

Taking It Seriously - The Ordinances

REVIEW: We are in a series that has extended in practical terms our series on Ephesians. Ephesians showed us, in theological terms, how the church was established by God, calling us before the world ever began to be a part of this new community that he was creating called the church. God did something in this new community that had never been done before - Jews and Gentiles were placed on level ground by their acceptance of Christ's work on the cross for them. The rest of Ephesians goes on to explain how the 'new self' behaves toward fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been carrying that idea out by looking at a variety of ways in which we take seriously this concept of church; things like why we come to church in the first place, baptism and membership in a church, and last week we looked at elements that you should look for in a good church.

INTRO: Today we are going to take a look at the ordinances of the church. Some faith traditions call them sacraments. I generally avoid that term because, depending on the tradition or background you are from, it has some specific meanings attached to it that I do not intend to use.

I. Ordinances or sacraments of the church

A. So what is the difference between a sacrament and an ordinance

B. Let's start with definitions for each

1. Sacrament - the word we use comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word for "mystery" (Gk. - mysterion; Latin - sacramentum)
 - a) With that understanding, it actually helps us understand a couple of things about sacraments
 - (1) First, sacraments are only understood by revelation from God
 - (a) The average person does not get what the point is
 - (b) This would explain why the first century the church was accused of cannibalism - they were eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ
 - (2) Second, sacraments are only understood up to a point
 - (a) They are by definition a mystery
 - (b) So there are parts that we probably will never fully understand even with the revelation God has given us about them
 - b) I said before that depending on your faith background, it may bring different things to mind when the word sacrament is used
 - (1) In the Catholic church, they recognize seven sacraments
 - (2) The protestant church only recognizes two - partly having to do with the term ordinance
2. Ordinance simply means a rule or law to be followed - the prescription of specific actions

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- a) The reasons protestants recognize two ordinances is because from that word we get our guideline for what should be recognized
 - (1) Ordinances are instituted by Christ Himself
 - (2) There is an express command to continue the practice
 - (a) Matthew 28:18-20
 - (b) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 - (3) They are essential symbols of divine acts that display the gospel
 - (4) Additionally, ordinances are given to the CHURCH to be observed, not individuals
- b) With those as parameters, the only two things that fall into that category would be baptism and the Lord's Supper
 - (1) So I will not fill our time debating the other sacraments that the catholic church observes
 - (2) Largely because, if we use this definition, we don't need to debate the rest - the thing that we would have to content over is the definition - and we will not take the time here
- C. Now, still under the general category of the ordinances, I said in that definition, or qualification of what is recognized as an ordinance that they are essential symbols of divine acts that display the gospel - I want to explore this for just a few minutes
 - 1. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are linked with two important OT rites: circumcision and the Passover
 - 2. Baptism: Colossians 2:11-12
 - a) Circumcision was the rite of initiation and identification with God's people in the OT
 - (1) Every Jewish male was circumcised on the eighth day
 - (2) Every convert to Judaism was circumcised to declare publicly and permanently that they were followers of the One True God of Israel
 - (3) Baptism is linked by Paul in Col. 2 as the same thing for the NT believers
 - (4) It was the initiation into a life of following Christ as well as the public identification of following Christ
 - 3. The Lord's Supper: 1 Cor. 5:7; 11:26
 - a) With these two verses together, we can see the concept of Christ being the Passover Lamb that was sacrificed for us
 - b) When we take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming that sacrifice, Christ's death
 - 4. Each of these ordinances is linked to very specific ideas from the OT, all of which point toward the gospel

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- II. So how do we take the ordinance of baptism seriously?
- A. “Wait a second pastor! Time out buddy! We just went over baptism two weeks ago. We get it, we are supposed to follow Christ in baptism to identify with the family of God. We don’t need to hear it all again.”
1. Thanks for the reminder folks! But no need to worry for two reasons
 2. First, I am coming at this from a different angle
 3. Second, I will spend the greater amount of time on the Lord’s Supper today
- B. Last time we talked about baptism it was why we need to be baptized - today I want to call to our attention why it is important to be there when others are being baptized
1. One of the things that your attendance does at baptism is display your commitment to the great commission
 - a) Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
 - b) We as Christians are supposed to be about the process of making disciples and expanding God’s family and the kingdom
 - c) When that process begins of being a disciple and someone wants to display their loyalty to Christ publicly, it really is important for us to be there to support them
 - d) And it shows that we are supporting with our presence the person’s new life in Christ and their discipleship
 2. Another reason to be present when baptism is performed is it is a great reminder for yourself about your choice to follow Christ
 - a) It allows you a moment to pause and reflect on your commitment to Christ
 - b) Perhaps your commitment is as strong as ever, and you are in an ever deepening relationship with Christ - this should simply help you to reflect on, and praise God for what he has done in your life
 - c) Perhaps your commitment has faded some over the years - allow it to be a time of calling you back to your first love, as John says in Revelation
 3. A third and final reason to be present when someone is being baptized - it is showing an acceptance of this person into the family of God
 - a) When that person being baptized accepted Christ, they became a part of the family of God - the universal church

