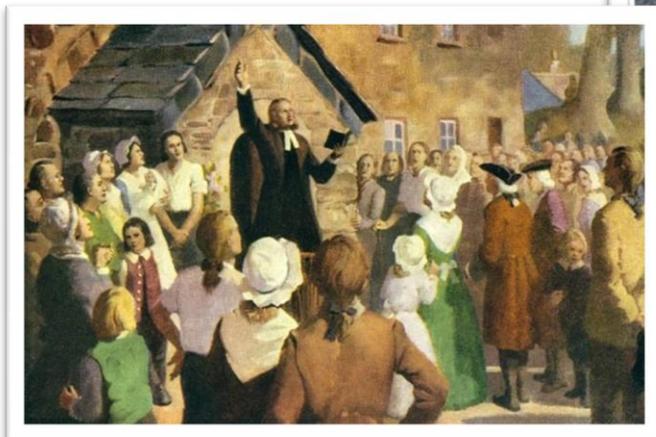


CHAPTER IX: The Sacraments

In the more Bible centered traditions, such as the fundamentalist and Baptists, or the Pentecostal/Charismatic, there has been, it must be admitted, something like neglect in the very important area of doctrine concerning the sacraments, sometimes referred to as ordinances. It is easy to see that this came about as a reaction against some of the traditional protestant denominations emphasis on the sacraments to the point of making them the cause of salvation. At John Wesley's testimony of



his sudden and dramatic conversion to Christ by believing God's revelation in Jesus, Wesley announced, "Until that point, I was not a Christian at all." That was such a strange thing for an ordained minister to say that one of his hearers could stomach it no more and burst out, "Sir, take heed that you do not so despise the sacraments." In other words, that man thought that the sacraments, infant baptism and communion, were what made

a man a Christian while Wesley was saying no, it is only by coming to personal faith in Christ that a man can become a child of God. The idea of a personal conversion was at one time, and in certain quarters still is, a radical notion and not at all very respectable. So we can see the mistakes of those who would have no more personal application of Christ's work in our lives than partaking of the sacraments and being a good member of the church; at the same time, we must not react so far against this view that we refuse to teach, preach, or participate in the sacraments which after all, were ordained by Christ himself.



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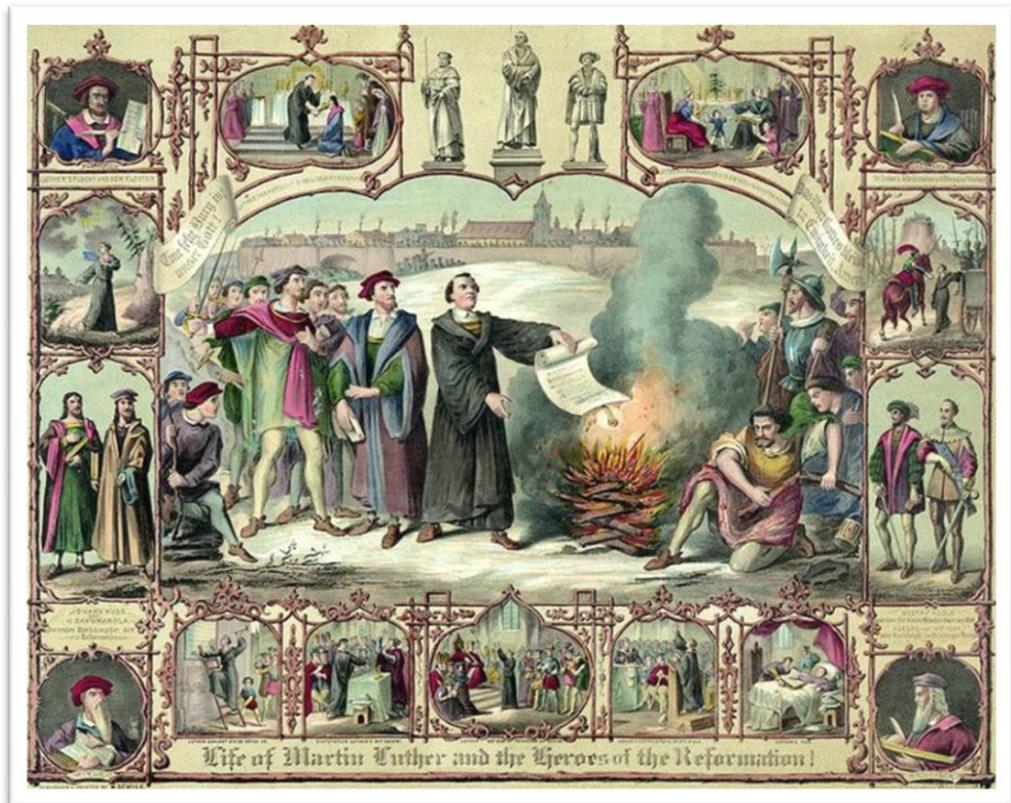


But just like some people who don't believe that the gifts of the Spirit are for today, don't preach on the Holy Ghost at all, considering him property of those people from the wrong side of the religious tracks-the Pentecostals. Let us not neglect to teach and preach the sacraments just because some have perverted and others misunderstood their meaning. The Holy Ghost is not the property of the Pentecostals, and Charismatic's and the sacraments are not just for the high church Episcopalians, traditional denominations or the Roman Catholic Church.

