

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew. This morning we will consider two passages, first Matthew 28:19-20 and then Matthew 26:26-28. Today we begin what could be called a mini-series within the greater series on worship. We move from looking at the non-sacramental elements of worship in a general sense to considering the sacramental elements in greater detail. With that in mind give your attention now to the reading of the infallible Word of the Lord from Matthew chapter 28 and also Matthew chapter 26.

Read Matthew 28:19-20, 26:26-28

Pray

When we come to consider this topic of the sacraments in general we must do so remembering the foundation upon which all of this is built. Our principle of worship, that God regulates how He is to be worshipped by His Word, that anything not expressly commanded by God to be done in worship is forbidden, must be what guides us when we consider the sacraments. So much division in the church, so much error and false teaching, has come from a misunderstanding of the sacraments. The primary cause of division between Baptists and basically everyone else in Christianity stems from a difference in understanding concerning the sacrament of baptism. The division between the Reformed and the Lutherans pertains to the nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the presence of Christ in the meal. In fact, this was the one thing that kept the Lutherans from uniting with the Reformed and Europe from having a united Protestant church. When you look at the papist church or the Eastern Orthodox many of their corruptions and perversions are rooted in blasphemous and idolatrous views on the sacraments. There are those who add various different things as sacraments of the church which cannot be rightly shown from Scripture to be a sacrament. There are those those believe the sacraments are necessary for salvation and even those who don't believe there is such things as a sacrament to be observed in the church. With all of these various views and practices and

understandings on the sacraments, not everyone can be right. And a proper understanding of the regulative principle of worship would correct the errors of the various different sects of Christianity. It would also lead to a reformation in the practice of the church towards a more Biblical approach to the sacraments of the Lord. So this morning we will consider the theme of the sacraments in general, and I pray that this will aid us in moving forward to over the next several weeks in considering the sacraments in closer detail. So we will consider this theme by answering three questions: first, what are the sacraments; next, who may administer the sacraments; and finally, why are the sacraments necessary.

So first, let us seek to answer the question what are the sacraments. Our Confession of Faith gives us a clear definition in chapter 27, “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.” There’s a lot here in this definition, and we could spend weeks just unpacking it, but I want us to consider this definition broadly and over time the more particular aspects will be fleshed out. The sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They are signs that point towards a greater reality. They are not the reality in themselves, but point towards that reality. I’m sure all of you have been driving down the road and seen the sign on the highway that says Chicago. No one thinks that sign on the highway is Chicago itself. Instead it tells you where to find Chicago. That is what the sacraments do, they do not give you Christ but they point you towards Christ. But that is just part of what a sacrament is. They are simply signs but seals also. Perhaps this is not as easy for us to understand as a sign. In the past when a king put forth a royal decree it was stamped with his royal seal, showing the people the authenticity and surety of what was contained. We still have this is a small measure today with the presidential seal and even something like a notary stamp. The

sacraments are a seal of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you to be your God. You have been stamped, sealed with the royal seal, declaring the surety of that covenant applied to you. And this language of sign and seal is taken straight from Scripture. In Romans 4:11 we read of Abraham, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.”

So the sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace, and they are immediately instituted by God. When we look at the sacraments of the Old Covenant, of which there are two, we see that they were immediately instituted by God. In Genesis 17:10-11 the Lord declares, “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” Circumcision was the initiatory sacrament of the Old Testament Church which showed visibly that those who received it were part of the visible covenant community. Then in Exodus 12 we see the institution of the Passover, that covenant meal, the sacramental feast of old, which is commanded by the Lord to be a sign unto them and a perpetual ordinance to be observed, “And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.” Just as the sacraments of old must have been immediately instituted by God Himself, the same is true of sacraments for the New Testament Church. In order for something to be considered as a sacrament of the New Testament Church, it has to be shown to be something ordained by the Lord Jesus in person, and its observance to be obligatory upon the Church until Christ returns. James Bannerman affirms this, “No observance not ordained by God can properly form any part of His service; far less can any observance not instituted by Him become a sign of His

spiritual grace, or a pledge of a blessing which it depends upon His pleasure to give or to withhold.”