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- b) When that person chooses to be baptized, it is their tangible way of displaying what has already happened in the universal church, but this time it is happening in your local church
 - c) So imagine if someone in the family was getting married
 - (1) Would you go?
 - (2) There might be a reason that prevents you like distance, or work or illness
 - (3) But let's assume none of those are factors
 - (4) Do you not think it would be hurtful to your family member if you lived close enough to attend, but you just didn't come?
 - (5) Or how about if someone in the family had a new baby
 - (a) You might not be able to make it to the hospital right away
 - (b) But you would be excited to welcome this new life into the family
 - d) This is the way we need to view baptism
 - (1) We are welcoming a new life into the family
 - (2) It should excite us in our souls that nothing could keep us from being there for baptism - whether we know the person or not
- C. Okay - now on to the Lord's Supper - where I want to spend a little more time

III. How do we take the Lord's Supper seriously

- A. While baptism is an ordinance of initiation which I performed one time, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance that continues on for all believers
 - 1. One is union with Christ
 - 2. The other is Communion with Christ
- B. First, we need to understand that communion is something deeper than many of us give it credit
 - 1. It is spiritual participation in the body and blood of Jesus
 - a) 1 Corinthians 10:16 "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"
 - (1) The word used for participation is a good word - however the word is normally translated "fellowship"
 - (2) It means "an association involving close mutual relations and involvement"
 - b) So what the verse is saying is that when we (meaning genuine believers) take part in communion, we have an intimate association or fellowship with the blood of Christ and the body of Christ
 - c) Sadly, most Christians do not give the elements of communion the respect they deserve

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- (1) The Bible here is pointing at a mystical experience by taking part in communion
 - (2) There is a participation, or deep fellowship with Christ when we take the elements and observe communion
 - (3) We can't really explain how - hence the mystery part we talked about previously
 - (a) We don't fully understand how it happens
 - (b) But Paul is making it abundantly clear that it does take place
2. It is also a memorial to Jesus Christ
- a) A memorial is by definition "something to preserve the memory of a person or event"
 - b) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 - (1) Notice what was said - "do this in remembrance of me"
 - (2) So the Lord's Supper is a memorial to a person
 - (3) But, because it reminds us of Jesus sacrifice for us, it is also a memorial to the event of the cross
 - (4) Many of you know that I have been working on my genealogy for some time now
 - (a) One of my most famous American ancestors founded three towns in America
 - (b) There is a monument to him in Fairfield, CT, and about three schools in MA named for him
 - (c) Want to know who he is? Roger Ludlow
 - i) How many of you know what Roger Ludlow was most famous for doing?
 - ii) Come on people! He has a monument! You don't know this?
 - (d) That's because even with the best of monuments, the memory of the person fades away
 - (5) Not so with the memorial to Jesus - it is not a monument, it is an event - something to be experienced
 - (a) We participate in it, not just stand and look at it
 - (6) Oh, and Roger Ludlow - he wrote the first constitution in America for the state of CT, that was used as a road map to write the constitution of the United States - That's my 11th great Grandpa
3. Celebrating communion is a proclamation of Christ's death
- a) Look again at 1 Cor. 11:26
 - b) The elements used in communion remind us of the bloody death of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins

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- c) So when we call attention to the elements in public worship, we are proclaiming Jesus death
 - (1) It sets the gaze of those assembled in the congregation and puts it on the cross
 - (2) You might not be a preacher or evangelist, but when you participate in communion, you are participating in something that is proclaiming the death of Jesus
- 4. Communion is also a look ahead to the return of Christ
 - a) Again, verse 26 “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
 - b) Communion is a look back to the cross, a reminder of communion with Christ in the present, but also a look forward to the promise of eternal life with Christ in paradise
 - c) This actually parallels the Passover well
 - (1) Charles Hodge “As the Passover was a perpetual commemoration of the deliverance out of Egypt, and a prediction of the coming and death of the Lamb of God...so the Lord’s supper is at once the commemoration of the death of Christ and a pledge of his coming the second time.”
 - d) It really is quite impossible to participate in the Lord’s Supper and deny that Jesus will return
 - (1) The ordinance reminds us that, one day the invisible presence of Jesus at the table, will be replaced by the physical presence of Jesus at the table
- C. So allow me to give you some practical ways in which you can take the Lord’s Supper seriously each and every time it is served
 - 1. Because communion is such a time of remembrance, we need to seek to center our thoughts on Jesus Christ
 - a) So in light of that, I will encourage you each time you take communion to look in four directions
 - b) Look up, look back, look ahead, and look around
 - c) These come directly from J.I. Packer
 - 2. Look up
 - a) Look up to the One who overshadows you in dignity
 - b) Look up to Jesus our Mediator
 - (1) He stands between us and God
 - (2) He offers His life and blood for us to give us His righteousness
 - (3) He has made us a part of His family
 - c) Look up to Jesus, God’s One and Only Son, our Redeemer, and our Savior

