

Title: The Sanctity of the Ordinances: Baptism

Theme: Baptism is a physical symbol of a spiritual reality: the believer's union with Christ.

Main Points:

1. The Meaning of Baptism
2. The Mandate of Baptism
3. The Method of Baptism

Introduction:

Earlier this year the BBC aired a documentary on the Crown Jewels of England.¹ The most famous jewelry in the world. The oldest part of the collection dates back to the second half of the 12th century.² In the documentary Queen Elizabeth II is reacquainted with the crown she has not worn in 65 years. Many are unaware there are several crowns for the British sovereign. Each year she wears the Imperial State Crown for the State Opening of Parliament, but there is another, St. Edward's Crown, that is only used for coronations. When the documentary aired, some viewers were alarmed and many pleased with how casually the Queen handled the crown. Apparently the only people in the world permitted to handle the crown without gloves are the Queen herself, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Crown Jeweler.³

Why is the crown important? Does wearing the crown make someone the sovereign? No, the crown is only an image, a symbol. It is a symbol of the position that the queen already has. It is a symbol of a present reality.

We will see that in a similar same way **Baptism is a physical symbol of a spiritual reality: the believer's union with Christ.**

I. The Meaning of Baptism

Before we diving into the meaning of baptism itself, I wanted to give a brief explanation of the Ordinances in general. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two ordinances of the church. Unfortunately, every denomination seems to have a different understanding of the reason and significance for them. As we go through baptism today and the Lord's Supper next week, we will do as we always do: go to Scripture. We cannot lean on church tradition, the word of Popes or preachers, or even our prejudices.

Some churches use the word "sacrament" instead of "ordinance." The word "sacrament" comes from the Latin "sacramentum" meaning something sacred or consecrated. The Latin translation of the Bible completed in 405BC used the word "sacramentum" when translating the Greek word "musterion," which means "mystery." Eventually a sacrament was associated with that which had a secret or mysterious significance.⁴

¹Anna Keay, "The story of the Queen's crown is more gripping than any Netflix drama," article posted 4 January 2018 at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/01/04/story-queens-crown-gripping-netflix-drama/> (Accessed 9 March 2018).

²Sarah Laskow, "The Oldest Object in England's Crown Jewels Is a Spoon," article posted 15 January 2018 at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/coronation-spoon-12th-century-england-crown-jewels> (Accessed 9 March 2018).

³Jo Tweedy and Rebecca English, "BBC Viewers Praise Queen for Being Casual about the Crown," article published 15 January 2018 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5270181/BBC-viewers-praise-Queen-casual-Crown.html> (Accessed 9 March 2018).

⁴Rolland D. McCune, "Systematic Theology III" (class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2008), p. 158.

As early as the 1600's "Hocus Pocus" was used by and as a term for court jesters and magicians.⁵ The origin of the phrase has been traced to the Latin "Hoc est corpus meum" which in English means: "This is my body." Hundreds of years ago the uneducated peasants of England heard the phrase in church and were told that the bread and wine turned into the actual body and blood of Christ.⁶ They then assumed that the Latin phrase the priest had uttered was a magical incantation.

Another important note about using the word "ordinance" instead of "sacrament" is that many understand a sacrament to be a means of grace, that is, the way or ways God transmits his grace to us. For instance the Catholic Church teaches seven sacraments or means of grace: Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick, Marriage, and Holy orders. A problem with saying that something is a "means of grace" is what is meant by "grace." The word "grace" is extremely common in the Bible. (135 times in the ESV.) Here are a few examples:

- **A Greeting.** In most of his epistles Paul uses the greeting "Grace to you." In a few he closes with "Grace be with you." (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 3).
- **Saving Grace** (Ephesians 2:5)
- **"Mega" Grace** (James 4:6)
- **Varied Grace** (1 Peter 4:10–11)

Why do I say all this? I'm concerned whenever someone starts talking about God's means of grace. If we mean that God uses physical actions and events to encourage our hearts or strengthen our faith then we might be okay with calling them "means of grace." However, if we mean that God communicates saving grace through these physical actions, that is, we receive saving grace when we partake of the sacrament, then no. They are not means of grace. **To be clear: the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper are not means of saving grace.**

Why do we limit the ordinances to only two? Because we look to Scripture and see what was ordained by our Lord and commanded to his disciples but also what was confirmed in the founding of the church in the Book of Acts. Only two items meet these criteria: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These two symbolize saving truth.

A. To Remember what Christ did

Romans 6:3–4

Water baptism reminds us of Jesus dying, going down into the grave, and being raised up again.

