



“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” I Corinthians 2:2.

The Church Ordinances

Lesson Aim: The Study of Articles 12, 21, 13. 12. Water baptism (immersion) to be administered to believers only and by divine authority as given to Missionary Baptist churches. 21. We believe that baptism to be valid must be administered by the authority of a true scriptural Missionary Baptist church, and we believe that a so-called Baptist church which knowingly receives alien immersion is not a scriptural Baptist church, and its ordinances are not valid. 13. The Lord's Supper as a church ordinance is to be administered to baptized believers only and in scriptural church capacity.

L334. Date: November 1964. **Text:** Matthew 3:1-8, 13-17; I Corinthians 11:23-26. **Topic:** Church: Ordinances of; Baptism; Lord's Supper.

INTRODUCTION—Today's study is on the subject, “The Church Ordinances.” We believe there are two church ordinances: **Baptism** and the **Lord's Supper**. They are “ordinances” in that their observance has been ordained (instituted with the command that they be repeatedly observed) by the Lord Jesus. They are “church” ordinances in that they are set in the church and may be administered only to a church. Jesus, the Head of the church, is the only One who could set ordinances for her observance.

A church ordinance may be defined as a ritual or ceremony which the Lord Jesus appointed to be administered in His churches as a perpetual memorial by visible sign of His saving sacrifice on behalf of mankind and their attendant redemption. Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and also the believer's death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ. The Lord's Supper pictures the crucified body and shed blood of the Lord and also, by eating and drinking, shows that the believer finds spiritual sustenance in Him. Each local church is

responsible to God to keep the ordinances in their original purity, purpose, and design. Jesus commanded the disciples to wash one another's feet. Is this a third ordinance? No. It is expressive of humility and love, but not of the Lord's sacrifice.

The ordinances of the church are important. They are not sacraments which confer saving grace and thus help save the soul, as Roman Catholics hold. They do not contribute to salvation, but they are important. It is impossible to have membership in a Baptist church without baptism. Yet some Baptist church members have not observed the Lord's Supper one time with their church. This is a serious error. How can one be fully obedient to Christ if He refuses to obey the Lord's command to observe the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him?

EXPOSITION

I. BAPTISM, Matthew 3:1-8, 13-17.

1. The confession in baptism, verses 1-8. The first great preacher and baptizer in the Christian lineage was John the Baptist. He suddenly appeared about A.D. 26. He was a fearless preacher who denounced sin and demanded repentance of the people. His reason was, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Those who believed his preaching that the Messiah (Christ, Anointed One) was about to appear repented of their sins to prepare for Him. They confessed their repentance and faith by submitting to water baptism (by immersion) at the hands of John the Baptist. John refused to baptize any who did not manifest a sincere change in their lives in demonstration of their repentance.

So it is seen that the original purpose of baptism was a confession of repentance and faith. It is still so. Baptism is not essential to salvation because it is intended to confess a transaction between the repenting sinner and God which is already completed. John the Baptist baptized those who repented of sin and trusted in a Savior to come. The Lord's churches today authorize the baptism of those who repent of sin and trust in a Savior who has already come. To receive baptism for any other purpose invalidates it as New Testament baptism.

2. The imitation in baptism, verses 13-17. John's ministry reached its zenith with the baptism of Jesus. Jesus journeyed from Galilee to where John the Baptist was baptizing in the River Jordan, a trip of near sixty miles. He desired baptism at the hands of John who hesitated because of a sense of unworthiness. Upon Jesus' insistence, however, John baptized Him.

Immediately the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

Many suggestions have been given to explain why Jesus was baptized, including: (1) to identify Himself with John's message of the Messiah, (2) to give the Father opportunity to confess Him before men, (3) to set an example for His disciples, and (4) to demonstrate His coming sacrifice and victory in death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus' only explanation was **“Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,”** i.e., “It is the thing which should be done.” In many ways the Christian cannot imitate Jesus. His wisdom, power, compassion, and other attributes are far above our own. But there is one matter in which we can do exactly what Jesus did. One can be baptized just as He was. He who has received the kind of New Testament baptism which is described below has been baptized just like Jesus was!

3. The prerequisites of baptism. Baptists hold there are four things necessary for baptism to be according to the scriptural pattern.

