

Chapter 28: Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

K. C. Juntunen

This is the first of a three chapter section on the sacraments according to Baptist theology. And this section is a subsection on the larger group dealing with ecclesiology, starting with chapter 26. This larger group can be thought of as being part of a yet larger group dealing with Christian liberty, which started with chapter 21.

If you notice that, after this chapter, we have “Of Baptism,” and “Of the Lord's Supper,” it might lead you to wonder, why do we need this chapter on both? Why an intro chapter? I think it has to do with the same reason our confession starts with “Of the Scriptures.” Previous confessions started with God: “I believe in one God, the father almighty...” When interacting with the Roman Catholic church, we're dealing with questions of authority. How do we know about the Trinity? Only through the Scriptures. How do we know the pope isn't authorized to commute someone's time in purgatory in exchange for money? Through the Scriptures.

Through the Scriptures, the Protestant churches knew there were not seven sacraments of the New Covenant. So, the Westminster Confession, and the Savoy Declaration spend 5 paragraphs redefining, and explaining the sacraments. Those paragraphs, at least the first four, aren't all bad. But our confession gives only two. Our two paragraphs cover the ground of the fourth paragraph of the other confessions.

Most Protestant churches agreed there were only two sacraments. Our confession didn't really need to argue about that. But because of the 17th century English context, our confession is, on this subject, interacting with other Protestant churches. We have an important disagreement going on about the mode and the subjects of baptism. So just as our confession starts by answering the question “How do we know what we know about God?,” this chapter takes us back to matters of authority. Who authorizes the sacraments? How are they to be practiced? By whom?

The WCF, and the Savoy name this chapter “Of the Sacraments.” We don't. In fact, wherever the other confessions use the word “sacrament,” we use the word “ordinance.” You won't find the word *sacrament* anywhere in

our confession. Renihan says,

[T]his is for polemical purposes. The sacramentology of these congregations was the primary differentiating factor of the baptized churches. For this reason, they highlighted the argument for their practice in several important ways, including the altered title¹.

Noah Webster gives four definitions. First:

Among ancient christian writers, a mystery. [Not in use.]

We get our word *sacrament* from Latin. Jerome the word *sacramentum*² to translate the word *mystery* when he produced the Latin Vulgate.

Second:

An oath; a ceremony producing an obligation; but [Not used in this general sense.

That would be the pre-Christian Roman usage.

Third:

In present usage, an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace; or more particularly, a solemn religious ceremony enjoined by Christ, the head of the christian church, to be observed by his followers, by which their special relation to him is created, or their obligations to him renewed and ratified. Thus baptism is called a sacrament for by it persons are separated from the world, brought into Christ's visible church, and laid under particular obligations to obey his precepts. The eucharist or communion of the Lord's supper, is also a sacrament for by commemorating the death and dying love of Christ, christians avow their special relation to him, and renew their obligations to be faithful to their divine Master. When we use sacrament without any qualifying word, we mean by it,

Fourth:

The eucharist or Lord's supper.

¹Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics*, Vol II. Location 11112.

²In ancient Roman religion this word was used for an oath that rendered one "given to the gods." It could also refer to something pledged in oath, but forfeit if the oath was violated.

Ordinance is more broad a term than *sacrament*. Anything at all that the Lord orders could be described as an ordinance. By using the term *ordinance*, we're not rejecting the word, or the concept of *sacrament*. This chapter is mostly acceptable in the other confessions. We're not avoiding the word "sacrament" because of any association with *sacerdotalism* (*i.e.* believing that ordained priests have supernatural powers). Rather, the idea is to get the institution of these practices into the category of New Testament commands. They are divinely *ordained* by the ascended Mediator.

This way of expressing the doctrine did not come with the 1689. The First London Confession (1644) says, "That Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ³."

1 The Institution of the Ordinances ¶ 1

Baptism⁴ and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only law-giver, to be continued in His church to the end of the world.(1)

- Mt 28:19-20; 1Co 11:26.

Mt 28:19-20

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:

²⁶ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

In both of these passages we see Jesus, having received all authority in heaven and on earth, ordaining these sacraments. And in both places they are ordained until his return.

³Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics*, Vol. I. p. 207

⁴In Renihan's *Vindication of the Truth*, he refers to what he calls the "threefold authorization of baptism." First, we have the fact that it was the risen Christ who ordered baptism. Second, the proper subjects are persons professing faith. Third, baptize means immersion.

I think all the words in this paragraph are clear to us except, maybe, *positive*. Sam Waldron says that *positive* is to be understood as opposed to *natural*, or *necessary*. He says, “A positive ordinance or law is something in addition to the law of nature. It is something not demanded by nature.” A natural law would be one that exists because of our nature and God’s nature. Moral laws fall under the category of natural laws, and ceremonial laws fall under this category of *positive institution*. The moral laws are the natural equipment of the human conscience. *Positive* laws would be unknown, unless we’re told. All the Old Testament ceremonial laws are sacraments, and are examples of *positive* ordinances. “Thou shalt not kill,” is an example of a moral law, which is natural. But an example of “positive and sovereign institution” might be “the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering.” (Leviticus 4:25)

Renihan says,

Consider the words: *ordinance, positive, sovereign, institution, appointed, Lord Jesus, law-giver*. No one should miss the point. Whatever baptism and the Lord’s Supper are (cf. 2LCF 29 and 30), they take their character by divine command from the ascended Mediator. This is the basis for their argument in the next two chapters, and especially for the definition of baptism⁵.

