



“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: To study Articles 12, 21, and 13 of our Doctrinal Statement.

L321. Date: November 1969. **Text:** Matthew 3:5-8, 13-17; I Corinthians 11:23-26. **Topic:** Church: Ordinances of. **Doctrine:** Studies In;

INTRODUCTION—A church ordinance is 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.

We believe there are two church ordinances, viz., Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are “ordinances” in that they have been commanded (ordained) by the Lord Jesus. They are “church” ordinances in that they are set in the church, administered only by the church, and remind the participant of Jesus who is the Head of the church.

The ordinances testify of Jesus. Baptism pictures His death, burial and resurrection by which the believer is made dead to sin but alive unto God. The Lord's Supper pictures the crucified body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus and the believer, by eating and drinking, testifies that spiritual sustenance is found in Him alone.

The doctrinal statement of our attitude toward these two ordinances has been expressed thus: “We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost: to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect, in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life; that is prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord's Supper, in which the members of the church by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination.”

The ordinances of the church are important but they are not essential to salvation. They are not sacraments which confer saving grace and so help to save a man. Yet, they are important.

How many members of your church were admitted without baptism? None! How many have never received the Lord's Supper in your church? Very probably, several! Why this inequality of the ordinances? Perhaps the following comments will help someone understand the better the significance of obedience in observing these rituals.

EXPOSITION

I. THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM

1. Manner. — How is New Testament baptism performed? There are several modes commonly practiced today. (1) The candidate has a little water sprinkled on his face. (2) The candidate has the sign of the cross made on his forehead by the damp finger of a priest. (3) The candidate has a little water poured on his head. (4) The candidate is submerged in water one time, backwards, in the name of the Holy Trinity. (5) The candidate is submerged in water three times—backward or foreword—each time in the name of one person of the Holy Trinity.

Which is New Testament Baptism? Does the Bible say? Yes, there is clear indication of the manner in which the earliest disciples baptized as commanded by Jesus.

Baptism is the immersion of the entire body of the believer in water, one time, backwards, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is evident in view of these considerations.

(1) “Baptizo” is the Greek word transliterated “baptize” in our English language. It literally means “to plunge; to dip; to submerge; to immerse.” This is the word which is always used for baptism in the New Testament.

(2) Those who are baptized are said to have gone “down into the water” (Acts 8:38), been baptized (immersed), and then “come up out of the water” (Acts 8:39).

(3) Baptism is a picture of the burial (which follows death) and the resurrection which the Lord Jesus performs, Romans 6:3-4. Only immersion can truly picture burial and resurrection. Moreover, you do not bury a corpse three times, but once. So the burial in baptism is one submersion. A corpse is also buried upward and this is the position in baptism.

All Bible scholars who are honest will admit the New Testament teaches immersion as the original form of baptism.

2. People. — Who is to receive Christian baptism? The only proper candidate for baptism is a person of sufficient understanding that he has repented of his sins and trusted Jesus as his own personal Saviour before he is baptized.

John the Baptist refused to baptize those who did not manifest by changed life that they had truly repented, Matthew 3:7-9. Therefore, he did not baptize infants; they were incapable of such evidence of repentance.

Philip did not baptize the Ethiopian eunuch until he had confessed positively and clearly his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Acts 8:36-39.

Paul and Silas baptized the Philippian jailor only when he “believed in God,” Acts 16:31-33.

There is not one single instance in all the New Testament record where an infant was baptized. Neither is there a case where one was baptized when he was not trusting Jesus having repented of his sin.

The proper subject for New Testament baptism is a person who is already saved because he has repented of his sins and is trusting Jesus as his personal Savior.

3. Authority. — Who can administer true New Testament baptism? And who has the authority to empower another to administer the ordinance?

All authority in heaven and earth resides in Jesus as the Son of God, Matthew 28:18. Jesus, in turn, authorized His disciples to perform the ceremony of baptism upon those who became believers through His personal ministry, John 4:1-2. So long as He was on earth the disciples performed the ritual under His authorization. But there came a time when Jesus was no longer to be personally among men as before. He made arrangements for baptism to continue after His departure.

Calling the eleven disciples to Him on a certain mountain in Galilee, Jesus commissioned them, **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen,”** Matthew 28:19-20.

They took this literally as an authorization to baptize those who became converts. Peter and the apostles baptized those converted on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:41. Philip baptized converts who responded to his preaching in Samaria, Acts 8:5-12. Ananias (so it seems) baptized Saul of Tarsus upon his conversion near Damascus, Acts 9:18. Peter baptized converts in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, Acts 10:47-48. Unnamed brethren baptized converts made in Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch as they

fled from the persecution of Saul, Acts 11:19-20. Paul baptized converts made during his missionary journeys, Acts 16:14-15; 16:33; etc. There is no record of any person being counted a member of the Christian community until he had been baptized.

Wherever the gospel was preached the ordinance of baptism was performed in generation after generation. And so it has come down to us today. This ordinance is restricted to the authority of the local church congregation in order to maintain it in purity of manner and meaning and in order to assure a regenerate church membership so far as possible. So you and I have been baptized by the authority of the Lord Jesus vested in a Bible believing congregation of Christians. 4. Purpose. — It is not necessary for a person to receive water baptism in order to be truly saved. In the act of baptism the believer is said to “fulfill all righteousness.” And the Bible clearly states that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done” that salvation is made sure, Titus 3:5.

Why baptism? It declares in a most impressive manner the truth of the gospel. Suppose you had never seen the ceremony before. Observing an immersion baptism, what would you think it was meant to portray? Burial and resurrection! Yes, the burial and resurrection of Jesus by which the believer has died to sin (is buried) and rises to a new quality of life. Baptism is, therefore, intended as a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus as one's own personal Savior. And it so beautifully fulfills that purpose. Is that why you were baptized? Why be baptized apart from this purpose?

II. THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. Name. — This ordinance is commonly called “The Lord's Supper” today because it is called by that title in the Bible, I Corinthians 11:20.

Others refer to it as the “Communion” thereby stressing the idea of fellowship with Jesus through the observance. Some call it a “sacrament” thinking it bestows grace upon the recipient which helps him be saved.

2. Origin. — From the days of the Exodus from Egypt an annual observance of the Passover was observed among the Hebrew people. Jesus, being a Jew, joined His disciples in the observance of the Passover meal. Then he took the bread and drink remaining from that meal and instituted the Lord's Supper. He left His followers the memorial of Himself in this simple act. By breaking bread and drinking beverage they were always showing forth the crucified body and shed blood of Jesus.

The early disciples never go away from this observance. They met regularly for “the breaking of bread” as an ordinary meal and as a memorial

Supper, Acts 2:46; I Corinthians 10:16. And so the ceremony has come down to us today.

3. Nature. — The Lord's Supper is a solemn ceremony. It is a communion with the Lord Jesus where we remember in a most vivid way His sacrifice on our behalf. In a sense there is also an element of communion between believers (I Corinthians 10:14) though a distinction should be made between “church communion” and “communion of the saints.”

But the supper is not a sacrifice. Some believe that in the Lord's Supper, which they call “the mass,” the Lord is actually sacrificed again for sin. They also believe that such repeated sacrifice is necessary for salvation. The Bible strictly declares this is not true. Hebrews 10:10-14 is a blessed expression of the finished work of Christ that needs never to be repeated.

The supper is a memorial, a remembrance, to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests unto our God.

4. Manner. — The elements used in the Lord's Supper are unleavened bread and a drink made from grapes. (There is no positive evidence whether it was actual wine or fresh grape juice which Jesus used.) The bread is broken to picture the crucified body of the Lord. The drink is poured to show His shed blood both by pouring and by color. The communicants partake of both the bread and the drink.

The ordinance is to be celebrated by the assembled church, Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:18, 20, 23, 33, 34. The frequency of its observance is not indicated by New Testament example nor teaching. It is the responsibility of the church to see that the ordinance is properly observed “as often as” is expedient, I Corinthians 11:2, 23.

5. Symbolism. — In most vivid terms the Lord's Supper symbolizes the death of Christ for our sins, Mark 14:24; Hebrews 13:20. It speaks also of our personal appropriation of the benefits of that death; we have received Him and live of Him just as we receive food and live of the food by eating and drinking, I Corinthians 11:14. It testifies that the believer is continually dependent upon the once crucified and now risen Saviour for all spiritual life and blessing, John 6:53. The joy associated with eating and drinking symbolizes also the coming joy in the Kingdom of God, Luke 22:18; Mark 14:25; Matthew 26:29.

6. Participants. — Those who share in the Lord's Supper must be regenerated. The ordinance is an expression of life in the believer since the dead do not eat and drink, I Corinthians 11:27-29. All Bible scholars agree, too, that only those who have been baptized should participate. Nowhere in the New Testament is there the slightest hint that the unbaptized shared in

the Supper. See Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41, 46; I Corinthians 10:1-3. Indeed why should the unbaptized wish to share in it?

We believe, too, that it is advisable to limit the observance of the Supper to members of the local congregation observing it. (Frankly, this writer cannot quote chapter and verse at this point. It seems reasonable that each believer should partake of the ordinance in the congregation where he is a member.) Communion is a family rite and the participant should first be a member of the family. The ordinance should be offered by the church to those subject to her discipline—her members.

7. Significance. — There are four historical views of what happens in the Lord's Supper. Roman Catholics hold the doctrine of Transubstantiation—change of substance. They believe that at the point in the “mass” when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, they are changed into “the actual body and blood, soul and divinity” of Jesus even though they retain the appearance of bread and wine. Thus the priest offers the Lord Jesus in sacrifice each time he celebrates the mass.

Lutherans hold the doctrine of Consubstantiation—along with the substance. They believe the communicant, in partaking of the consecrated elements, eats the veritable body and drinks the veritable blood of Christ in and with the bread and wine, although the elements themselves do not cease to be material.

Presbyterians hold the doctrine of Spiritual Presence. Christ is thought to be spiritually present at the observance more than at any other time and thus brings blessings to all participants. Christ is conveyed through the elements to them.

Baptists and others hold it is merely a memorial supper. The bread and wine are mere symbols of the real person of Christ. Through these symbols the believer meets the Lord Jesus in his own heart just as he remembers a loved one by looking at a picture. The blessing is in the believer's attitude of heart and mind, not through any grace inherent in the elements or ceremony of the memorial observance.

CONCLUSION—There are two church ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. They have been set in the church by the Lord Jesus to bear visible testimony to His divine grace in redeeming sinners and preserving saints.

These ordinances are not passing in importance. They are to bear witness until Jesus comes again. Therefore each believer should join in glad observance of them as often as the church observes them. And since they have been entrusted to the administration of the church they should inspire

greater respect for the church which Jesus so honored.

These are sacred obligations. We must keep them exactly as He gave them. **“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. Why are the ordinances important to you?
4. Why do we hold to immersion for baptism?
5. Why do we insist only believers can be baptized?
6. How is the Lord's Supper a memorial to Jesus?
7. Why are bread and drink used in it?
8. Who should partake of the Supper?
9. What is the significance of the Supper to you?
10. How can you make the observance of the ordinances more meaningful in your church?