

Baptism: A “Church Ordinance”?

Joe Slater

A congregation with which I once worked had an exhibit at which we gave away gospel tracts during a three-day community event. Our tract on the new birth caught a gentleman’s attention. “Isn’t this teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation?” he asked. I agreed that the tract so taught and affirmed that the Bible taught this as well. A rather spirited discussion ensued, to say the least.

Among the many objections he offered was that baptism was just a “church ordinance.” I asked him to show me where the Bible said that. Of course, he made no attempt to do so. Biblically there is no such thing as a “church ordinance.” Ordinance is merely another word for law. The church is not in the law-making business. There is but one law giver (James 4:12).

Sometimes even brethren carelessly call baptism and the Lord’s Supper “church ordinances” (or, worse yet, “sacraments”). Both expressions are foreign to Scripture.

Rather than the church making laws, Christians have pledged themselves to obey the law of Christ. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are two of many things commanded by Jesus, so technically they might be called ordinances of Christ; but He commanded many other things as well.

Sacraments, on the other hand, are purely the invention of men. Nobody ever heard of “sacraments” connected with the church for over a thousand years after its beginning.

Unwilling to surrender his point, my visitor re-phrased his argument: “Baptism is just a command; it has nothing to do with salvation.” Evidently, he didn’t stop to think that faith is also commanded (Acts 16:31); repentance is also a command (Acts 17:30). Yet my opponent believed both of those things were necessary for salvation! Indeed, Jesus is “*the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him*” (Hebrews 5:9).

Seeking Contentment

Among the inspired words written by Paul to the church at Philippi are the following: “*For I have learned in whatsoever state I am in, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:11-13). Being a good soldier of the cross, Paul wanted others to know the importance of Christian survival in a hostile world, so he emphasized two main points: (1) learning to be content whatever state we are in, and (2) fully trusting in Jesus for our daily strength. These are wonderful words of encouragement to all Christians in every generation.

As Christian soldiers, we march off to war every day, wearing the armor of God and bearing in our own bodies the scars of ongoing spiritual warfare. As is the case in earthly warfare, times will not always be peaceful and serene. Adaptation has always been the hallmark of any good soldier. Satan is the most powerful foe man will ever face; consequently, we need to remain ever faithful to Jesus and remain close to our spiritual Commander in order to win this life-long battle against such a powerful enemy.

Paul once wrote to the churches of Galatia, “*I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*” (Galatians 6:17). The old “apostle to the Gentiles” was indeed a battle-scarred warrior who had faced down many spiritual foes, always emerging victorious. Now, what advice do you suppose Paul would give us so we could do the same? The exact advice he gave nearly two thousand years ago! Learn to be content whatever state you are in, and always put your full trust in Jesus Christ who stands ready to strengthen you. Do these things and you, too, will finally lay your armor down, depart your battered physical body, and find that eternal peace that awaits all of God’s faithful soldiers.

--Milton Smith (via *Old Paths*)

THE RACE OF LIFE

Like a sprinter who pulls up lame in the 100-meter dash, so is the Christian who does not maintain confidence in Christ firm until the end. The Christian life is a daily commitment to follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). It is a race which must be completed (Hebrews 12:1-2). One cannot stop half-way through the race. We must give our best effort every step of the way!

The Hebrew writer says that if we wish to be partakers of Christ, we must “*hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end...*” (Hebrews 3:14). The runner has no chance of victory without crossing the finish line. Similarly, the Christian must be faithful until death in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Another important thing to keep in mind is that we cannot rest upon past accomplishments. It would be foolish to stop half-way through the race, turn around to see how far we have come, and then conclude: “Well, I guess I’ve made it far enough!” Jesus says, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” Luke 9:62). The apostle Paul, who worked tirelessly for the sake of Christ, never reached a point where he said, “I have done enough!” He continually reached forward, pressing on for the sake of Christ (Philippians 3:13-14). In the same way, we must give our hearts in steadfast devotion to the will of the Lord.

All that God requires is that we put forth our best effort. We stumble and falter at times, but we must get back in the race and concentrate on doing our best for the Master. Like the runner who lunges forward with his last ounce of strength to reach the finish line, so also the Christian must run in such a manner as to win the race of life (1 Corinthians 9:24). The race is set before us. Our goal is heaven. The strength we need comes from the Lord. But we must do the running every step of the way.

--Glen Elliot (Greenbriar, AR)