I have decided to follow Jesus”. But that’s not quite right. The word for “baptize” here is a violent one—immersion—used to describe drowning, or the sinking of a ship. This is no sprinkle or light dip, this is a violent immersion and resurgence of new life. You are not saying “look at me, I am a Christian now”, you are saying: “I am dead and here is my resurrection ceremony! I am new. I am new, not because I was able to make covenant with God through my holiness, but because I died in my inability to do so and the Spirit raised me again. I am new, because Jesus Christ has not just saved me, but made it so that my very life is unified to his. I identify with his death and burial as I am submerged in the water, and I identify with him as I emerge a new person. It’s because of him I am new. I go into the water to show that before Christ I was separated from God, I emerge from the water to show that now I am covenantally unified to God in Christ.”

Baptism is not just a sign of our justification, the fact that we are saved from sin and the wrath of God. So often that is our focus, and it’s not wrong. But Baptism is much more. Baptism is a sign of our New Covenant relationship, a relationship that is made perfect through our union to Christ. We are not just washed and forgiven, we are welcomed into the family, all of us who have died by immersion and made alive again.

You thought I have forgotten the Lord’s Supper? No, it too is a sign of our New Covenant relationship. Paul’s logic here about baptism can be applied to the Lord’s Supper. Every week before communion we recite the words of institution, which Jesus said before he instigated the practice of the Lord’s Supper. What does he say recorded in Luke 22,

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”

So Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:16,

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

And perhaps the most striking reference, in John 6:

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my



blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

We tend to think of the Lord's Supper as simply a meal of remembrance of Christ's cross. Surely it is, he said "do this in *remembrance* of me." But it is so much more. The Supper is an invitation to participate, to belong, to feast, to be unified with Christ. We partake of his blood and his body, and in doing so, what does John 6:56 say? We *abide* in him, and he abides in us. The Lord's Supper is a weekly act of saying: I am one with Christ! He is not just my ticket out of hell, he is my everything! His body and his blood are not just reminders, they are elements of union. They are what you need to survive, your sustenance, your abiding vitality, your very life. This meal is an invitation not only to eat and drink forgiveness, but eat and drink covenant relationship. Why? Because once again, Paul reminds us in Romans 6. We have *died* with Christ. The Lord's Supper is a meal of participation, of recognizing that his death is also our death.

By Grace God the Father chose a family to which he might send God the Son to live a perfect life of obedience to the law, to die and rise so that they might both send God the Spirit to unite God's chosen family to the Son and receive all the blessings of covenant relationship. When you are baptized, that's what you are entering into. When you partake in the Lord's Supper, that's what you are partaking in. Not just salvation, but union and covenant relationship.

This might be new to you, because our Christian culture is pointing more towards our outward expression of part of ourselves, rather than a declaration of complete newness. As one author puts it:

"Faith has been reduced to a necklace one wears as part of a self-made identity rather than a whole new set of clothes."¹

Baptism and the Lord's Supper is saying "I've got a whole new set of clothes. All about me is now all about Jesus."

This is the blessing of the ordinances—they are the outward, visible signs to us of this participation in the New Covenant. In baptism, we identify with Jesus' death and resurrection, showing our union to him. In the Supper, we participate and identify with Jesus' body and blood, showing our union to him. In all of this, we remember, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "You are not your own, you were bought with a price". We belong to Jesus. Baptism and the Lord's Supper just are our ways of showing that. And that showing could not be more important in our endeavor of "making Jesus known". So, I've spent some time showing you what the ordinances are, not it's time to show you what the ordinances *do*.

¹ J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*, 24.



The Ordinances are Acts of Communal Assurance and Perseverance

Read with me Romans 6:6-11. The point of Paul's address to the Romans is not to explain what baptism *is*. Sure, we can take a small theology of baptism out of the text, namely that signifies our union with Christ. But the point of this passage is to show what baptism, as it points to our new covenant union with Christ, *does*. First, our union with Christ is an act of communal assurance.

