

The Ordinances of Christ, Part 1: Baptism

Acts 2:36 ESV (Pg. 531) Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” **38** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” **40** And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” **41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

- I. I am beginning a new 2 week mini-series. I want to try and bring bring biblical clarity to a couple of key things in the life of the church. I am calling this series “the Ordinances of Christ”.
 - A. We are going to be discussing Baptism this week, then, in two weeks (after Father’s Day), we will take a look at communion, or the Lord’s supper.
 - B. For many of you, these rites of the church may be completely misunderstood, Others may have never thought deeply about why they are important, especially if you grew up going to church. I pray that your understanding and appreciation for these powerful ceremonies, given to us directly by Christ, will increase.
 - C. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are often called “sacraments” of the church. A sacrament is a rite or ceremony used to unveil a mystery. I, however, will use the word “ordinance” instead of “sacrament” (as many evangelical protestants have throughout the years). I prefer this word for a couple of reasons:
 1. Both baptism and the Lord’s supper were directly “ordained” by Christ, and he commanded that they be practiced in perpetuity by the church. By virtue of this command, they are “ordinances” of his.
 2. Also the idea of “sacrament” has been both added to, as well as distorted into something unbiblical, by Roman Catholic tradition.
 - a) In addition to baptism and communion, Catholics also recognize 5 other sacraments that are not necessarily either biblically ordained, or commanded by Jesus.
 - b) Catholics teach that sacraments actually convey grace; meaning that people who are baptized are regenerated by that act, and people who partake of the Lord’s Supper (or Eucharist) are actually consuming something that becomes the literal body and blood of Christ, thus producing a spiritually redemptive effect in the partaking.
 - (1) Most protestants (like us) reject this idea that there is a miraculous quality in the waters of baptism, or the bread and wine of communion. We place significance rather in the **faith** that accompanies the rite, and not in the ceremony or elements themselves.
 - (2) Saint Augustine said that a sacrament (or ordinance) is a visible sign of an invisible grace. So we will use the word “ordinance” to distinguish between our doctrine and that held by Roman Catholics.

The visible sign of Baptism is water. The invisible grace which is at work in us is five-fold. We will discuss each of the five momentarily.

3. Unlike the Catholics, we don't teach that Baptism can save you, but rather that it is an outward, visible testimony of what God, through Christ, has done in you invisibly and internally by faith through grace.
- D. Jesus ordained baptism by being baptized himself by John the Baptist in Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, and John 1. This story gives us insight into what Jesus won for us through his death and resurrection. In his own baptism, we clearly see Jesus as our substitute, standing in our place.
1. But a difficulty arises when the New Testament tells us that John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance". So the question must be asked: of what did Christ need to repent?
 2. Nothing! Why then was he baptized? The answer is given to us when John resisted Jesus' request to be baptized by him. **Matthew 3:15 ESV "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."**
 - a) Christ was to provide his own righteousness, fully and perfectly, in substitution for all whom the Father would call to believe in him.
 - b) Therefore his baptism, even without the need of his own personal repentance, was a foreshadowing of what would be accomplished by our repentance and faith in him, and signified by our own baptism.
 3. Three things happened at Jesus' baptism that shed a beautiful light upon our understanding as to what he accomplished in the gospel:
 - a) First, when he came up out of the water, the heavens were opened. Sin barred all of humankind from God's presence. But because of Christ, the way was opened wide to receive all who would believe in his Name.
 - b) Secondly, the Spirit of God descended upon him, and the John says, he "remained" upon him. In the passage from Acts 2, Peter says the Spirit will be given as a gift to all of those who repent and whose sins are forgiven as a downpayment and a seal of all that Jesus won for us.
 - c) Last, the voice of God spoke from heaven, saying of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Paul says when we were dead in sin, we were aliens and strangers from God, but now, because of Jesus, we have been adopted into his family, and granted his righteousness, so God is as "well-pleased" with us as he is with Christ!
 4. Now, as a sign of what Christ has accomplished, we are commanded to **Matthew 28:19 ESV 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...**. This allows both ourselves and the disciples we make to share in a deep identification with Christ.
- II. This is the first of the five "invisible graces" communicated by baptism: the declaration of our association with the Triune God: The Son stood in our place, the Spirit has descended upon us who believe, and the Father has spoken his approval of us as we are in Christ. **Galatians 3:27 ESV "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** A new identity! We are "innocent by association"!