The Spirit baptism described in the Epistles correspond to water baptism. Jesus makes a similar comparison in Acts 1:4–5.

B. To Identify with Christ

1. Baptism does not save you or wash away sin.

Acts 16:29–33; 1 John 1:7

⁵"hocus-pocus," Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, Historian. 11 March 2018 article published at <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hocus-pocus> (Accessed 10 March 2018).

⁶This was true as early as the fifth century according to the Roman Catholic Church. See the Catechism http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm

2. Baptism does show you are with Christ

Galatians 3:25–27; Romans 6:1–7

The only point I'm highlighting here is that Spirit baptism unites us with Christ. Water baptism visibly identifies us with him.

C. To Proclaim your Commitment to Christ

1. Baptism is public.

Acts 2:38

2. Baptism is evidence.

Acts 2:41

II. The Mandate of Baptism

A. The Command by Christ to his disciples

Matthew 28:16–20

“*Baptizo* here is participial in form but is imperative in force as an explication of the command to disciple.”⁷

This was not just the eleven, Peter tells us in Acts 1:21–22 that others were there.

One can undoubtedly be a Christian without being water baptized, but such a Christian will be a disobedient Christian until he is.

B. The Confirmation in the Founding of the Church in the book of Acts

- At Pentecost in Jerusalem. Acts 2:38; Acts 2:41.
- After hearing Philip preach in Samaria Acts 8:12.
- After hear Philip's explanation of Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus Christ in Acts 8:36 the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized.
- In Acts 9:18 Saul of Tarsus [who became the Apostle Paul] was baptized.
- The new Gentile believers in from Cornelius' house were baptized. Acts 10:45–48.
- In Acts 16:14-15, 33 Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailor and his household were baptized after believing.
- In Corinth Acts 18:8.
- The disciples at Ephesus were baptized after having been baptized in John's baptism. Clearly they are different (and John was not a “Baptist.” He was a “baptizer.”) Acts 19:1–7.
- Paul himself baptized certain people. 1 Corinthians 1:13–17.

III. The Method of Baptism

A. The Prerequisite for Baptism is Belief

Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:37–38; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:14-15, 33 Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailor and his household were baptized after believing. Acts 18:8.

⁷McCune, “Systematic Theology III,” p. 159.

Because church tradition began to teach that baptism was a means of grace for the remission of sin, baptism became open for anyone needing such remission whether believing or not including those who were unable to believe, namely, infants.

The Bible never records a single example of a baby being baptized. The only evidence offered by those in favor of paedobaptism are the cases of whole households being baptized. But in each case the order presented is: preaching, believing, and baptism. No mention of children is made. (See Acts 10:44, 47-48; 16:14-15, 32-34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16)

B. The Proper Method of Baptism is Immersion

Mode of baptism refers to how someone is baptized. Some denominations teach sprinkling called aspersion or pouring called affusion. The Greek words for sprinkling (*rantizo*) and pouring (*epicheo*) are never used for water baptism.

The English word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “baptizo,” meaning “to dip.”

“John Broadus says correctly that the idea of ‘mode’ begs the question. The real question is, ‘What is baptism?’ No one argues over the ‘modes’ of the Lord’s Table, whether to recline at a table, kneel at a railing, sit in a pew, etc. The question is, what action constitutes baptism? The ‘mode’ questions should concern such things as whether it should be in a tank, a stream, or a lake, and, probably by extension to today, whether the candidate should lean back, sit on a chair, get on his knees, etc. (*Immersion Essential to Christian Baptism* [American Baptist Pub Society, 1892], p. 8).”⁸

Also, remember we mentioned that baptism is a symbol of our participation in Christ’s death, burial and resurrection?

“Only immersion pictures this participation. (Affusion says baptism symbolizes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Christian or the bestowal of the Spirit in regeneration. Aspersion says it symbolizes the cleansing of the blood of Christ, patterned after the sprinkling of the blood in the OT offerings.)”⁹

By simply looking at Scripture we must conclude that baptism means immersion.

C. Those Performing Baptism are tied to the church.

“The local church is the custodian of the ordinances and it alone can arrange for baptism. This is against non-church, private baptisms in backyard pools, or para-church organizations such as camps that baptize at the close of a camping session, or other ad hoc types of occasions.”¹⁰

There is no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian.

Conclusion:

A wedding ring is symbol of marriage. Wearing a wedding ring does not make someone married nor does removing a wedding ring cancel a marriage. The ring is a physical symbol of a present and legal reality. Similarly, **Baptism is a physical symbol of a spiritual reality: a believer’s union with Christ.**

⁸Ibid., p.160.

⁹Ibid., p.161.

¹⁰Ibid., p.164.