

## BAPTISM

The New Testament church has two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are not sacramental but symbolic in nature.

## NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The word "ordinance" does not appear in the New Testament with reference to either baptism or the Lord's Supper. "Ordinances" in I Corinthians 11:2 should be translated "traditions," or the teachings which Paul declared to the Corinthian Christians. "Ordinance" is used in connection with baptism and the Lord's Supper as acts commanded by Jesus. A Christian ordinance may be defined as a symbolic act commanded by Jesus to signify that which Christ did to effect salvation from sin.

"Baptism" comes from the Greek word *baptize*, meaning "to dip, submerge, or immerse." It is used of Jesus being submerged in calamities (Matt. 20:22-23). But more often it denotes baptism in water. There are two different nouns in the New Testament which are translated "baptism." *Baptismos* refers to the act of baptism (Heb. 6:2; 9: 10) with reference to Jewish ablutions or ceremonial cleansing. It appears only twice (not genuine in Mark 7:4,8). *Baptisma* connotes the meaning of the act and appears in the New Testament twenty-two times (13, John's baptism; 5, Jesus' suffering; 4, Christian baptism, Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). John's baptism was not synonymous with Christian baptism, since its meaning was different (Acts 19:3-5). John's baptism signified repentance and a readiness to participate in the kingdom of God. Christian baptism symbolizes the redemptive work of Christ.

Christian baptism, then, symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It also typifies the Christians death to his old life, its burial, and his resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12). It also implies faith in the coming resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:13 ff.). The New Testament knows nothing of infant baptism but that of believers only. Baptism in the New Testament is never by sprinkling or pouring.

Assuming that the subject of baptism is a believer, two

things are necessary for New Testament baptism—a proper mode and a proper meaning. The mode is immersion in water and emersion from water, a burial and a resurrection. The meaning is symbolic of death, burial, and resurrection. If the mode be changed, the meaning is lost. If the meaning be changed, the mode loses its significance. Hence, there is the widespread practice of Baptists in rejecting as New Testament baptism that which changes either the mode or the meaning.

In the New Testament baptism is the prerequisite of the Lord's Supper. It is an initiatory, symbolic ordinance and is to be administered "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19, RSV).

#### Lord's Supper

There are four historic views relative to this ordinance. The Roman Catholic position is that of transubstantiation or "substance across." It holds that in the Mass the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Jesus. (Note: the New Testament does not say "wine" but "fruit of the vine.") Lutherans believe in consubstantiation. This view holds that the body and blood of Jesus are present with the elements of the Lord's Supper. Others hold to the view that grace is present with the elements, or that the partaker receives grace thereby which is not available otherwise. Baptists believe that the Lord's Supper is symbolic. The bread and fruit of the vine are but symbols of the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus.

The Lord did not state when or how often we are to observe the Lord's Supper. He instituted it on Thursday night, and the early Christians observed it on the Lord's Day. Any New Testament baptized believer is eligible to partake of the Supper. None is worthy except by the grace of God. The word "unworthy" in 1 Corinthians 11:29 is an adverb of manner, "unworthily." It refers not to the person's condition but the

manner in which the Supper is observed. The Corinthian Christians were making it a bacchanalian banquet.

The Lord's Supper is a repetitive ordinance. It is to be observed as a remembrance of that which the Lord did for our salvation (I Cor. 11:24-26), until he comes again.

Baptists are sometimes called "close communionists." This is a misnomer. The "communion" is not between men but between God and man (I Cor. 10:16). Here the communion is with Christ, not man. The New Testament name for this ordinance is the Lord's Supper.

Christian groups generally are agreed that baptism must precede the Lord's Supper. With this Baptists agree. The question is not "communion" but baptism. What is New Testament baptism? If anything, then, Baptists are "close baptismists."

*[Excerpt from Herschel H. Hobbs, What Baptists Believe.  
Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1964.]*