By communal, I mean that not only are we communing, or coming together, with Christ in the ordinances, we are coming together with other brothers and sisters. It is important here to note the background of the Book of Romans. If you want to boil down the purpose of the book of Romans as finely as possible, you will find that the letter to the Romans was written so that the church in Rome would stop their racist segregation and hatred of one another. You see, the church was full of Jews and Gentiles. The Jews looked down upon the gentiles for their lack of Jewishness, the gentiles thought the Jews were stuck up and self-righteous. So what does Paul do? He uses the power of theology to bring them together again. He starts by outlining why they are all sinners under the wrath of God, without excuse and breakers of his revealed law in Moses, but also his revealed glory in creation. Then he moves to show how their standing with God is based solely on an alien righteousness and justification through faith alone in Christ alone. So by the time he gets to Romans 6, his point is to show that *all* have died with Christ. *All* are unified equally to the same Christ, the same body. When he says "we" in this passage, he means we. The whole body.

You see, somehow we have taken the idea of the ordinances and made them all about us. Baptism is a personal act, you can do it in the Jordan river with just your tour group there. It's really about your profession of faith. The Lord's Supper is about you and your remembrance and you contemplating the cross. You take it with your eyes closed and your head bowed. But what the ordinances are intended to do is to unite us. As they signal our unification to Christ, they signal our unification to one another.

"It is tempting to 'feed upon Christ' and yet spurn the actual flesh and blood Christians around us... [but] to be in communion with the beautiful, alluring Christ is impossible without communion with his broken and sinful—yet cleansed and redeemed—bride, the church."²

This is why we baptize into the local church, because baptism is a symbol of *belonging* and unity. This is why I encourage you often to lift up your eyes in communion, to feast together, to consider how the gospel unites you to your brothers and sisters. Because the ordinances are *communal*. They are family practices.

² J. Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope*.



And they are communal acts of assurance. Notice the finality of our union with Christ in Romans 6. We are not just dead, but buried. Really dead. Put in the ground, dead. Look at **verse 5**, see the force behind it. **Certainly** be united. **See verse 10**. This death is *once for all*. Or think of the Supper—the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He is not re-sacrificed at the table, his work is sufficient and final.

And finality breeds assurance. When you look back at your baptism, it should assure you of your union with Christ. You may have had a day where you could not escape sin, but then you remember... I'm dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ. I died and was raised again with Jesus all those years ago on the cross, and I proclaimed that finality publically when I was buried under the water and risen again out of it. And not only that, but my brothers and sisters were there. They saw it, they acknowledged that I belong to the family of God. And their witness fuels my assurance, that I know I am united to Christ even when he feels distant and my faith feels weak.

The Supper does the same thing. We take the supper as an act of assurance. The table is not closed to sinners, it is wide open to them. It's a table of assurance, a table where we come and leave our sin and feast on gospel news. And we do it together, so that no matter if we feel like we have to crawl to this table, our brothers and sisters are there too. They are not looking at us with condemnation, because they are just as needy of the feast of Christ laid out as anyone else is. This is communal assurance.

As the finality that the ordinances portray leads to communal assurance, it also leads to perseverance. This is Paul's main point of Romans 6:1-11. You're dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. Remember your baptism? You died, were buried, and rose again new! So tell me, new man, new woman, how can you live to sin? Baptism is *in order that* we might walk in newness of life. New life is a sure life, a grace-fueled life, a life that perseveres towards holiness.

The ordinances act by way of reminder of your security, vaulting you towards obedience and faithfulness. Baptism enters you into a life of holiness in Christ, and the Supper sustains your life of holiness in Christ. And all of this we do together. One of the most surefire means of your sanctification is to wash yourself in corporate reminders of grace. This is one of the most glorious points of the ordinances: to surround yourself with fellow partakers in Christ, to both spur you forward in accountability as you run the race with endurance and to assure of grace you when you trip.

While we do not believe that the ordinances confer grace in and of themselves, it is true to say that they are means of grace for you. They are means of your perseverance, of your sanctification, of your continued killing of sin. They are fuel for you. They are meant to make you holy. In them you remember that your old master of sin can't order you around anymore. Because it's impossible to enslave a dead man! Your new master is a master of grace, who has not only bought you but married you and identified with you. What grace, church. What grace. Let's come to the water and to the table to experience that grace, the kind of grace that helps us run the race of faith together.



