

SACRAMENTS AND CHURCH ORDINANCES

David Halbrook

By using only the Bible, what can you find about “sacraments” or “church ordinances”?

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines sacraments as “outward signs of inward grace,” listing the nature, origin, number, effects, minister, and recipients of the sacraments, and declaring there to be seven sacraments. Some religious groups reject all “sacraments,” but declare “church ordinances” among their “articles of faith,” often setting that number at two.

This partially explains modern religious division. Neither Jesus, nor His apostles taught about “sacraments,” so why would we? Did Jesus really only ordain two things for the church?

In the New Testament, the church assembled for a variety of God-given purposes: to pray, to be teach/learn, for the fellowship (collection), the Lord’s Supper, and singing (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:15). These are just a few of the things Jesus and the apostles ordained (commanded).

There is no unity in Christ when men declare things God did not reveal. Unity is available by simply speaking as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). By this, no one will teach seven sacraments or only two church ordinances.

-- *Editor’s Note:* Paul spoke of the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). When men declare “sacraments” and “church ordinances,” they cloud this simplicity. Let’s pray that this appeal to the oracles of God will appeal to those searching for them, and let’s find someone to share this with (find, clip, share, and tell others about these articles in *Arkansas Weekly*).

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

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ARE BABIES SAFE?

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There is nothing on earth that pulls at our heart-strings quite like babies do. But the common teaching that children are “born sinners” or have an inherited “sinful nature” mars and slanders the innocence of all infants. The prevalence of this teaching should motivate us search the Scripture and speak as the oracles of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Pet. 4:11). Here are three reasons why babies are safe--

1. Babies are not lost.

Sin is a violation of God’s law, which simultaneously governs both the human mind and body (1 Jn. 3:4). Infants are not accountable for their thoughts and deeds because they are born without the ability to govern their thoughts and deeds. They have no ability to be fully aware of God, His revelation, or their actions, and thus are not spiritually responsible beings. Thus, infants cannot sin. Since infants cannot sin, they cannot be lost, so, we can say they are “safe” during this important phase of life when their young minds are being shaped and molded by their parents.

Some people agree that children cannot sin, but claim that infants are lost because they inherited Adam’s sin. Notice the words of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 18:20)—

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

The righteousness and wickedness of Adam is upon himself, not his children. If neither Cain, Abel, Seth, nor any of Adam’s children could inherit the sin of their father, then neither can we. So, we know that babies are not born with Adam’s sin or guilt. They enter this world innocent and safe.

(continued inside)

2. God provided no way to save them.

The Old Testament paints a clear picture of God's hatred for sin, and His expectations of those who have sinned. People of that era were required to kill a healthy, potentially useful animal when they sinned, which showed that sin was costly, gruesome, and deadly (Heb. 9:22). Yet, God gave Israel no animal sacrifice to be offered at the birth of infants, or any other time, to "atone for infant's sins." God did nothing to train the Israelites to act on behalf of the sins of their newborn children—because infants have no sin.

Today, men have invented a variety of ceremonies for infants and their alleged sins, yet none of those actions are from God's mind, nor do they have His approval. No apostle or Christian in the New Testament ever baptized, sprinkled water on, or poured water on a baby for the remission of sins. Why not? Because there is no need to try to "save" someone who is not lost. God gave no plan to save infants—a clear indication that infants are innocent, safe, and are spiritually in God's care.

3. As Adam and Eve, man enters this world without sin but later chooses to sin.

A simple way to understand this subject is by reading about Adam and Eve. God created them in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). They were not created with a depraved, sinful nature. God created them upright and taught them how to remain pure (Eccl. 7:29; Gen. 2:15-17). They had no sinful nature, but they did have the ability to choose to accept or reject God. Despite being initially free from sin, eventually they chose to sin, and at that point, God treated them accordingly (Gen. 3).

It is no different for mankind today. We also are made in God's image (Gen.9:6). We too are made upright and have God's instructions showing us how to remain pure. At some point in life, we are fully able be aware of God, His word, and our will. At that point, we can choose to accept or reject God. All men choose to sin and *at that point* God treats us accordingly (Rom. 6:23). But God does not treat us as sinners before we sin—thus babies are safe.

There is no major difference between the reason why Eve or Adam sinned, and why we sin. We do not sin because of a "sinful nature inherited from Adam," as priests and pastors often preach today. To blame our sin on Adam or an inherited nature "passes the buck," but even worse, it contradicts Scripture. All humans are innocent and safe until they choose to sin.

Conclusion For centuries men have slandered the God-given nature of human babies by twisting a few passages and ignoring other passages and principles, thereby elevating human teachings and authority. Among the tragedies of this error,

innumerable parents whose children have died before or at birth, have had their grief forever multiplied by the idea that their child died but "was not saved." Such grief is needless, unfounded, and overcome with a knowledge of God, the nature of sin, and the nature of man. *Children are a heritage from the Lord* and are clearly safe in His care for *of such is the kingdom of heaven* (Ps. 127:1; Matt. 19:14).

MATURITY IN CHRIST

Kyle Campbell (www.lawofliberty.com/articles/Resources/maturityinchrist.pdf)

"Brethren, be not children in your understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" (1 Corinthians 14:20). Paul's admonition proceeds his discussion of the necessity of various spiritual gifts. They were not all to seek the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues. They needed to be mature in order to understand the role God had given to all of His miraculous gifts. Only through maturity would they realize that God purposed all spiritual gifts for the ultimate edification of the body of Christ.

Maturity is still sorely needed today. Many problems arise in congregations because of a lack of maturity. Some problems arise because of a lack of doctrinal maturity. Some brethren simply do not know the scriptures and apostasy is the result. The struggles over institutionalism or divorce and remarriage illustrate this point. On the other hand, some problems arise because of a lack of mental maturity. Some brethren get their feelings hurt or some matter does not go their way so they pull away from everyone else and refuse to take any further part in the work of the church.

Both types of immaturity are wrong. Those who are mature are so because they have their senses trained through long use and habit of study to discern between right doctrine and erroneous doctrine (Hebrews 5:14). They will not be led astray by a "strong delusion" delivered by a well-known or eloquent preacher (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Jesus said concerning mental immaturity, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican"* (Matthew 18:15-17). Clearly the burden is upon those who have a difficulty with others to resolve the problem. This is often not done primarily because the ones who have the problem know they are being childish in the first place! The only way for the church to grow is to have members who are mature both in doctrine and in mind.