

Church Ordinances.

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Some thirty years ago the subject of church ordinances was vigorously discussed on this continent. The Baptist position was assailed and defended to the great advantage and advancement of the truth as Baptists hold it.

Among the writers of that day Prof. Geo. D. B. Pepper D. D., wrote on "The Mutual Relation of Baptism, and the Communion." From his writings I have largely quoted in this paper.

We are not without indications that the Divine purposes of the ordinances are but imperfectly understood in our churches. The opening up of this subject, even should it provoke controversy may be for the extension of righteousness.

BAPTISM AND COMMUNION.

Before entering upon the discussion of my topic you will allow me to note the wideness of meaning between an ordinance and a sacrament, and the misleading and mystifying views which prevail among our people when these words are used synonymously.

Sacrament in the Episcopal church catechism is said to be "an outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches essentially the same doctrine. "It considers Sacraments to be holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace."

In Roman Catholic theology it is a visible sign instituted by Christ which confers *ex opere operato*—an actifying grace—by external works or acts of worship—on man. In a general religious way the word "sacrament" carries with it the idea that by its observance special grace is conferred and special blessings of grace received. On the other hand an ordinance is "a rule established by authority, or an established rite or ceremony." "Simply a decree or dispensation of the Divine being." In Baptist theology we have no place for a sacrament. It may be we have been misled in our conceptions of church ordinances, as well as in our practices by borrowing ideals from the Church of Rome and her daughters.

The New Testament idea of baptism and the Lord's Supper are emphatically declarative rather than receptive, *i. e.*, declaring the grace received before the ordinance is administered or can be properly administered, rather than the grace received in and by the administration of the ordinance. The proof of this will more fully appear as we proceed.

And now a word as to

THE NATURE OF THESE ORDINANCES.

In each of these there is a prescribed visible, external act. In one by the use of water, in the other by the use of bread and wine. In each the external act is all that is seen by the spectator; but this that is seen is not the ordinance, no more than the body seen is the real man discovered. This is only the form not the spiritual life which seeks to express itself in acts. The form ordained even when strictly followed does not constitute the ordinance. These ordinances, to properly be, must have form and must have spiritual life. Baptism and Communion as ordained, are expressions of faith in Christ and the spirit of obedience to Christ. Nothing but this is baptism, nothing but this is communion in the New Testament sense of the words. This spiritual life—at least in germ—and this expression of it in act are the cardinal facts of design.

It may be that the application of this doctrine to our church records will convince us that we may have had fewer baptisms than we have reported, and even less communicants than the small percentage of our church members have furnished for the "Lord's table." For if the true spiritual life expressed in the ordained act is alone an ordinance, we can see that it is possible to have the form without the spirit, and the spiritual life without the prescribed form or act, and so in neither case have we the observance of a New Testament ordinance. An unregenerate one may be baptized upon a profession of faith—a false profession as was Simon's of Samaria. To the eye he is in the church ordinance when in fact he is in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. So too is it possible to eat the bread and drink of the cup without spiritual life, fail to discern the Lord's body and fall to be in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Yes, worse than a failure! To attempt to declare by a divinely appointed act the great fact of regenerate life when the fact is absent, is an awful falsehood, and a blasphemous perversion of the ordinance.

The converse of this quite as true. There may be the true regenerate life, the love, the loyalty, the faith of God's elect, the spirit of obedience in the absence of the expression of all this in ordained form or act of ordinance. It is from this last class that Baptists receive their candidates for the ordinance of baptism and church membership. And so it is that we as Baptists stand for the right observance of ordinance without uncharitably

judging our fellow-Christians who differ from us in matters of faith and practice. Loyalty to Christ and an intelligent obedience to his commands are always consistent with the widest fellowship of his redeemed people.

THE INTERRELATION OF THE ORDINANCES.

We have chosen to discuss the interrelation of these ordinances rather than either of them separately, that in this way we may more fully discover their real intent and forcefulness in the Christian church.

Of their co-relation we notice:

1st. They are co-ordinate, equal in rank, equal in function.

2. In their origin invested with the same authority. "Go ye and baptize." "Do this in remembrance of me."

3. In perpetuity, baptism and Communion are co-ordinate. Of the first we have in the command "Always to the end of the ages." Of the latter "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come." The perpetuity of both ordinances is thus fixed by divine statute.

4. Again co-ordination is seen in their design. They both stand related to spiritual life. They speak of its origin and continuance—of its source—of its attainment at the central fact of the gospel, as the greatest fact of human history—they alike testify with equal clearness and equal authority.

5. In what constitutes baptism and Communion we find them co-ordinate. In each there is the voluntary individual act. On the external side of which there is nothing to distinguish these acts in a moral sense from the ordinary doings of life, such as in bathing, eating and drinking. The real ordinance lies in the fact that one like unto the Son of God is with them. In each ordinance the candidate is not alone; but though unseen yet in the high act of realism the Rider Brother is with them—"Buried with Christ in baptism."—"This is my body."

Since by divine appointment baptism and communion are of equal rank in the church, they must have like observance in church life. It is therefore no slight offense for our church members either to refuse or neglect to observe the Lord's Supper. By this they cast the mists of doubt around the validity of their baptism. To neglect either ordinance is to offend in both. If the believer's experience is consulted it will testify to this fact.

Secondly, Of the interrelation of baptism and communion we have proof in the fact that they stand, by divine appointment, to each other as "antecedent and consequent." Baptism is the antecedent—communion the consequent. As it may be thought that this leads me onto debatable ground, I think it is sufficient just here to say I am speaking of ordinances—of the divine unchangeable appointments for the Christian church. Having shown that these ordinances are co-ordinate; for the present the work in hand is to notice how harmoniously they stand to each other in mutual relationship. If the fact that they stand to each other by the ordaining of Christ as antecedent and consequent conflicts with other theories, we are notwithstanding this quite outside of debatable territory, and I intend to keep far afield from debate.

