

Sacraments During the Coronavirus Crisis: Questions and Answers

Summary

Q1. How will RGC handle the sacraments during coronavirus crisis while we are not conducting in-person Sunday services?

A1. Baptisms are suspended until we can perform them safely and with the church assembled to witness and rejoice in this once-in-a-lifetime moment of grace.

A2. We plan to receive the Lord's Supper during our online service on May 3, 2020 and monthly thereafter.

Explanation

Q2. What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is a blessing from Christ which is a sign (a picture) and a seal (a mark of being set apart) given to believers in order to teach and assure us of our salvation. The Lord ordained two sacraments: baptism (Matt. 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23), also known as communion. Participation in the sacraments is intended to strengthen and assure individual believers and the church that we have eternal life by grace through faith in Christ.

Q3. What is baptism?

A. Baptism is the sacrament which uniquely depicts *initiation* into the Christian life, portraying the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). It points to the beginning of the Christian life (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38) and displays one's commitment to Christ, a commitment which will be lived out in the local church.

Q4. Why are we suspending baptisms?

A. At this time we are suspending baptisms because we see no way to properly administer one without endangering the health of those involved. Putting an elder and a person being baptized, and possibly a third person, in water and close physical contact is outside the bounds of safe practice. Further, we believe baptisms are best done with the gathered church, so we prefer to wait until the church is able to assemble as one to rejoice with and pray for the person being baptized.

Q5. When will we resume baptisms?

A. We will resume baptisms when there is a safe way to perform them and have the church assembled as witnesses. If there arises some way to safely perform a baptism before the church is ready to assemble together as a whole, we will encourage the person to wait until the whole church is able to assemble again but

allow for those who would prefer to go ahead to do so with a smaller group that accommodates safe practices.

Q6. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament which uniquely depicts *continuation*, a repeated act whereby the believer remembers the Lord's death and renews his or her commitment to participation in the Lord and his church (1 Cor. 11:27-34). In eating and drinking with the church the believer is nourished and strengthened to grow in grace (1 Cor. 10:16).

Q7. How do baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

A. "*Baptism* [is] an ordinance that is only observed once by each person, as a sign of the beginning of his or her Christian life... *The Lord's Supper* [is] an ordinance that is to be observed repeatedly throughout our Christian lives, as a sign of continuing fellowship with Christ."¹

Wayne Grudem

Q8. Why are we going online with the Lord's Supper?

A1. This is in an unprecedented situation.

At this time somewhere around one-third of the world's population are under stay-at-home orders or restrictions of some kind. Our church has not gathered in person for the past seven Sundays, and there will be at least six more before we can gather again. The elders of RGC understand that the Lord's Supper is intended to be taken "when you come together" (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34), and we long for the day when we'll be able to come together again to celebrate communion in person.

Scripture gives us no guidelines for how to observe the sacraments during a world-wide pandemic, so we look to prudential wisdom and the Spirit's guidance to help us. Receiving the Lord's Supper "together at home" is an exception we make during an exceptional time. This is perhaps similar to our practice of serving the Lord's Supper privately to shut-ins. When Jesus expresses his approval of the time when David ate the special bread that was normally set aside for the priests (Matt. 12:1-8), this indicates that some of God's standards are flexible enough to allow for applying them differently during a crisis.

A2. This is an opportunity.

The Lord's Supper is both a picture of the gospel and an opportunity to experience the grace of God through sensing our union with him and being assured of his promises of a greater banquet to come on the Last Day. If the common grace of digital communication makes it possible for the saints to be

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 988.

strengthened by grace available in the Lord's Supper, let's grab hold of this opportunity.

A3. This is temporary.

Lord willing, the day will come soon when we can regather as a church. Our less-than-ideal experience of the Lord's Supper online can be one more reminder that we wait for, pray for, and long for the day when we can pass the trays and share the bread and cup in the same room at the same time.

Q9. How should we prepare?

A. Please prepare ahead of the service (May 3 is the first time we'll have the Lord's Supper online) to have some bread and grape juice (or wine) ready to receive during the service.

Q10. Should my children participate in the Lord's Supper?

A. If your children have made a believable profession of faith and have been baptized, then we encourage them to participate. If they have not, we do not believe they should receive the Lord's Supper. Instead, this is a great opportunity to urge them to trust Christ and to encourage any evidences of that you see in their lives.

Q11. Doesn't this contribute to the downgrading of meeting in person?

A. We live in a time when more and more is being done online. People are teleworking, purchasing groceries online, and watching sermons online. We are becoming a virtual, online society; won't this decision further normalize making church an online experience? Certainly this is possible, although it would seem that having the service online increases the risk of this happening more than observing the Lord's Supper.

We will continue to communicate our desire to "get back to normal" by gathering in person. Also, we do not desire for people to watch the recording of our services later and take the Lord's Supper then.

Every shift in culture presents both challenges and opportunities. Our culture's shift to "online everything" challenges the value of being together in person while also creating the opportunity of welcoming into our worship services people who would otherwise not venture into a church building.

Resources

[*Practicing the Ordinances in a Pandemic*](#) by Bill Riedel

Midweek Musings on 30 April: *Why is RGC going online with the Lord's Supper?*

Sermon on 3 May, 2020: *Sacraments During the Coronavirus Crisis*