(1) Candidate: The person baptized must be one who has repented of his sins and trusted Jesus as his own Savior. By repentance and faith, such a one is saved, John 5:24. Read Matthew 3:5-9 and Acts 8:36-38 to observe that one who has not repented and trusted Jesus is not a proper subject for Christian baptism. To baptize an unsaved person is of no advantage whatever to his spiritual state and may serve as a handicap to his trusting the Lord later. The proper candidate for baptism is one who is already saved by repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) Purpose: The only valid purpose in baptism is the confession of faith in Jesus as a personal Savior. If baptism is performed for any other purpose, it is not performed for the same purpose as New Testament baptism. Baptism performed for any other purpose is not to be accepted as valid by the Lord's churches. Since baptism is to be a profession of faith, by showing the candidate has died to sin and risen to a new life in Christ, private baptismal services (practiced by some) are not to be commended. The sole purpose of baptism is to confess salvation by faith which one already enjoys.

(3) Mode: The only valid manner in which to perform baptism is the immersion of the candidate in water, once, backwards, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Valid baptism is by immersion only. Rituals of pouring or sprinkling water on one is not New Testament baptism. Baptism is a “going down into the water,” a burial, and a “coming up out of the water,” Ads 8:38-39 cp. Romans 6:4-5. Moreover, the Greek word which is translated “baptism” means “to plunge, to dip, to

immerse” and could never mean sprinkling or pouring.

(4) Authority: Only a true New Testament church has the authority to administer Scriptural baptism. The authority to baptize was not given to individual Christians or to ordained ministers. Listen carefully to the ordination ceremony of a minister and observe that no “authority to baptize” is conferred in the process of ordination. **Only the local church has authority here.** Not even denominations can authorize the administration of the ordinance of baptism. Only scriptural doctrinal position can remove this authority from the local church. She receives it from her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptists hold a unique position regarding baptism. We reject all forms of so-called baptisms performed in the wrong manner regarding candidate, purpose, mode, or authority. The church which knowingly receives as valid a form of baptism which is unscriptural (known as “alien” baptism) forfeits her right to be considered a true church. Because of our unique position on baptism, Baptists insist on performing the ritual of scriptural baptism upon those united with the church from other denominations. By such demands, we stay true to the New Testament and protect the purity of the doctrine. We must never grow lax in this matter.

II. THE LORD'S SUPPER, I Corinthians 11:23-26.

As baptism uses the element of water to picture its meaning, so this second ordinance uses the elements of unleavened bread and “the fruit of the vine” to picture its meaning. What should this ordinance be called? Some have called it “The Sacrament,” “The Eucharist,” and “The Communion.” The Bible calls it “The Lord's Supper” and no other name should be given to it, I Corinthians 11:20.

1. Institution. The original institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, and I Corinthians 11:23-26. Each account plainly states that it was instituted by the Lord Jesus. He had just observed the Passover meal with His disciples. With the remains of bread and wine left from that solemn observance, He gave this symbolic picture of His death—a crucified body and shed blood.

Since the Supper is of no human institution, it is an important part of the ministry of the church. It is as important that this ordinance be observed as it is essential that baptism be administered. The church which neglects administration of the Lord's Supper is as much in error as a church which neglects baptism. The Lord instituted the Supper and commanded its observance. The church should obey in hearty devotion.

Symbolism. When Jesus said, “**This is my blood of the new testament**” and “**This is my body . . .**” (Matthew 26:20-28), He was speaking figuratively. He did not mean the bread was His actual flesh and the fruit of the vine was His pure blood, but that they symbolized such. Roman Catholics seriously err here in holding to a literal interpretation of these words. They believe that in the mass the priest is able to crucify Jesus **anew**, just as He was crucified on the cross! Moreover, they hold such repeated sacrifice of Jesus is necessary to their salvation. In fact, they actually believe the real sacrifice of Jesus was in the upper room, at the institution of the Supper, and not on the cross! Of course, the Bible strictly denies this, Hebrews 10:10-14.

In the Lord's Supper we partake of a bit of bread and drink a bit of wine or grape juice (according to the custom of the church) thereby remembering the crucified body and shed blood of the Lord. The blessing of the ordinance is in the heart of him who observes and not in any inherent merit in the elements used. The elements are symbols, nothing more.

3. Memorial, verse 24. The observance of the Supper is proper only when it is done in remembrance of the Savior. The ordinance fails in its purpose unless it quickens the heart of the participant in remembrance of Calvary and leads him to greater dedication to the crucified and risen Lord.

Because it is a memorial, the Supper should be partaken of prayerfully and lovingly. Many congregations are asked to bow in an attitude of prayer during the observance of the ordinance that they may the more easily commune with the Lord.

Some denominations hold the Lord's Supper is a time of communion between Christians. Hence, they invite all Christians to partake of the “Communion” with them. Baptists believe the communion is between the believer and the Lord and that this is a **church** ordinance the same as baptism. We do not declare any criticism of others in not inviting them to partake in the Supper. Indeed, if they wish to partake in the Supper with Baptists, let them join a Baptist church, receive scriptural baptism, and partake in each observance of the ordinance.