Perhaps ere we proceed further it may be well to here state in more direct form the main question under review in this paper, viz.: What do these ordinances stand for in the Christian church?

You will permit the writer to answer.

a. In baptism and Communion alike we have a "declaration of the candidate's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and of the Heavenly Father's faith in the obedient believer—"the answer of a good conscience toward God." In these ordinances we have an epitome of the whole gospel proclaimed. In baptism we have the sin life and the saved life declared—death to sin—the burial of the old life—the resurrection to newness of life with Jesus Christ. For baptism is a personal act—the declaration of personal transaction between the believer and Christ—of a new personal experience—of a new born purpose of the beginning—of a new life and of the putting on of the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness and truth. All this declared to the world by words of confession spoken, and by way of obedience in baptism and only properly by baptism. So we have a spiritual transaction properly embodied in a God-appointed act or ordinance complete in its design, wanting nothing in its ability to declare the great work of regenerating grace in the human soul—the birth from above."

Just so in Communion we have a personal act testifying to a personal fellowship with Christ and his body—the church. This is a continuous act corresponding to the continued life of the believer. But Communion with Christ and his body in the realm of the spiritual can only be a reality to one who has a spiritual life begun; and the beginning of spiritual life and church life is only properly declared in ordinance by baptism. It is in this way that baptism and Communion as personal acts stand for the true spiritual life—life commenced and life continued—begotten of Christ and feeding on him.

Now what these ordinances stand for together, lies

their relation in the Divine order as "antecedent and consequent." Baptism the antecedent, Communion the consequent, the spiritual life continued, the consequent of spiritual life begun. To reverse this order, or to omit either ordinance, is to make the observance of baptism or Communion as declarations of a personal faith senseless and useless. If the sacramental idea could be brought in here it would relieve the situation somewhat. For if by receiving either ordinance special grace is conferred, in a sacramental way, the candidate might be the gainer by receiving either ordinance in any order; but as acts of personal faith the right order must be preserved in order to an intelligent and intelligible declaration of personal faith.

Had we time to pursue this subject further we would find that these ordinances, not only as "declarations of a personal faith," as we have seen, but as proclamations of gospel truth and as prominent and indispensable factors in church organization and church life, Baptism and Communion, in order to fulfil the divine purpose must preserve this order of antecedent and consequent; otherwise they teach falsehood instead of gospel truth, and make impossible the existence of a church after the New Testament order.

CLOSE COMMUNION.

It is with pleasure we record the fact, that barring the sacramental idea, which has been mentioned in this paper, the consensus of the several Christian bodies is in harmony with the Baptist position, both as to the right observance of these ordinances and as to their place in church organization.

This agreement of the churches embraces three particulars:

1. That these ordinances are of the Lord's ordaining, to be observed by his church.

2. That in the absence of proper qualifications no person can properly receive either baptism or the Communion.

3. That the church is to decide as to the fitness of all candidates.

Therefore, the term "Close Communion" as applied strictly to Baptists is a misnomer.

To confirm this statement of the case, it may be deemed sufficient for the present to quote from two church authorities.

In the Methodist Discipline 1886 pg. 17. Sec. V. "The Lord's Supper."

39. "Let no person who is not a member of our church be habitually admitted to the Lord's Supper, without examination, and some token given by the minister."

40. "No person shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper among us, who is guilty of any practice for which we would exclude a member from our church."

Free Will Baptists on Communion "Invitation to the Lord's Supper."

BUTLER'S THEOLOGY PG. 428 A. D., 1861.

"How shall it be determined who are Christians? Shall each one be sole judge of his own case, and the ordinance be open to all who are disposed to partake?" This would be virtually, opening the door to all: and Unitarians, Universalists, Mormons, and even the immoral, might partake to the profanation of the ordinance and the grief of Christians. The ordinances of the gospel should not be thus exposed. The church is Christ's body. All its members have spiritual communion with the Head of the church and with each other and may freely associate in the visible ordinance.

The proper course, as we conceive, is to invite all Christians, or gospel believers in regular standing in any evangelical church. Each church should clearly define what she understands by evangelical, as thus applied, so that none need mistake the invitation. Those only can be recognized as evangelical who hold both theoretically and practically the doctrines essential to salvation: It should be distinctly understood that persons in regular standing are not invited, unless they are true believers. As a general rule, we say, all such and no others should be invited to the ordinance. None can rightfully complain of this rule as too strict. If, after all, one partakes unworthily, he does it to his own condemnation alone.

Exceptions to the general rule may be allowed in special cases. Where the evidence of Christian character is clear and undoubted, one who is not a member of any church, might be permitted to partake. Of such cases each church will judge for itself. The practice of some in allowing professed converts before uniting with the church, rejected members of other churches, and indeed, almost any, to come to the Lord's table, is to be condemned. We should require satisfactory evidence that persons are Christians, before admitting them to the ordinance, equally as in the case of receiving candidates for baptism. Gospel order, purity and harmony require that in no ordinary case should one be invited to the Lord's table who is not in regular standing in an evangelical church. It should be understood, also, as before remarked, that none such are invited unless they are real Christians.

None have a right to the privileges of this ordinance but gospel believers, those walking in the path of obedience to God. All such have the right, and should on no account be prohibited. The gospel rule on the subject, as we understand it, is that Communion at the Lord's Table is the Communion of Saints.

We may add that as "each church is to judge for itself" this is Close Communion.

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