But the ordinances are not just for remembering the glory of eternity past or the glory of our union now. The ordinances are also beacons of the future, echoes of an eternal hope.

The Ordinances are Echoes of Eternal Hope

Let's turn our attention towards baptism first. Up to this point, I have failed to mention one of the driving points of Paul's argument for union with Christ as a means of our killing sin: the potency of resurrection. **Look again at verse 9.** Christ has been raised, never to die again. So too we have been raised, never to die again.

The resurrection is a miracle, and it's not because dead men and women have come to life in Christ. That is amazing, yes. But if you and I came to life in Christ only to die again, what kind of miracle would that be? That would be resuscitation, not resurrection. No, our new life is eschatological, meaning it is "future-oriented", it has its eyes towards the eschaton, when all things will be made new. We are made alive, *never to die again*, but rather to live forever. This is part of the potency of baptism: it is a symbol that in your union with Christ you have passed over from eternal death to eternal life. W.H. Auden once penned, "Nothing can save us that is possible: / We who must die demand a miracle." The resurrection of the dead is an impossible miracle, and baptism is our first experience of that miracle.

One day, the dead in Christ will rise completely. When the end comes, all those who are united to Christ by faith will enter into the new heavens and new earth where they will dwell with God forever. Let's be a people who celebrate that reality at baptism. And this can be an application for you who have already been baptized. When you are tempted to believe that this world is all there is, remember your baptism. You entered into a new reality of eternity when you came to faith in Jesus Christ. The water that surrounds you on the day of your baptism is an echo of the water that will cover the earth and make it new and perfect and wipe away every tear and every sad thought and every sin. Baptism is a symbol of undying hope, and hope is fuel for you to live to Christ in a decaying world.

But the Supper also is future oriented. One part of the words of institution we do not read and often forget, let's remember now. Jesus says: "I will not drink again until the kingdom of God comes." Even now, Jesus is waiting, preparing a table for a feast and a banquet like no other. When all comes to a close, when the imperfect is swallowed up by the perfect, that meal will be a meal of perfect union with our Lord. It will be a meal of marriage, a meal of union. We will be perfect like he is perfect, and no longer will sin separate us from him. This means that when you take communion, do not only look backwards. Don't just picture the cross in your head. Picture the table. Come to the feast anticipating with joyful hope the feast to come.

The ordinances make Jesus known to us, the Jesus who one day we will be totally and completely unified to in the new heavens and earth with new life, the Jesus who one day we will feast with forever.



What does this all mean for us church? It means that God in his kindness has given us two signs of his unending commitment to us. We must embrace them as a means towards holiness. My prayer is that this week you would take what you have heard and consider: how am I neglecting the grace of God in the ordinances? How might they fuel me towards assurance and holiness and hope?

There may be some here who the table is not open to yet. We don't dole out the ordinances lightly, because its a dreadful thing to give false assurance. It's a terrible thing to assure someone that they are in the covenant family when they are not. That is why we guard this table, asking only those who have truly repented of sin and placed their faith in Jesus Christ to come. But if that's not you, if you know that you are not in this family of the new covenant, and that this sign of the new covenant is not for you, do not neglect today as the day of salvation. Do not regret that you stood back in condemnation when there was a feast of grace offered to you.

And to all those who feel like there is no place for you in the water or at the table, the invitation is always open. Come and partake in Jesus, come die with him, come be buried with him, come live again with him. Come by his blood, shed for you on the cross, come with faith and come ready to lay down your life of sin for a life of joyful endurance with Jesus. This invitation is for the unbeliever, and for the believer. All enter in again and again by the same way: through the blood of Jesus Christ. Come find me or another pastor if you would like to belong to the new covenant family in baptism. And right now church, for all who are in Christ Jesus, we have laid out for us at these tables a sign of our union with Jesus, who came to live and die to make secure his covenant with us. Let's pray before we take together.

