

We Come To Worship

A STUDY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

LESSON 6: Ordinances

Ordinances vs Sacraments

- › *Sacrament* has historically developed the idea of a *sacred rite* through which divine grace is communicated or conveyed to the participant. This means that there is a grace that is communicated through the rite itself. This is rejected on various grounds.
- › *The challenges to this view*;
 - 1. To need this grace, through another means, would signify that Christ's work is incomplete. That without these acts, the gift of God is pending your participation and further reconciliation (Roman catholic view).
 - 2. keeping the idea of sacrament, yet framing it in reformed soteriology/theology still imparts a grace that remains largely *ambiguous*.
 - Calvin rejects the idea that the sacraments confer grace merely by being administered or received—what later theology calls *ex opere operato*. He argues against the notion that they “justify, and confer grace.” (*Institutes* IV.14.14).
 - Yet he also rejects a bare memorial view. Sacraments are genuine instruments or means by which God confirms, nourishes, and increases believers' faith. Their efficacy is real, but it is wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit and received through faith (*Institutes* IV.14.7, 9, 12, 17)
 - While reasonable and logical, it still imparts a specific grace to the participant, and then the absence or presence of that grace in the work must be explained using Scriptural support.
 - Unlike the other means of grace, such as Bible reading and prayer, these two acts are never specifically mentioned in the Scriptures as imparting a grace.
 - Calvin would argue that they are more than just remembrances on the basis that there is a spiritual food that nourishes (1 Cor. 10:3-4), while verses (Romans 10:17) speak to the effectiveness of these in sanctifying and saving souls.
 - **In summary:** While they are vital for obedience, they are not clearly spoken of in the Scriptures as a means of grace, yet the participation in them is still meaningful and commanded.
- › *Ordinance* is a practice that has been ordained, instituted, and commanded by Christ. At times called the memorial view, it would state that these items occur on the physical level as a response to commands, without an explicit spiritual reality (i.e., grace imparting) occurring.
 - Matt 28:19 - “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.”

- Luke 22:19 – “do this in remembrance of me.”
- › In this grand sense, the New Testament consistently puts salvation by the grace of God received by faith, not through works, no matter the work. (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 5:1, Acts 16:31)
- › These practices may strengthen our faith, but the scriptures do not substantiate any imparting of grace or increased faith through the participation of these ordinances.
- › Another way of thinking about it;
- › Ordinances: we observe ordinances **because we have received** the grace of God unto salvation in Christ through faith.
- › Sacraments: decidedly (*wrongly*) partake in the sacraments **to receive** the grace of Christ to increase our faith.

Observance in the Church

- › **Baptism**
- › The timing of Baptism is after the confession of faith in Christ. It might be hours, or even weeks, after confession. But it is most importantly *preceded* by a confession of faith.
- › Baptism is to take place in the church by immersion.
 - **Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch.** The eunuch was traveling back from Jerusalem from worship to his home, where there seemingly was no church. This was an exception, not a rule in that sense. He came to worship, then came to faith on the way home. It would be deduced that he was not returning to a church.
 - Eusebius, the great Church historian, refers to the Ethiopian Eunuch as “the first fruit of Christianity in the whole world” (*Ecclesiastical History*)
 - **The Results of Pentecost:** The early church was growing, and the baptisms were happening in their midst (Acts 2:47).
 - **Cornelius and Lydia** (Acts 16:11 & Acts 10:45-47)
 - In both of these cases, there was not a formal church present. Both were new believers in new areas, but other believers were present.
- › I think the biblical evidence supports the idea of baptism taking place *in the church*, not the physical building, but in the midst of the body of Christ.
 - A point of ecclesiology: when the church is gathered, the pastor is the one who leads/oversees the gathering. It would be expected that the pastor is present and overseeing the baptism service, but it is clear that pastors and deacons alike were baptizing in the early church.
 - Acts 9:18, Ananias (“a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there - Acts 22:13) baptized Paul, and he was not an elder, but a believer. Again, a principle that shows it is not vestment of power in the pastorate to exercise, but an obedience for all believers to respond to be led by faithful men.

- Practically, this is a great rejoicing in the church. Anytime someone comes to faith and desires baptism, the body should respond.
- › **Lord's Supper**
- › *How often should we partake?*
- › My response firstly rests on the memorial view of the ordinances. Because they are memorial,
- › 1) There is a clear imperative to do it in remembrance,
 - “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).
 - “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:25).
 - In contrast, if I were Anglican or Presbyterian, it would be abundantly clear that we should do it every single time we meet because of its sign, seal, and effectual grace. To withhold it would be like withholding prayer or the reading of the Word.
 - Yet in the same vein, I don't think that it would be repetitive or diminish the meaning to do it every week. It will never be unprofitable to remember Christ's death and sacrifice for us as sinners.
- › 2) There really is no NT standard for practices, and they fluctuate overall the map of Christian history.
 - Calvin was weekly based on his convictions.
 - Some might advocate for annually, based on the Passover services (1 Corinthians 5:7, 11:25)
 - Yet, what remains is that it is a command given to observe, and to stir to remembrance. It is not isolated to a specific Sunday of a month, or a service on the calendar.
- › 3) The church should operate in both a spiritual climate that declares the truth of Christ and stirs the people to remembrance. It should be pastorally determined yet never failing to be regular.
- › **Proclaiming it reverently, victoriously, with full praise and participation in the blood-bought body of Christ together.**

Closing

- › That when we come to worship, we come together as the people of Christ, identified in the ordinances, proclaiming the work of Christ until He comes again.
- › It should be our desire to worship the Lord in faithful obedience to these ordinances as a regular element in our worship. Through remembrance of Christ in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. And celebration of the Lord's work in building His church through the Great Commission in the ordinance of Baptism.