Next week, Deacon Cook will show how our doctrine of baptism is drawn from the Scriptures as a New Testament ordinance.

Renihan continues,

Phrasing the matter in this way serves at least two purposes. On the one hand is the polemic benefit derived from heaping up such robust language. Opponents must grapple with the argument based on its strong foundation. On the other hand, these words support the argument that the ordinances of baptism and the Supper are to be defined by the New Testament⁶.

Renihan says,

The ordinances are of positive institution and as such are not based in moral law (see 4.3). They would not be known, and

⁵Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics, Vol II*. Location 11195.

⁶*Ibid.*

would have no obligation, apart from divine revelation. A positive law does, however, have binding authority while it is in effect, the use of the phrase here indicating that baptism and the Supper are part of the revealed will of Christ for the church now. Commenting on Matthew 28.19-20 and its doctrine of baptism, Richard Dean cited this phrase, “the Words of positive and sovereign institution.” As in Matthew’s gospel, the Confession’s language reflects Christ’s kingship over all things. He is pleased, as Lord of all, to institute and require the observance of these ordinances. This places the doctrine of the ordinances into an important category: they are binding acts for Christ’s subjects⁷.

Jesus says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) So “careful observation of and obedience to Christ’s ‘positive and sovereign institutions’ manifests a peculiar love for and loyalty to the will of Christ the King⁸.”

Waldron says,

We are baptized, and eat the Lord’s Supper properly only when we do it because he told us to. There is no glory, or benefit in observing these rites out of tradition or because they seem like a good idea to us. When, however, we feel upon our hearts the authority of Christ in his Word and respond to that authority, then what glory there is in these ordinances⁹!

We have a hermeneutical disagreement with the other Protestant churches. We don’t agree on our reading of the Scriptures which we all agree is authoritative. Because they believe that the New Covenant is Abrahamic Covenant under a new administration, the paedobaptists believe that they can obtain information about New Covenant baptism from the Old Testament.

We don’t practice, or understand New Testament ordinances by *directly* deducing things from Old Testament ordinances, such as circumcision. The OT may tell us many things about sacraments in general. But the application of New Testament baptism is not to be found in the Old Testament. Baptism has not replaced circumcision. The Abrahamic Covenant is not the same as the covenant of grace but was a type and shadow of it.

⁷Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics*, Vol II Location 11112.

⁸Waldron. p. 400.

⁹Waldron. p. 400

2 The Administrators of the Ordinances ¶ 2

These holy appointments are to be administered by those only who are qualified and thereunto called, according to the commission of Christ.⁽²⁾

- Mt 28:19; 1Co 4:1.

Mt 28:19

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost

1 Corinthians 4:

¹ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

The Westminster says that only an ordained minister can administer the sacraments. Article XLI of the first London Baptist confession takes the opposite position saying, “The person designed by Christ to dispense baptism, the Scripture holds forth to be a disciple; it being no-where tied to a particular church-officer.” Our confession is less specific. It says the one dispensing the sacraments must be qualified and called.

You might be wondering what this citation of 1 Corinthians 4:1 has to do with the subject, other than mentioning ministers. This is one place where Jerome would have translated mystery to sacrament. This passage isn’t really directly talking about the New Covenant sacraments though, so that can’t be the connection. Sam Waldron says the main clue is in the word *steward*.

Mt 24:45-51

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷ Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸ But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; ⁴⁹ And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰ The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹ And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 12:41-44

Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? ⁴² And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁴ Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

Notice that not everyone can be a steward here. The steward is the one who gives the Lord's household "their portion of meat in due season." Everyone else is the household.

Titus 1:7 says, "a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God." Sam Waldron says that the language (steward;) Paul uses "makes it clear that Paul was thinking of Luke 12:42 when giving these directions in Titus 1:5-7¹⁰." So we can say that the elders are the stewards of God's house.

Waldron also asks us to consider that the Great Commission is given not to each Christian individually, but to the Church corporately. It's beyond the capability of most individual believers to "go into all the world, make disciples, baptize and teach them to observe all Christ's commands." Because this command is for the Church, he argues that it's those with authority from the church who ought to baptize.

He goes on to argue that, since the Lord's Table should only be celebrated when the Church is formally gathered (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), it must be the elders who are responsible to dispense it (1 Timothy 3:5). Chapter 26, paragraph 11 talks about how it's appropriate to have a non-elder preach. On that basis Waldron says elders may delegate the "performance of the ordinances to a faithful brother, but they cannot delegate the responsibility."

We talked before about the possibility of a gathered church being not "completely organized;" in other words, having no elders. What are they to do in that case? Waldron says,

If a local church has no elders, the safe and wise course would be to seek the oversight of other pastors and another church and under their direction to celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper. John Owen remarks that the first duty of a church without elders is to seek a pastor or pastors, not to seek the administration of ordinances¹¹.

¹⁰Waldron. p. 402.

¹¹Waldron. p. 404