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3. Look back
 - a) We need to learn to look back at the cross and think through the implications of what it means for us in our lives
 - (1) Sin's penalty has been paid
 - (2) We have been reconciled to a loving Father through His Son
 - (3) We have been adopted into God's family
 - (4) The power of Satan, sin, and death were all defeated at the cross
 - b) Jesus and the cross should always be central to what we gaze at during communion
 - c) The Passover serves well here for us to focus our hearts on as well
 - (1) This coming Easter I will preach the sermon from the perspective of the Passover - so make sure you are here and invite a friend
 - (2) At the institution of Passover, Israel was told to sacrifice a perfect lamb, eating the meat and smearing the blood on the doorposts
 - (a) The blood was shielding the Israelites from God's plague on Egypt - the first born child dying
 - (b) It foreshadows our being protected from certain death because we are covered by the blood of the Lamb of God
 - (c) The lamb, of course, points forward to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
 - (3) The meal itself is instructive as well
 - (a) They were instructed to prepare the meal which showed an urgency of haste on their part
 - i) Unleavened bread (don't wait for it to rise)
 - ii) Let no food remain until morning
 - iii) Eat the meal with belts and sandals on, and your staff in your hand
 - iv) God's point: Your freedom is at hand - you need to be ready
 - (1) Which showed trust in God's word
 - (b) The cross, the spiritual counterpart of Israel's earthly redemption, is about to deliver you from sin
 - i) Be prepared
4. Look ahead
 - a) "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."
 - b) When we take communion, we look forward to the day when He comes
 - (1) And the fact is that the Lord comes for each of us
 - (2) John 14:2-3

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- (3) The Lord comes to receive us to Himself when our mansion is ready - or when the Lord says it is time
 - (a) We talked before about this - no one leaves this world before it is time
 - (b) We just assume that we know when the right time is
 - (c) God has a plan and will call us to Himself when He is ready for us
- c) Also, there are some people that the Lord will receive differently
 - (1) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - (2) If God wills that you remain here until His return to earth, God will call all the rest together at an event known as the rapture of the church
 - (a) The idea that the word rapture is not used in the Bible is a bit of a misunderstanding
 - (b) The word is used - it simply comes from the Latin translation of these events
 - (c) The point is that when Jesus comes back at this point in salvation history, all believers on earth will be raptured (translated) into their heavenly bodies to be with Christ forever
- d) So either way
 - (1) Whether taken from this life and ushered to our new home that Christ prepares for us
 - (2) Or taken when Christ returns, we have something that we look forward to at communion
- e) Allow me to give you one illustration of this that might help put this in perspective
 - (1) Couples that are courting or even married couples - when they are away from each other, they find great delight in talking on the phone
 - (2) But greater the delight when they are able to be reunited and be with one another in person
 - (3) Similar to communion
 - (a) In communion, we experience Christ's presence in a real way and we enjoy it - much like talking on the phone
 - (b) Someday, the day we look ahead to, we will be with Christ face to face - that is something we should look forward to, and something we should tell Christ how much we are anticipating that day
- 5. Look around
 - a) This simply comes as a Christian duty

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- b) Communion, and for that matter our relationship with Christ was not meant to be an individualistic thing
- c) The grace and mercy that we receive from Christ, that we remember, and celebrate at the communion table should cause us to look around to the needs of our fellow man
 - (1) Both the needs of those in the family of faith
 - (2) As well as needs that we might come across in life
 - (a) Contemplate the story of the Good Samaritan from that angle - he is simply helping a person in need that he came across
 - (b) Might change our perspective on helping others in need
- 6. This fourfold way of looking (up, back, ahead, and around) gives a little different perspective on Paul's words that we examine ourselves
 - a) Not just for sins
 - b) But for focusing our hearts and our thoughts on Christ

IV. Taking it seriously

- A. These are but a few ways that you can take the ordinances of the church seriously
- B. Not only make sure that you have been baptized, but make baptism a priority to celebrate when new members come into the family
- C. Now that we know how serious an event communion is, we need to strive to really focus our thoughts on Christ, and praise Him for His grace and mercy
- D. There are more practical ways that we can focus during communion, but we are out of time for today