If this is true then we must look to what Christ has instituted to be sacraments for the Church and observe only those things. Rome says there are seven sacraments: baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, penance, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction. But when we examine these according to Scripture none but the first two have divine warrant as sacraments. Confirmation, penance, and extreme unction are found nowhere in Scripture. Ordination is an act of the Church and was instituted by Christ mediately through His apostles. Marriage is a creation ordinance given unto all people and cannot be a sacrament of the Church since it is common to all human societies. There are some churches who say foot washing is a sacrament of the church, and yet the covenant of grace is neither signified nor sealed in the act of foot washing, and Christ Himself says that it is to be an example to His disciples of the servant heart they are to have. And so that leaves us with the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the sacraments of the New Testament Church. Our texts we read earlier from Matthew 28 in the great commission and Matthew 26 in the last supper prove that Christ Himself instituted these sacraments to be signs of the covenant of grace and to be observed perpetually till He come. They, in effect, replaced the two sacraments of old. Circumcision, that initiatory sacrament, is replaced by baptism, that sacrament which shows publicly one’s entrance into the visible covenant community. And passover, that confirmatory sacramental meal, is replaced by the Lord’s Supper, that confirmatory covenant meal. As Circumcision and the Passover were ordinances that involved the shedding of blood, symbolizing the Redeemer to come, and since Christ has now accomplished our redemption, there is no need for blood to be shed. So the two bloodless signs of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have to take the place of the two bloody signs of circumcision and the Passover; even though their significance as signs of the covenant of grace remains morally the same in both dispensations. In this New

Covenant age, there are two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

So who is it that may administer these sacraments? This may seem like an absurd question to some of you, but this question is one which has been asked throughout church history and has been the cause of much ink being spilled. Growing up in the baptist church I saw any number of people administer the sacrament of baptism to people. Pastors, church workers, fathers, grandfathers, friends, coaches, I've seen them all enter the baptismal and dunk whoever what being baptized. However they did not do the same for the Lord's Supper. Only the pastor was the one who administered that sacrament to the people, and it was distributed by the deacons. It always seemed strange to be that pretty much anyone was allowed to administer baptism but only the pastor could administer the Supper. But there are other churches that are more consistent in this. They would hold that the sacraments are for the people and ought to be administered by the people, and so they permit virtually anyone who wants to administer the sacrament to do so. The papists are somewhat consistent in their regular practice of administering the sacraments. They hold that the normative practice is that the sacraments are to be administered by the priest. And yet they are inconsistent in this in that they permit baptisms to be performed by the laity in times of need. Because of their heretical understanding of baptism, their belief that it washes away original sin, they permit baptisms to be done by anyone in the instance where the child is likely to not live long enough to go to a priest. Oftentimes this baptism is administered by a midwife. The Reformed position is that the sacraments are only to be administered by one who has been ordained to the office of minister. The Confession of Faith says, "There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained." By virtue of his office, the minister must be the one who administers the sacraments because they are the Word made visible.

But we are not to build our practice off of tradition. What does the Scriptures say on this matter? In Matthew 28 we see that it is to the disciples, those leaders who Christ had appointed for the Church, that the great commission is given. “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” In Matthew 26 we see that it is to the disciples as well that the Lord’s Supper was instituted and given, “Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve... And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Every instance of baptism or the Lord’s Supper being administered in the Scriptures is clearly seen to be done by those who are given the keys of the kingdom, the officers of the Church who have been vested with the authority to administer sacraments by virtue of their office. Nowhere in Scripture do you read of laymen administering the Sacrament. Nowhere do you see an example of one who is not an office-bearer, either apostle, pastor, or evangelist, administering the sacraments.

At this point is where normally the objections would begin to come in in. What about the priesthood of all believers? Is that not a key Reformed doctrine that we all confess? Should it not inform us of the role of all believers in the ministry of the Church? Yes. 1 Peter 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

But that does not negate the fact that there are particular offices given to the Church and not everyone who is a believer possesses the authority and the responsibilities of those offices. Only the minister of the Word may preach the Word. Only the minister of the Word may pronounce the benediction upon the people of God. Only the minister of the Word may solemnize a Christian marriage. And only the minister of the Word may administer the sacraments. Why? Because it is given unto him the mysteries of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” This is where that word sacrament comes from, the Latin word *sacramentum* used to translate the Greek *musterion*. But what of Philip? Acts 6 makes it clear that he was ordained to the office of deacon and yet in Acts chapter 8 he baptizes the Ethiopians eunuch. Is that not warrant for men who are not ministers to have the authority to baptize? Absolutely not. Acts 21:8 refers to Philip as the evangelist, which means while he was originally ordained to the office of deacon, he was later ordained to the extraordinary office of evangelist, and office with authority to administer the sacraments.