To begin with, the sacraments or as they are sometimes called, ordinances, are baptism and the Lord's supper, communion. There has been much debate about the number of sacraments because the Roman Catholic Church, out of which all western traditions sprang either directly or indirectly, claims seven as the number of sacraments. These sacraments of Roman theology include man made traditions such as confirmation and penance as well as the God ordained institution of marriage, along with baptism and communion.

The reformers, following their usual practice of throwing out everything not found in the Bible made the criteria for a sacrament to be, 1.) It must be scriptural and recognized by the church in the apostle's day, and 2.) The Lord Jesus himself must have instituted it in order to qualify as a sacrament of the church. Obviously, this would leave nothing but baptism and communion and so in this the reformers were correct.

The reformers defined a sacrament as an external sign whereby God assures us of his good will towards us, and we in turn testify of our faith in him by participating in them. The word merely signifies the external signs of baptism and communion. And just as the preaching of the word is



edifying to the faith of the saints, so also are the sacraments. They are meant to bring us closer to the Lord and to edify and encourage our faith. It is without doubt that in the early church the Lord's supper was given every bit as much prominence as the sermon or more. In time however, the communion came to be misunderstood and misinterpreted to mean something that it never did in New Testament times.

BAPTISM

The sacrament or ordinance of baptism is first mentioned in the ministry of John the Baptist. John's ministry was to prepare Israel for the coming of the messiah Jesus, and was basically a call to repentance. In Luke 7:30 we read "*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.*" Therefore, the baptism in water itself was not what saved anyone, but was an outward demonstration of the desire to turn from sin to God. Salvation has always been by grace through faith (Ephesians 2; 8-9) and in Romans chapter 4 Paul demolishes the notion that baptism or circumcision or any other work we can do saves us when he teaches clearly that all are saved the same way Abraham was saved. Some teach that baptism is the water part referred to in John 3:5 but to this it would seem obvious that chapter was entirely a comparison and contrast between the natural birth and the spiritual rebirth. Still others take Acts 2:38 and suppose it to mean that baptism is the cause of the remission of our sins. This might be reasonable if it weren't for the entire rest of the Bible, which teaches so clearly the doctrine of justification by faith alone, for that particular passage is phrased in such a way that if taken totally without regard to the rest of the scriptures it would be easily inferred that baptism, not repentance, is the cause of our sins being remitted (or forgiven, the word *afesin* is translated as both). "*Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" (Acts 2:38)



Upon the basis of this some teach that the water baptism is what gets your sins forgiven and also that the Holy Ghost is given based on something you do (repent and be baptized). As absurd as this is, because it totally ignores the scriptures which clearly show that the Holy Ghost is given only by faith (Galatians 3:2, for example), it must be dealt with. Why then can Acts 2:38 be read to mean that baptism rather than faith is the cause of our being forgiven? To begin with we must remember that all writers, either in scripture or anywhere else have their own style and their own particular characteristics. Luke the physician wrote in a style quite distinctive of the rest of the New Testament writers; he did this because he was a gentile, a native Greek speaker with a naturally better feel for the language. So in order to fully understand Acts 2:38 let us remember that in other places Luke deals with baptism and forgiveness and lets us see exactly what he means when he uses these words. Luke 3:3 declares, speaking of John the Baptist: "*And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*"

Almost the exact same expression is used here as in Acts 2:38 and here what is clearly meant is that if you repent and be baptized you will be forgiven but that forgiveness is to be attributed to repentance not baptism. The baptism was to show (a public confession) that you were turning from your sins to the messiah, hence the wording, the baptism of REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.

It is the repentance, not the baptism that procures a man the forgiveness of sins. Again we see this in Luke 24:47 "*And that **repentance and remission of sins** should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" Here he omits entirely the very mention of the sacrament of baptism, which he surely would not have done if it were the baptism that brought forgiveness, or remission of sins.

As to the best answer towards those who believe that baptism saves us- that the thief on the cross was not baptized and yet was surely saved they reply that he was saved under a different dispensation. To which we answer that salvation is the same in all dispensations and back it up with Paul's crystal clear teaching in Romans 4 that all are saved the same way Abraham was saved, by trusting in God's promise. Anyone still refusing to be convinced will not be convinced even if the archangel himself came down and brought the apostle Paul and Martin Luther with him just to explain it.

