



Are the LORD's Supper and Baptism "Sacraments"?

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*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

It is being said today that those of us in Churches of Christ who believe the Lord's Supper should be observed every Sunday, and who also believe that baptism puts us into the body of Christ observe both of them sacramentally. In discussing this subject, it would be worth our time and study to define what is meant by Sacraments. The Latin word "sacramentum" was:

... an ambiguous theological term first used by Roman law to describe a legal sanction in which a man placed his life or property in the hands of the supernatural powers that upheld justice and honoured solemn contracts. (**Encyclopedia Britannia**)

Tertullian (AD 160-220) is believed to have been the man who first began to use this term in a religious sense. Our English word brought together two different words, the Latin word *sacer* (holy), and the Greek word *mysterion* (secret rite), to form the word "sacrament."

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines sacrament as,

A Christian rite (such as baptism or the Eucharist) that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be avenues of Divine grace, or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.

The **Encyclopedia Britannica** defines it this way:

A religious sign or symbol, especially associated with Christian churches, in which a sacred or spiritual power is believed to be transmitted through material elements viewed as channels of divine grace.

It is important to remember that dictionaries give definitions based upon common usage at a specific time in history. That is why definitions change.

These definitions, as well as others of similar description, base their conclusions upon the general history of Christianity, and do not go back to the Apostolic period to reach them. As far as we can determine from history, the term "sacramentum" was first used in the third century AD. Thomas Aquinas said that "anything considered sacred may be called a sacrament." In the 12th Century, Bishop Peter Lombard narrowed the sacraments to seven which were adopted by Thomas Aquinas, the Council of Florence (1493), and the second Council of Trent (1550-1555). These seven, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, confession, Holy marriage, Holy Orders, Extreme Unction, the "last rites" administered by a Catholic Priest to those who are dying, were affirmed by

the Roman Catholic Church as sacraments instituted by Christ. When the Protestant Reformation began, only two of these, baptism and the Lord's Supper, were adopted by most reformers, and they were not thought to convey divine grace. They concluded that "grace works by itself to confer an indelible character on the recipient." The historical facts prove that these acts while having spiritual application were given the title of sacraments by men and not by Christ or the inspired writers of the New Testament.

It is important to remember that the New Testament never uses the word "sacrament," nor does it set aside specific acts of devotion to be considered more significant than others. There is no place in Scripture where Jesus instituted sacraments or sacramental observance of any spiritual act. The Latin Bible translated the Greek word "mysterion" (mystery) in the following passages, **1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:3; Colossians 1:26**, with the word "sacramentum." At no point do these, or other passages, use mystery to refer to baptism, the Lord's Supper, or any other act of worship. If you look for the word in Scripture it will take you to passages related to the Lords' Supper and Baptism, but the word sacrament does not appear there. After stating the common usage of the term "sacrament," the **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** adds the following:

In the Greek New Testament, however, there is no word nor even any general idea corresponding to 'sacrament,' nor does the earliest history of Christianity afford any trace of the application of the term to certain rites of the church. Pliny (circa 112 A. D.) describes the Christians of Bithynia as 'binding themselves by a sacramentum to commit no kind of crime' (Epistles X), but scholars are now pretty generally agreed that Pliny used the word in its old Roman sense of an oath or solemn obligation, so that its occurrence in this passage is nothing more than an interesting coincidence.

The **ISBE** adds that:

The notion of seven sacraments has no New Testament authority, and must be described as purely arbitrary, while the definition of sacrament is still so vague that anything but arbitrary selection of participants is possible.

Since there is no Bible authority for calling the Lord's Supper and baptism sacraments, why do some, even so-called Bible scholars, chose to refer to them as sacraments? Interestingly some of those who insist that baptism is a human work of merit not required for salvation, believe that as a sacrament it must be done to receive the blessings promised from it. There is no question that we receive forgiveness of our sins when we are baptized into Christ. Before one is baptized, he or she must believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He died for our sins (**John 8:24**). If a person truly believes that, he should be willing to confess that faith publicly (**Mathew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10**). Jesus taught that before our sins could be forgiven, we must repent of them (**Luke 13:3, 5**). Repentance means to turn away from our sins and turn toward God. Being baptized with Him "into death," and "united together in the likeness of His death" brings us spiritually into contact with Christ's blood which cleanses us of our sins (**Romans 6:4-5; Revelation 1:5**).

Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible does not teach that baptism is an "outward sign of an inward grace." According to this doctrine, we are not baptized to be forgiven of our sins, but we are doing it because we have already been forgiven. Jesus plainly

taught that belief and baptism are both necessary to receive salvation (**Mark 16:16**). In Peter's response to the believing Jews on Pentecost, he said, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins," and not because of believing you have already been forgiven (cs **2:38**). Wayne Jackson wrote that baptism is, "is an outward act of obedience leading to pardon and the obtaining of a clear conscience before God (**1 Peter 3:21**)." We are baptized, not just to receive forgiveness of our sins, but we do so believing in God's promise to forgive us. It is not done for sacramental reasons.

Writing in objection to those who say Jesus did not command or institute baptism, an article in the **Bible Hub** responds, "Over against them all we have to set is the positive and weighty fact that from the earliest days of Christianity Baptism appears as the rite of initiation into the fellowship of the church (**Acts 2:38, 41**; et passim), and that even Paul with all his freedom of thought and supernatural interpretation of the gospel, never questioned its necessity (compare **Romans 6:3**; **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**; **Ephesians 4:5**)."

Teaching that the Lord's Supper should be observed every Sunday falls into that same category with those saying we are observing it as a sacrament. The Roman Catholic Church was the first to refer to the Lord's Supper as the Holy Eucharist, but the term "Eucharist" is used today by many denominational bodies for the Lord's Supper. The term Eucharist comes from a Greek term meaning "to be thankful" or "to give thanks." In Catholic practice, it is connected with the doctrine of transubstantiation, meaning that the bread and the fruit of the vine actually becomes the physical body and blood of Christ. Jesus' statement to the Apostles on the night He instituted the supper clearly indicates the emblematic nature of the bread and the fruit of the vine. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of Christ death and not a reenactment.

In the Catholic Mass when the Eucharist is observed, only the priest partakes of both the bread and wine, and the regular participants are taught they receive both the body and blood of Christ in the bread. This ignores the Lord's own instructions for all participants to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine (**Matthew 26:26-29**; **Luke 22:17-20**). During the observance of the Eucharist, referred to as the "sacrifice of the mass," it is believed that Jesus is sacrificed again for our sins (Council of Trent 1551).

Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus was sacrificed once for all people and for all time (**Hebrews 7:27**; **9:24-28**; **10:10-14, 18**). While there is no doubt we are blessed by observing of the Lord's Supper, we are doing it to remember our Lord's sacrifice for our sins. Paul said that unless we are observing it for that reason, we are partaking of it "in an unworthy manner" and "eating and drinking judgement to ourselves, not discerning the Lord's body." Discern (Greek *dikrino*) means to separate, to take apart and in this case to see the distinctiveness of the bread and the fruit of the vine. The Lord's Supper is not a common meal, and from Paul's words, neither should it be observed as one. Responding to those who say it was Paul who added the words "this do in remembrance of Me" to imply Jesus intended it to be observed by all of His future disciples is the following article in Bible Hub: "That the simple historical supper of Jesus with His disciples in the upper room was converted by Paul into an institution for the Gentile and Jewish churches alike is altogether incomprehensible. The primitive church had its controversies, but there was no trace of any controversy as to the origin and institutional character for the Lord's Supper." It is worth noting that the words "do this in remembrance of Me" are also used in **Luke 22:19**.

The Lord's Supper is unique and special in that it is not food for the body but food for the soul. Its purpose is for us to remember the Lord's sacrifice of His body (see **Hebrews 10:5-10**), the torture of the cross (**Isaiah 53:3-5**; **1 Peter 3:24-25**), and His resurrection (**Romans 1:4**), and to be reminded that He is coming again (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**).

--- Sellers S. Crain, Jr. D. Min., July 7, 2021