Friends, there is no instance in all of Scripture to show that the sacraments may be administered by one who is not a lawfully ordained minister of the Word. And remember that regulative principle, if it is not commanded in Scripture to be done it is forbidden. Hebrews 5:4 says, “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” Why would anyone want to take upon themselves this mantle of Gospel ministry, this responsibility of the ministry of the Word, the duties of rightly administer the sacraments which Christ Jesus Himself instituted, and to do so by his own authority without the calling of the Lord on him? What a great danger it is to put yourself in that position. Dear saints, do not dare seek to usurp the God-given authority placed upon the minister which the Jehovah has ordained for this very purpose. To do so it to place yourself under the greater judgement that ministers will be judged with, but to do so without any of the gifts or graces that the Lord gives His ministers. You are risking

your very soul by assuming an authority which has not been given unto you. I pray that no one here is even tempted towards this. But perhaps there is something else about this fact of who may administer the sacraments which is of greater importance and concern for you. Some of you here may have been baptized by one who is not a minister lawfully ordained, or you may have been baptized by a papist or another ungodly man. I know that there are differing positions on this, but I hold to a distinguishing between irregular and invalid. If you have received Christian baptism, Trinitarian baptism, but it was not by a minister lawfully ordained it is not invalid but irregular. And you have concerns because the one who administered your baptism is an ungodly wicked man, take comfort in the fact that the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on the character of the man administering it. If you have been given the sign and seal of the covenant of grace it is yours.

Finally, let us consider why the sacraments are necessary. There are a lot of false views out there about this. I've already mentioned that the papists believe baptism washes away original sin, and so they believe it is necessary for one to obtain salvation. They believe that in the Supper, or the blasphemous perversion they call the mass, Christ is sacrificed again in a bloodless sacrifice and that simply in going through the process of partaking salvation is conferred. Out of the working it is worked. The Churches of Christ hold to a baptismal regeneration, that it is in the act of baptism that one is regenerated and made new, and so it is necessary for salvation. I'm sure you could go through all the various different sects within Christianity and find the aberrant views they espouse and see why they would hold that the sacraments are necessary. So what of us? When we say that the sacraments are necessary what do we mean? I think it's important to upfront state that we do not believe that the sacraments are necessary for salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith and not of works, Ephesians 2. To add the sacraments as being necessary for salvation is to add works to the Gospel of free grace, thus perverting it into a false gospel. Scripture testifies to the fact that the sacraments are not necessary. Look to

the thief on the cross in Luke 23. That man came to faith in Christ Jesus as the Redeemer of mankind, and the Lord said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." He was not baptized. He never sat at the Lord's Table and partook of the bread and wine of the Supper. There's not even any evidence that he had been circumcised or partaken of the passover. And yet Christ saved him to the uttermost.

If it's not that we believe the sacraments are necessary for salvation, then why do we say that they are necessary? Because Jehovah commands us to observe them, and to do so in the way that He has prescribed. The sacraments are necessary in the same way any other work of obedience is necessary in the life of a believer. We confess that it is a great sin to neglect the sacrament of baptism. Consider Exodus chapter 4 when Zipporah circumcised her son when Moses was negligent to and the Lord was going to kill him for his disobedience. We are commanded to be baptized according to Scripture. Likewise the command is for us to partake of the Lord's Supper. "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me... this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." We are commanded to do it, to take and eat, to take and drink. The observance of the sacraments are not merely suggested things that could be done and may be beneficial to your spiritual walk. These are commands of the Lord and must be obeyed. To fail to do so is to place yourself under the just judgement of the Lord. When the King summons you to come you come and do whatsoever He commands you.

We also say the sacraments are necessary because they are an effectual means of salvation, not that they are required for salvation or that they cause salvation, but they are effectual means of salvation. Larger Catechism 161, "The Sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered; but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the

blessing of Christ by whom they are instituted.” They truly are means of grace, and the Lord uses the sacraments as visible representations of the covenant promises proclaimed in the Gospel. We don’t have pictures or statues or paintings of the Lord because that would violate that command He has given us in the second commandment. But if you want to see Christ visibly put on display before you, cast your gaze upon the sacraments which themselves are the Word made visible. See the waters poured out in baptism signifying the washing away of your sins and the pouring out of the Holy Ghost. See the waters sprinkled upon the recipient signifying the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon the mercy seat purchasing salvation for His people. See the body of our Lord broken for you in the broken bread of the Lord’s Table. See His blood of the covenant poured out for the remission of your sins in the pouring out of the wine in that sacramental meal. Are the sacraments necessary? I answer with another question. Is seeing Christ before you necessary? I pray we would all say yes.

Brothers and sisters, I know we have only begun to scratch the surface in regard to the sacrament. There is so much that we could have covered this morning but didn’t. But I pray that this sermon, though much more teaching that I normally would like, has been edifying to your soul and you have received a taste of what is to come as we look further in the weeks to come at these blessed sacraments that Christ Jesus has given us as His Church.