

The Basics of Christian Ceremony

I. Introduction

- A. Whether we choose to admit it or not, we all have our rituals (systems of ceremony).
- B. The true purpose of ceremony is to keep a strong tie with the past while presenting a celebration for the present.
- C. Eventually we look to the Lord as the leader of the Church, but He works through humans.
- D. There is nothing wrong with a ritual that expresses life. But the ritual becomes useless when it is a substitute for life.
- E. Christians should not only be defending their faith; we also need to celebrate our faith.
- F. Most evangelical and Pentecostal churches observe seven ceremonies that allow the congregation of believers to respond to God and one another in a variety of ways. These ceremonies or rituals are:
 - 1. Water baptism
 - 2. The Lord's Supper (Communion)
 - 3. The marriage service
 - 4. Baby dedications
 - 5. Prayer for needs
 - 6. Public worship
 - 7. Funerals

II. The Ceremony of Water Baptism—Beginnings

- A. Water baptism is an introduction into the Body of Christ.
- B. Jesus spoke of salvation as being "BORN AGAIN."
John 3:7 Don't be surprised when I tell you, 'You must all be born again.'
- C. Water baptism does not make you new. Being baptized in water does not save you.
- D. Jesus went "from Galilee to the Jordan River and wanted John to baptize him."
(Matthew 3:13).
- E. On the day of Pentecost, Peter set the pattern, and the Church has followed that pattern ever since. He said, "Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each 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." (Acts 2:38).
- F. Water baptism is an obedient response to a clear command in the Bible.
- G. Even Satan views water baptism as the final loss of a person.

III. The Lord's Supper—Remembering

- A. Jesus introduced the ceremony of the Lord's Supper (Communion) on the Jewish Passover. That was not accidental.
 - B. The Passover and the Lord's Supper are both ceremonies of remembrance.
 - C. The Lord's Supper should be observed with rejoicing and gladness.
- IV. The Ceremony of Marriage—Commitment
- A. From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible speaks of the union of a man and woman in marriage as a holy, beautiful, and necessary part of life.
 - B. Christian couples should prepare for marriage. Premarital counseling can save much difficulty and even prevent divorce.
 - C. Five areas of living together need to be discussed before marriage
 - 1. Communication
 - 2. God concepts
 - 3. Family heritages
 - 4. Money
 - 5. Sex
 - D. God intends marriage to be a lifetime commitment.
- V. The Ceremony of Baby Dedications—Blessing
- A. In the Old Testament, God considered all firstborn children to be His.
 - B. To make it more clear that the children belonged to God, the law provided that they be presented at the tabernacle or temple for dedication. At that time the males would be circumcised.
 - C. This condition of the law was already an almost universal practice.
 - D. Mary and Joseph fulfilled this command of the Law by bringing Jesus for dedication in the temple.

Luke 2:22-24 When the time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the law of Moses taught about being made pure, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ (It is written in the law of the Lord: "Every firstborn male shall be given to the Lord.") ²⁴ Mary and Joseph also went to offer a sacrifice, as the law of the Lord says: "You must sacrifice two doves or two young pigeons."
 - E. Dedication is not child baptism.
- VI. The Ceremony of Prayer for Needs—Compassion
- A. Life is full of complications and problems that are beyond our ability to handle the situation by ourselves.

James 5:13-15 Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises. ¹⁴ Anyone who is sick should call the church's elders. They should pray for and pour oil on the person in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer

that is said with faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person. And if the person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven.

- B. There are many forms of sickness—physical— emotional—mental.
- C. This simple ceremony of praying for the sick is a double blessing.
- D. Praying for one another enables the suffering person to give the burden to Jesus.
- E. This same ceremony allows the people with physical problems to ask the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray the prayer of faith over them.
- F. How we pray for one another is less important than the fact that we do pray for one another.

VII. The Ceremony of Public Worship—Unity

- A. Worship is really a private connection between a person and God. When we worship together in a public gathering we need some ceremony to give form and direction to it.
- B. The ceremony of the pastoral prayer gives a common message of expression to God.
- C. Even the preaching of God's Word is like a ceremony.

VIII. The Ceremony of Funerals—Completion

- A. The Bible says, "...everyone must die once and then be judged" (Hebrews 9:27).
- B. We know death is as much a part of the life cycle as birth.
- C. Happy is the person who has prepared for death before the time to die arrives.
- D. When the last breath has been taken, attention is turned from the dying to those who remain.
- E. The law does not demand a funeral, and many people are buried without one.
- F. If the pastor can meet with the family before the funeral, there are five things that should be explained to the family:
 1. First, the family needs to admit that this day is a very sad day for them. It is a time to mourn, weep, and express their loss.
 2. Second, someone needs to tell them that the days after the funeral will be brighter days, but the family will need one another. Special days like wedding anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas, etc. will bring a stabbing pain that can best be healed by the family.
 3. Third, they need to be told that if the person in the casket has left any of them with debt, either emotional or financial, to go to the casket and say, "I forgive you." Don't carry emotional wounds or grudges from the graveyard.
 4. Fourth, they need to be reminded that if they've been blessed through an inheritance left by the person who died, they should not feel guilty about using it.

5. Fifth, someone should remind them that they might need the strength and guidance of a pastor for the early months following a funeral.
- G. At the funeral of a believer, tell the gathered loved ones, "We who are going Heaven came to celebrate the life of this one who is now a resident of Heaven. He or she cannot come to us, but we can go to him or her."
- H. Encourage the close family members to touch the corpse, or at least the casket, and say good-bye.
 1. It helps them realize that he or she is not there and will not be coming back.
 2. It is a step toward facing the reality of death.
- I. From birth to death, ceremonies become ways to celebrate different stages in the life cycle.
 1. Certainly Christian ceremonies help adjust our lives from the cradle to the grave.
 2. They are ways to help us express our faith.