Having dealt with what baptism isn't, let us look briefly at what it is. Having already said that sacraments are external signs we can see this in the comparison between baptism and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In both Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 Paul likens water baptism to burial with Christ and to resurrection with Christ. In this way baptism is a symbolic representation of the whole Christian experience. We die to sin and the law and we are raised up to righteousness in Christ. The old man, descendant of Adam the disobedient dies and the new man, descendant of Abraham the obedient lives instead. Baptism also serves as a public testimony that you confess Jesus as your savior and the new convert to Christianity is received publicly into the local body of believers through the sacrament of baptism.

COMMUNION

The other of the two sacraments is the communion of the blood and body of Christ, sometimes called the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. The tendency in the fundamentalist as well as the Pentecostal traditions has been to focus on the communion being only in remembrance. It certainly is in remembrance but it is not ONLY in remembrance. Therefore, while it is symbolic and symbolizes Christ's death for our sins it is not merely symbolism any more than Christ's promise to be with us when we are gathered together in his name is merely symbolic.

When the church comes to assemble in his Name, we do this not merely in remembrance of him although we certainly assemble partly in remembrance of him, but not totally. We assemble not merely to remember the savior who came and went long ago; we assemble in the expectation that his promise is true and that he walks in the midst of the churches and that he is truly present among us.



Therefore, the communion is symbolic but is also spiritual in that the very real presence of the Holy Spirit makes Jesus real to us in the sacrament.

Much wasted energy and even a few wars have been fought over the fruitless question, How? How is he in the sacrament? The Bible gives us no answer and what scripture draws a veil over it would be immodest in us to inquire into. Let it suffice just to say that the sacrament is symbolic, done in remembrance of him and spiritual, done in fellowship with him in a very real though spiritual way.

Let us remember also that the communion of the blood and body of Christ, unlike baptism, was not something brand new that Christ instituted on the night he was betrayed. For on that night he was partaking of the Old Testament ceremony of Passover.

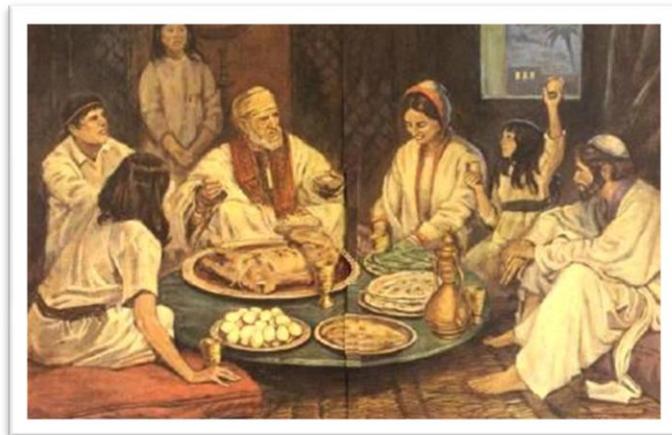
So while it is true that the last supper was the first communion, let us remember that the first communion was the last Passover. On the other hand, the last Passover was the first communion. In other words, the communion is simply a

continuation of the Passover celebration. The Passover commemorated God's deliverance of his

people out of the Egyptian bondage and culminated in the slaying of a lamb, which was eaten by the people who were delivered. The lamb of the Old Testament Passover was a symbolic representation of Christ who, when the Passover was instituted, was looked for in the future. In that time people got saved by looking forward to the cross of Calvary just the same as we now get saved by looking back to the cross of Calvary where Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was

the high point of history and the Passover lamb represented what to them was the greatest moment in history when their messiah would come. So the Passover is the communion of the blood and body of Christ in that it symbolized the sufferings of the messiah for the sins of the world. Of course, the people in Old Testament times didn't know all about Jesus the way we do, they obviously had only a limited revelation right through the centuries until the very time of Christ. Moreover, as the Passover testified to their faith in the messiah Jesus, so the Lord's Supper testifies ours.



However, it is the similarities to which we would direct our reader and the reason for that is this: we would have all to see clearly that salvation is through the cross of Jesus alone, has always been through the cross of Jesus alone, and always will be through the cross of Jesus alone.

DOCTRINAL PURPOSE OF COMMUNION

The communion also serves a doctrinal purpose or a very real and practical aid to our faith and beliefs. It is well known, not only to those who study church history but also to anyone whose memory of the church reaches back a decade or so that many churches and movements which start in the red hot fires of revival and the purity of repentance often fizzle out into a dead orthodoxy or outright heresy.

