

THE ORDINANCES ///

When talking about baptism and the Lord's Supper one must first discuss terminology. Throughout church history the term used most often to describe these two events has been sacrament, which comes from a Latin word used to describe "the oath of loyalty a Roman soldier would make to his commander."

Typically Baptists do not use the word sacrament because of its use by other denominations that have different understandings of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For example, some of these denominations understand baptism and the Lord's Supper as the "vehicles" through which God's saving grace is applied to each individual.

Baptists practice baptism and the Lord's Supper without the idea that these acts automatically convey God's saving grace. Baptists believe that God gives grace through faith in Christ alone. In other words, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not the active agents that achieve forgiveness in Christ.

Technically speaking there is no biblical warrant to use the word "ordinance" or the word "sacrament". Because of the connotations carried with the word sacrament, many Baptists have long opted to use the word ordinance. The term ordinance simply signifies that baptism and the Lord's Supper are acts ordained by Christ for the church.

WHY THESE ORDINANCES? ///

Biblically speaking there are two criteria by which Baptists have limited the ordinances to baptism and the Lord's Supper.

1. They are directly instituted by Jesus
 - a. Baptism: Matthew 28:19
 - b. The Lord's Supper: Matthew 26:17-30

2. They are directly related to the Gospel in that they symbolically depict the central story of Jesus Christ and our union with him.
 - a. Baptism: Romans 6:2-5; Colossians 2:12
 - b. The Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 22:20

HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE ORDINANCES ///

Traditionally Baptists have understood the ordinances as acts of obedience and powerful symbols of the gospel message. The ordinances are understood as symbols because they graphically depict the truth of the gospel and the inward change that comes with one's faith in Christ. The ordinances should be practiced with an understanding of the symbolism and the reality portrayed, as gospel dramas where the Word is spoken and made visible.

CONCLUSION ///

Baptism and the Lord's Supper both symbolize the gospel message but in different ways. Baptism symbolizes the transformation effected by the gospel; it is thus the ordinance that proclaims our new birth and justification through Christ. The Lord's Supper proclaims the gospel message of Christ's death as the sustenance of the Christian life.