

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

9th April 2006

Read: Matthew 28: 9-20

The Significance of Baptism

Our Confession of Faith and our Catechisms teach the institution by Christ of the two sacraments of *Baptism & the Lord's Supper*. The Shorter Catechism, in answer to Q.92 states that "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed and applied to believers." The Catechism then proceeds under Q.93 to state that "The sacraments of the New Testament are, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper." These statements in our Catechism have been taught to generations of young people within historic Presbyterianism in the ages since the days of the Westminster Assembly; and as a church we still do so believing them to be founded on and in agreement with the Scriptures, the only infallible rule for faith and practice.

THE MEANING OF "SACRAMENT"

The word *sacrament* is Latin in origin, and basically signifies a holy or sacred oath. Throughout time many of God's people have disliked the word "sacrament" preferring to use the word "ordinance" instead, because of the misuse of the sacraments by the apostate system of Romanism. Rome views the sacraments as absolutely necessary to salvation, teaching that saving grace is actually conveyed to sinners by means of these ordinances, a position known as *sacramentalism*. Not only does Rome misuse these sacraments through her erroneous teaching and practice, she also abuses the whole concept by adding five other sacraments – confirmation, penance, holy orders, marriage, and extreme unction – for which there is absolutely no Biblical warrant whatsoever. Her addition of them, making seven sacraments in all, is both an arrogant delusion and a rejection of Scripture.

THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT

However, call them what we will, whether *sacraments* or *ordinances*, the point is that Christ did appoint or institute both Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Moreover, our Saviour did so to have them correspond to and replace the two Old Testament sacraments of circumcision and the Passover. But the vital thing is that we need to understand what a sacrament actually is. If we think again of our Catechism the nature of the sacrament will become clearer to us. Note the following:

1. A sacrament is an outward, visible, sign

This is Biblically correct in that baptism involves the use of water and the Lord's Supper is comprised of the two elements of bread & the juice of the grape. Note that the Catechism speaks of "sensible signs" signifying that which appeals to our senses. The water of Baptism is visible to us; and in Communion the bread and wine can be seen, handled and tasted by us. In Acts 8 the eunuch said – "See, here is water." And when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He placed the bread & wine in the hands of the Apostles so that they saw held and tasted the two elements. Therefore, in using the word "sign" with regard to the sacraments, it is being underlined that Baptism & the Lord's Supper are object lessons with respect to spiritual truths; those truths that pertain to Christ, His work for us and in us, and the spiritual & saving benefits that come to us as God's people.

2. A sacrament is a sign in that it is indicative of an inward work of grace.

Both sacraments signify the inward work of God's saving grace. In the case of Baptism there is **signified** our experience of union with Christ, the new birth, washing from sin & walking in newness of life. By the Lord's Supper there is **signified** the experience of the removal of sin's guilt & our acceptance before God through Christ's once & for all sacrifice. It is vital to note, therefore, that the sacraments do not confer saving grace on anyone. Rather, they are signs of that inward work but do not initiate it or confer it in any sense.

3. A sacrament is also a seal to the believer of his salvation.

See Rom 4: 11 which states that Abraham "received the **sign** of circumcision, a **seal** of the righteousness of the faith which he had." Here are the two words – sign and seal – used in Scripture with regard to the OT ordinance of circumcision: it was both a sign and a seal. But since in the NT Church baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant, then the same words – sign and seal – can be used of baptism and indeed of the Lord's Supper. Now, as already noted, the two sacraments are visible signs of the inward work of grace. But they are also seals of that work in this sense – they present truths on which we are to meditate and dwell within our hearts. And as we do so the Spirit of God applies & blesses those truths to our hearts so that we are edified. In this way the sacraments are seals – the Spirit of God uses them to affirm within the soul of the true believer the truths symbolised in the sacraments or ordinances.

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SACRAMENTS

As noted, a sacrament is an outward, visible sign of an inward work of grace and is also a seal or affirmation to the soul of the believer of the truths symbolised. Moreover, since Christ Himself has ordained these two sacraments for His people it is essential that they observe them. The observance of them is not optional for the believer but is obligatory because obedience is commanded by Christ Himself, as is clearly seen in the words before us today here at the end of Matthew 28 where Christ formally & officially institutes the ordinance of Baptism and commands its observance in the Church until the end of the world. In conjunction with our present studies on Christ's headship over the Church, I wish to preach on the sacraments, commencing with the matter of Christian Baptism – especially seeing it as it is one of the means of grace appointed by the Lord for His people. In this message today we will focus on one major point --

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

At once it must be stated that the primary significance of baptism is that it is a picture or symbol of our union with Christ, a point clearly in view in the statements on baptism in the Confession & Catechisms of our Church all of which refer to the believer's "*ingrafting into Christ.*" These creedal documents of the Reformed Churches also point out that purification from sin is signified by baptism. The Heidelberg Catechism Q.69 – "Christ has appointed the outward washing with water and added the promise that I am washed with His blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is from all my sins." Therefore, the real significance of Christian Baptism is that of the great spiritual transaction of union with Christ that results in cleansing from sin.

