Baptism and the Lord's Supper

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Please read I Corinthians 11:23-31; Romans 6:1-6; Colossians 2:12, 13

All the many ordinances of the Old Testament have been superseded by two in the New Testament: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and God has put more spiritual significance into these two than into all the Old Testament ordinances combined, as death through a broken law gives place to life through a risen Christ.

The observance of these two ordinances is clearly enjoined upon us. In Acts 10:48 "He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord," and in I Corinthians 11:24, "This do in remembrance of Me."

Moreover, the mode of observing both ordinances is clear: baptism by immersion after saving faith in Christ —believer's baptism—and the Lord's Supper, not celebrated by a priest on behalf of the church, but each believer breaking the bread, and partaking of the wine for himself.

Let us therefore turn our attention to the deep, spiritual significance, and the personal challenge in these ordinances, for there is a grave possibility of carrying out the act in the prescribed mode, and being therewith satisfied while completely missing the high and holy purpose God had in instituting these two ordinances.

Just as our Lord took the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and condensed them into two—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—so He took all the ordinances of the Old Testament and condensed them

into two, placing one, baptism, at the beginning of His public ministry and the other, the Lord's Supper, at its end, as though to teach us that in them we have that which encompasses the whole Christian life.

Baptism signifies union with Christ the Head, and with each other as the members of His body. The Lord's Supper signifies communion with Christ and with each other. The first is once for all time, the second is repeated, "as oft as ye do this." Because union can never be broken, the body of Christ will never again be mutilated, so it does not need to be repeated; but communion can easily be broken, and, therefore, must be maintained. Acts 20:7 suggests that the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly, on the first day of each week.

Water baptism properly understood is a public acknowledgment of a fundamental fact in the Christian life. Romans 6 asks, Know ye not the significance of your baptism, that the link with the first Adam, the natural man, has been broken, and you have been joined to a new Head, Christ? But note that when the Holy Spirit according to I Corinthians 12:13 baptized us into the body of Christ, He did not put that old nature of ours into Christ, but He gave us a new nature. God sees the old nature (Romans 6:6) as crucified with Christ, as put to death, and when we see that great truth, we realize we have a corpse on hand, and we do with it what any sensible person would do, we bury it out of sight in the waters of baptism, and bidding it a final farewell we rise to walk in newness of life, on resurrection ground. Our baptism is in reality a public avowal to God, to our fellow believers, to our relatives, and to the unsaved that we have died to the old self, that we have buried it,

that we have risen to live a new life in association with our risen Lord on the victory side of the grave. It might help us to understand its significance better if at each baptismal service we put a notice in the obituary columns of the newspapers:

> "*So-and-so has died to his old self, has been buried, and has risen to walk in newness of life. Church members, fellow workers, and citizens note the change in his life.*"

Our witness for God is ineffective because our baptism is so unreal. The act of baptism should be the beginning of a new attitude to life that is daily maintained; so never ask a Christian, "Have you been baptized?" but "Are you a baptized believer? Are you living on resurrection ground?" So many of us, by our lives, are denying what we affirm in our baptism. When we awake every morning we should say, "I am a baptized believer," which puts us under the obligation to live a resurrection life today.

Baptism, while it is an individual act, is also an acknowledgment of collective responsibility, for only those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body (I Corinthians 12:13) have any right to go through the ordinance of water baptism; for we are not only born of the Spirit as individuals, but we are baptized by the Spirit into a living organism, the mystical body of Christ, indissolubly joined to every other believer, dependent on the Head, and interdependent on each other as members of the same body.

The Lord's Supper has this very same thought of unity in it. It is a collective act. I Corinthians 10 tells us that "we

being many are one bread," or one loaf (margin). The unbroken bread on the table represents the unity of the saints in I Corinthians 10. There the cup is mentioned first because the blood is the bond and basis of that unity, but in chapter 11, where the bread represents the body of Christ, there it is broken first, and the cup comes after, for it was from the marred body of Christ that His atoning blood flowed. Attendance at the communion service does not discharge our collective responsibility to God, and to our fellow believers; it only acknowledges it, and what we affirm by our presence at the communion service, we should not deny by our absence from other church gatherings.

But if the Lord's Supper is a challenge to collective responsibility, it is also a tremendous challenge to individual holiness, for we draw near as priests (I Peter 2:9); Exodus 28:36 tells us that Aaron wore upon his forehead a golden plate inscribed, "Holiness unto the Lord," and verse 38 says it was always to be upon his forehead.

The Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are indissolubly joined together—the one spoke of the deliverance by the blood of the Lamb, the other, of the holiness which should characterize a people so delivered. We who have commemorated the Lord's Supper on Sunday may well say, "I cannot use this hand to do a dishonorable deed on Monday, because I used it to handle the holy emblem of my Lord's body given for me." "I cannot use these lips to speak Spirit-grieving words on Tuesday, because I raised the cup and used them to partake of the holy emblem of my Lord's precious blood by which I am redeemed." If I accept the privilege, I cannot escape the challenge of the Lord's

Supper. "As often as ye drink this cup [present], ye do show the Lord's death [past] till He come" (future). Commemoration of His death in the past; consecration of my life in the present; confirmation of my faith in the future. The past is an appeal to history: He came and died. The present is an appeal to the heart: He lives and loves. The future is an appeal to that great purifying hope: He is coming again. How hallowed is the memorial feast; holy emblems in our hands, holy thoughts in our minds, holy, acceptable worship in our hearts, His holy presence in our midst, and we, holy brethren (Hebrews 3:1), a royal priesthood, every communion service a challenge to holy living, to regal conduct, in keeping with the royal lineage to which we belong!

With these thoughts in mind it is not hard to understand why the Holy Spirit has written in I Corinthians 10, "Ye cannot," not, ye must not, or should not, but "Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." The Lord's table in chapter 10 is the Lord's Supper plus its implications. In other words, if you see a man eating in the groves of Baal, you are justified in believing he is a licentious idolater, but on the other hand if you see a man eating at the Lord's table, you may expect him to be a man of holy living. For instance, while lunching in a high-class London restaurant a friend says to me, "That gentleman over there belongs to the king's household, and eats at the king's table." After noting his table manners for a few minutes, I reply, "I am afraid you are mistaken; no man with table manners such as his could eat at the king's table." You see I have in my mind a certain standard of table etiquette as becoming those who eat at the king's table, and so it should be with those who partake of the Lord's Supper.

We need to be reminded that the cross of Christ stands for a manifestation of God's holiness, as well as God's love, and not to dwell entirely on the objective side of what the cross of Christ has done for us in the sight of God, to the exclusion of the subjective side of what the cross of Christ demands from us in holy living, reality in worship, implicit obedience, reciprocal love, and sacrificial service.