

CHAPTER 28 - BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Description of the Ordinances

1. *Baptism and the Lord's supper are ordinances which have been explicitly and sovereignly instituted by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, who has appointed that they are to be continued in His church to the end of the world.*

(a) **Ordinances or sacraments?** Baptism and the Lord's supper are often called sacraments. 'Sacrament' comes from a Latin word which means 'something sacred'. However, the word has often been used with the idea that they have special power in themselves, such as in the Catholic Church. 'Ordinance' is a more simple word, less open to misunderstanding, which means "...a custom or practice established by usage or authority" (Webster's Dictionary). The Confession prefers the word 'ordinance', and explains it in the following words.

(b) Ordinances **"explicitly and sovereignly instituted"**. 'Explicitly', in the Confession, has the idea that these ordinances are in addition to the laws God established at creation, and so not necessary in themselves. For example, Abraham was neither baptized nor required to take the Lord's supper. 'Sovereign' implies that they are established because of the will of the King, and that alone. To despise Christ's ordinances is therefore to despise the King who gave them.

(c) Ordinances **"instituted by the Lord Jesus"**. It is He who commanded that all disciples ought to be baptized (Matthew 28:19); that He ought to be constantly remembered in the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). We properly submit to these ordinances only when we do it because *He* told us to do so; merely to do so out of habit or respect to the Church is wrong. Christ is "the only lawgiver" = the Head of the church. This is why there are only two such ordinances, and not seven, as the Catholics practice (confirmation, holy orders, marriage, penance, extreme unction). None of these were "explicitly and sovereignly instituted by the Lord Jesus".

(d) Ordinances **"to be continued ... to the end of the world"**. By promising His presence until "the end of the age", Jesus is commanding His church to make disciples, baptize, and teach them, until the end of the age. Participating in the Lord's supper is not only a remembrance of Him, but also a proclamation of His death "till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is therefore wrong for any Christian Church to ignore either of the sacraments, or to add to them or change them in any way. They must be practised as He instituted them.

Administration of the Ordinances

2. *These holy ordinances are to be administered by those alone who are qualified and called to do so, according to the commission of Christ.*

Who may administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper? The 1689 Confession seeks to avoid two extremes. The Westminster Confession (Presbyterian) says that only an ordained minister may administer them. A previous Baptist Confession (1644) taught that *all* disciples could administer them. "Those ... who are qualified and called to do so" is an expression that needs to be defined.

We know Jesus did not baptize, but His disciples did (John 4:2). It was specifically to the eleven disciples (apostles) that He gave the command to baptize (Matthew 28:16ff.). We are rarely told exactly who administered baptism - Philip, one of the seven baptized the Ethiopian (Acts 8:38); we assume that he also baptized the Samaritans (Acts 8:12), that Ananias baptized Saul (Acts 9:18), that Peter baptized Cornelius (Acts 10:47), and that Paul baptized Lydia (Acts 16:15); we know that Paul did baptize (1 Cor.1:14). In each case those who administered baptism were those responsible to preach the Word, although Philip had not officially been 'ordained'. Because the two ordinances are but visible symbols of the very same Word that is preached, it is right that the responsibility for administration rests with them. The actual performance may be delegated to a faithful brother. So with the Lord's supper, that is to be observed when the church is assembled, such assemblies being the responsibility of the elders (1 Corinthians 11:18ff.).