1. The basic significance of baptism – the principle of union -- is seen in the usage of the NT word for baptism.

With regard to the very sense and essence of the NT words, either the verb, *baptize* or the noun, *baptism* – the principal idea is that of union. Note Scriptures that make this exceedingly clear.

(a) 1 Cor 10: 1, 2 – here is a remarkable statement, namely that the children of Israel were "*all baptized unto Moses.*" Now, the point is there is no water in view in this event of baptism, yet the Spirit of God says that the children of Israel were baptized unto Moses. Indeed the word could be rendered "into" – *into Moses*, signifying union. The meaning is that they were united with Moses in the event recorded. They were in union with Moses as they walked on the dry sea bed and were exempt from water even touching them. They were not immersed in the sea, sprinkled by it, nor did it pour upon them – so not a drop of water is in view here with regard to this baptism! Thus, they were baptized into Moses in the sense of being in union with him – here "baptized" signifies union.

(b) Romans 6: 3, 4 – very plainly, union with Christ is in view. Note the words in v.3 -- "*baptized into Jesus Christ.*" Again we may say that there is not a drop of water here, though the word "baptized" is used. To make it clear – if there were any water in view in this reference then we would be forced to espouse baptismal regeneration since the baptism in view, as noted, unites the believer with Christ. But Paul is not dealing here with the sacrament of water baptism. He is speaking of a baptism that is spiritual, bringing a sinner into union with Christ and all of the merits of His death & resurrection, underlining that the principal idea in the NT words for baptize is union.

(c) Galatians 3 – first, see v.26: sinners become the children of God through faith in Christ. The word for "children" also means *sons* and has to do with the legal position of sonship in the divine family. But it comes as a result of "faith in Christ Jesus..." words that signify union with Christ as such words always do in the NT. But now see v.27 – the "in Christ" relationship, the union with Christ relationship, is now expressed in a somewhat different form by use of the word "baptized" – "*as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Again – there is not a drop of water in view. If there were then once more I say that we would have to become baptismal regenerationists. But, the whole thrust of the passage is union with Christ; therefore, by employing the word "baptized" the Holy Spirit again reveals its principal sense – union.

2. But while the NT word baptize denotes the principal of union, water baptism does not unite a sinner with Christ.

In the light of these Scriptures where the use of the word clearly indicates the concept of union, we are clearly shown the significance of the ordinance of baptism – first & foremost it signifies the believer's union with Christ. But it must be stressed that water baptism does not effect that union as many within what we might call "Christendom" will teach in the heresy of baptismal regeneration.

Let me put it another way – water baptism as an ordinance is the solemn *admission* of a person into the *visible church* but it does absolutely nothing to effect a person's inclusion within the *invisible church* or company of God's redeemed people. As noted it is true that the ordinance of baptism is seen in the NT to warrant a person's inclusion in the visible congregation, Acts 2: 41. But water baptism, no matter when or how it is administered, does not admit a sinner to union with Christ or His people. See 1 Cor 12: 13 – here again is the word "baptized" used in a sense that clearly is indicative of union; and in this instance it is union within the body of Christ. But as in Rom 6 there is no water baptism involved. Rather, it is a spiritual baptism wrought by the Holy Ghost; and it alone admits a person into the Church of the firstborn. This is one reason why baptism should never be called or accounted *christening* – which means, 'to make a Christian' – for water baptism makes no one a Christian, it only admits the individual to the visible church.

WCF section 5 – "*Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.*" Note it again in the light of our own Confessional teaching – the notion in any form that water baptism is necessary to salvation or that it guarantees salvation is a dangerous & damnable doctrine. See Luke 23: 43 – the penitent thief was saved without being baptized. Acts 8: 13, 23 – Simon the sorcerer after professing faith and being baptized remained "*in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.*" Note Paul's statements in 1 Cor 1 – if water baptism even contributes one iota to a sinner's salvation then Paul was very much astray in his remarks. See v.14 – if water baptism regenerates then Paul is saying "I thank God that I regenerated none of you." He could hardly thank God on that account! See v.17 – "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel." If water baptism regenerates then Paul's commission was wrong – why would Christ not send the apostle to promote regeneration by baptism? The point is clear – water baptism does not unite sinners with Christ. Rather, it is the work of the Spirit under the preaching of the Gospel to unite them with Christ.