Many a cult can trace its roots to the old saints who tarried for the Holy Ghost among the brush arbor meetings. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses began, as a sincere Bible study among people who were truly zealous for a purer church. There is in us an inborn tendency to wander from the first principles of the faith. Look at the early Pentecostal hymns and notice what their theme was: "Just Over In the Glory Land, I'll Fly Away, and Everybody Will be Happy Over There" serve as a reminder that the early Pentecostals, rather like Abraham, were looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

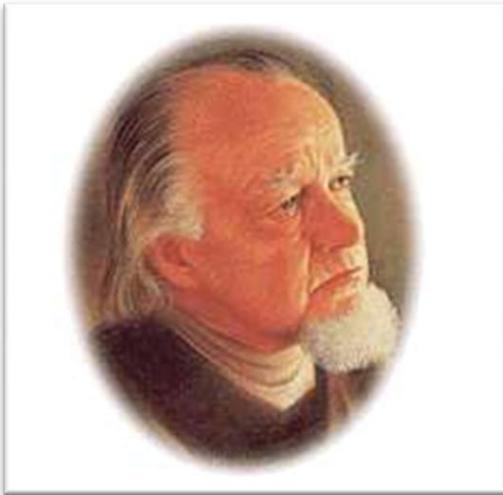
These hymns show a heavenly mindedness that brings to mind the injunction to "*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,*" (Colossians 3:2). Likewise in the early days of the charismatic movement, as distinct historically from the Pentecostals, I myself remember the emphasis being mostly on the conversion experience, turning to Jesus from sin. The message that God forgives sinners seemed to be the main focus along with the supernatural power of God to intervene for good in people's lives. Yet since the seventies, many of those same churches have either disappeared or completely changed, and within the charismatic movement itself have sprung new churches whose focus is much less upon the Glory land or over yonder. Shifting from one doctrinal emphasis to another can lead to heresy and to that church becoming spewed out of Christ's mouth.

The early Methodist movement, which did more to get people saved in the 19th century than anything else in the church, today argues over whether or not they should allow homosexual marriages and I think no sane person would fail to agree that whatever name they bear, they cannot be the heirs of the Methodist revivalists of the 18th and 19th centuries. One of the purposes of the communion is to keep us from this natural tendency we have to wander from the pure gospel, to manmade traditions, to outright rejection of the teachings of the Bible, as in the case of the homosexual debate.

The whole of church history is, in fact, a series of restorations to the first principles of the Christian faith. When the church had forsaken the doctrines of the Bible then God raised up men to restore them. This would never be necessary if we did not have a tendency to wander off into heresy or to camp out on a few non-essential pet doctrines as has happened repeatedly in church history. In the Old Testament it was ordained that the tabernacle (and later the temple) services should begin and end each day with the offering of a lamb. This was known as the morning oblation and the evening oblation, and was a representation of Christ. The obvious point here is that the people and especially those who ministered before the Lord, should be brought to focus their attention upon Christ, even though at that time the ancients new but little about him. However, the lesson for us in this is that no matter what doctrine or teaching we emphasize we must bring our thoughts back around to the centerpiece of Christianity-Jesus Christ, the lamb for sinners, slain.

As the morning and evening oblation of the lamb was intended to raise men's minds to their need for a sacrifice to atone for their sins and to assure them that God provided for their atonement, so the communion is intended to raise our minds to the cross of Jesus where all of the Old Testament types and symbols were fulfilled. In this way we are recalled at the beginning and at the end of every day to the foundation of the Christian faith—Christ and him crucified.

One of the ways this restoration to our first faith through the communion is effected is by self-judgment. If the communion were merely a remembrance and there was no presence of the Holy Spirit in it then people who took communion in the wrong attitude or not appreciating what it symbolizes would not have been chastened so severely as Paul says they were in 1 Corinthians 11:28-32. *"But let a man examine himself, and so eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. but when we are judge, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."* Just think how closely we would inquire



into our own hearts, confessing all our sins and growing in holiness if we truly believed Christ was present in such a way that his immediate chastening would be apparent if we were to take the bread and wine unconfessed, harboring some lust or pride in our hearts, holding on to ungodly or worldly attitudes.

So the communion serves the purpose of bringing us into a closer relationship with Jesus and not only with the Lord but with the church as well. *"For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread."* (1 Corinthians 10:17) Of course, as everyone knows we are brought into closer communion with each other through the sacrament but we are also, or should be, brought into a feeling of kinship and love for all Christians, the whole body of

Christ. Having followed me thus far I will take the liberty of adding to all other Christians not only those who are now alive in the world but those who have gone on before us. Yes, when you partake of that cup and of that bread you are reminded that you are one with Paul, with Peter, with the prophets who foretold of this day and with the apostles who proclaimed it.

Not just them only but with the entire people of God throughout all ages from before Abraham to Luther and Calvin, to Wesley and Whitefield to our own day. We all become one through that greatest event in all history, the cross upon which was poured out ALL of God's wrath against ALL of our sin. Thank God for that blood that was freely given for us. Thank God for that sinless body which was voluntarily broken for us. We can never, ever, appreciate it enough.