- A. Secondly, and more specifically, baptism is how we identify with Christ in both his death and resurrection. The two clearest passages in the New Testament on Baptism as a doctrine of the Church speak of this facet of “invisible grace”:
1. Romans 6:1 ESV “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that **all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”
 - a) Paul is saying that the great symbolism of baptism is that of a watery grave. When we immerse people it symbolizes that when Christ died, we died and were buried with him. So we don’t live in, or for, sin anymore, because we (in a very real sense through faith) died to sin with Jesus.
 - b) But there is a secondary symbolism as well. When we are raised up out of the water, it is a bold statement that we have been raised from death just as Christ was, and we can now walk in newness of life.
 2. Colossians 2:11 ESV In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **12 having been buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. This is just a slightly different restatement of Romans 6. By faith in Christ, the power of our sinful nature has been nullified (no matter what miscellaneous sins we may still struggle with), and now we may walk pleasing to the Lord as he works to change us into his image.
- B. Next is the “invisible grace” of cleansing from sin. We all know that water is the primary vehicle for washing the body, and this symbolism wasn’t lost on the Biblical writers either. When Saul of Tarsus met the disciple Ananias after his conversion on the road to Damascus, Ananias told him, Acts 22:16 ESV “**And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.**”
- C. A fourth “invisible grace” communicated by baptism is to symbolize our escape from divine judgement. When Paul says in Romans 6 that “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death” it means more than just that we died to the power of sin by our association with Christ, but that our sin was judged in Christ’s death as well.
1. No human being can live unaided underwater for more than just a few minutes, and oftentimes we see water used in an outpouring of God’s wrath. Such was the case in Noah’s time, and when God destroyed the Egyptian army by drowning them in the Red Sea, and when Jonah was cast into the ocean after he disobeyed God.
 2. But baptism gives us the confidence that all of our sin has already been judged in Christ’s suffering on the cross; so that though we may enter our watery grave under God’s wrath and judgement, we will emerge to a shout of “This is my beloved son! My Daughter! I am well-pleased with you!”

3. *“No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the pow’r of Christ in me! From’s life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny! No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand! Til he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I’ll stand!”* This is the confidence that Baptism signifies!
- D. Lastly, baptism demonstrates the obedience to Christ for incorporation into his church. The passage we read in Acts shows a three fold progression: They received the word and repented, they were baptized, and then were added to the church. This is seen over and over again all throughout the book of Acts.
 1. This is neglected in the Body of Christ today. Many have lowered the bar of membership to just “those who are willing to show up” without ever seeking evidence of true repentance, let alone requiring the public profession of belief and surrender that is made by baptism.
 2. The other elders and I are in the process of defining and clarifying what it means to be a member of North Ridge Life Church. I can assure you that this three fold process will be central to that clarification. Belief and Repentance. Baptism. Added to the church.
 - a) If you say you believe, but have no willingness to obey Christ in baptism, you cannot be counted a member of his body. We are not saying that you’re not saved, we’re saying that we cannot make a confident determination that you are, because of your unwillingness to obey Christ.
 - b) Baptism is the single biblically prescribed method of declaring association with Christ and his church; not “praying a prayer”, or raising a hand, giving money, or performing some duty. It is what Christ commanded, therefore, it makes a powerful symbolic demonstration of where your life is in relation to the gospel; so it must not be neglected.
- III. So who should be baptized? Let me suggest three types of people:
 - A. Those who have come to faith in Christ. That doesn’t mean those who are perfect, or those who are inordinately spiritual. It means those who have determined that Jesus Christ is your only hope in life and death. Those who realize they have no option but to run to him for mercy and grace. Those who desire to be eternally safe under the protection of his wings.
 - B. Next, those who came to faith some time ago, yet have never obeyed Christ in this matter. You may think, “I’ve been a Christian a long time so that’s not really for me. We’ll let the new believers do it.” Let me remind you that there is no expiration date on your need to obey! If you truly are a believer, it’s time to make a public, obedient profession of that fact. Why wouldn’t you?
 - C. Lastly, those who were baptized earlier in life, but you realize that it was just another notch in your works-based religion, or a way to satisfy someone in your family. Maybe you were a child and didn’t understand at all what you were doing. You are invited to come to the water and make public your statement of belief in the free, unearnable grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!
 - IV. If you would like to obey Christ in this visible sign of invisible grace, write me a note on a white card. I’ll contact you this week and we’ll set something up!