4. Regularity. The Lord's Supper should be observed regularly by each local church. The Bible does not set a certain time for its observance. Various churches observe it weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually. Occasionally a church is found which seldom observes it, but that is rare. Possibly most churches of our fellowship observe the Supper once each quarter—four times a year. This gives members the opportunity to observe it annually at the very least and does not permit the ordinance to be commonplace if one observes it each time. It is unwise to condemn one for

observing it often or not, since the spirit of the observer is the primary thing. Each church should see that the ordinance is not neglected in her services.

5. Participants. Baptists are accused of being “narrow” or “close-communionists” regarding the Lord's Supper. This is because we do not invite all denominations to join us in the observance. Actually, we are close concerning baptism. We believe that baptism must come before the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the person who is truly saved but without scriptural baptism as defined above, is not qualified to come to the Lord's Supper. Those whose baptism is not counted scriptural are not invited to participate.

But what about those with scriptural baptism? Should a church invite Baptists from other congregations to participate? There is room for question here. Actually, each church is responsible for the administration of the ordinance for her own members. Since the church should offer the ordinance to those subject to her discipline, she should confine the observance to her membership. However, if a church should wish to invite visiting Baptist brethren to participate, she would not be violating any specific Scriptural principle known to this writer.

6. Consistency. The Supper should be observed by the Lord's churches “till He come,” verse 26. The ordinances are still valid. They should be observed without ceasing. So long as there are true churches in the world—which will be until Jesus returns—the ordinances must be observed and administered. Both of the ordinances are a vivid witness to men—saved and unsaved. They speak of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, of His victory in resurrection, of redemption through faith in Him, of the hope of resurrection, of and of the sure fact of His second coming. This witness needs to be given over and over again. The Lord's churches must not fail to declare the message of redemption by ordinance as well as by sermon. When it is enough, the Lord will come and call His children home.

7. Administration. The elements used in the Supper are bread and wine (or grape juice). The communicants are to partake of both elements. The ordinance is to be observed by the assembled congregation of the church, Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:18, 20, 23, 33-34. It is not to be taken to the sick nor observed privately. The church, as a body, is responsible for seeing that the ordinance is properly administered, I Corinthians 11:2, 23. A church member may exclude himself from privileges of participation in the Supper by immoral conduct, I Corinthians 5:1-13; disobedience to the commands of Christ, I Corinthians 14:37; II Thessalonians 3:6, 11, 15; heresy, Titus 3:10; Acts 20:30; or schism, Romans 12:17. The ordinance can be observed only by the authorization of a local church.

8. Open communion. We object to “open communion” (inviting all who

call themselves Christians to partake) for these reasons. (1) The doctrinal statements of all Christian denominations (except some English Baptists and Free Will Baptists) call for “close communion” though they may be “open” in practice. (2) It assumes an unscriptural inequality between the ordinances. Open communion treats baptism as if it was optional and the Lord's Supper as if it was indispensable. (3) It tends to do away with baptism all together. “If the highest privilege of church membership may enjoyed without baptism, baptism loses its place and importance as the initiatory ordinance of the church.”—A. R. Strong. (4) It tends to do away with church discipline. By inviting all to come the church has no authority to refuse one who is clearly unworthy. (5) Wherever error in doctrine makes one ineligible for Baptist church membership also makes him ineligible for the Supper. (6) It is based on a false sentiment that the Supper is a “communion of the saints” and that close communion breaks the bond of brotherhood in Christ. Baptists have good reasons for their insistence on each local church observing the ordinance for the good of her own members alone.

CONCLUSION —The ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are sacred obligations upon the churches. The faithful church will observe them regularly and reverently. The ordinances have no contribution to make to one's salvation, but speak rather of the Lord Jesus who takes away men's sins. As they have been entrusted to the church, we should have an increasing respect to our own local church which Jesus Christ has so honored. **“Now I praise you, brethren, that ye . . . keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you,”** I Corinthians 11:2.

Questions

1. What is a “church ordinance”?
2. What are the two church ordinances?
3. What is the difference between an “ordinance” and a “sacrament”?
4. What four things are necessary for valid baptism?
5. In what sense is the Baptist position on baptism unique?
6. What is the proper name for the second ordinance?
7. What were the circumstances surrounding its institution?
8. How is the Supper a memorial and a symbol?
9. Who authorizes the administration of the Supper?
10. How could the ordinances be made more meaningful in your church?