

Differences in the Two Sacraments as Sealing Ordinances

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Free Presbyterian Magazine – May 1961

They of the south maintain that both the sacraments, being seals of the same covenant, and imposing the self-same obligations, ought to be administered on the same footing, the same kind and measure of profession and of qualification being required on the part of applicants for either; that no adult should be admitted to the one without being admitted also to the other ; and that the Christian profession required of a parent , in order to the baptism of his child, cannot be complete without his being a communicant. The result of these views being carried into practice in the Lowlands, or rather the result of their mode of reducing them to practice, is that, with rare exceptions, all the members of a congregation above a certain age go to the table of the Lord, and that any parent who is a communicant receives, as a matter of course, baptism for his child.

The Ross-shire Fathers held that though in general the two sacraments were equally seals of the covenant of grace , they do in some respects differ even as sealing ordinances; that baptism, being the door of admission into the visible Church, a larger exercise of charity is required in dealing with applicants for that sacrament than is called for in administering the other, which implies a confirmation of those who were members before; that the lessons of baptism are more elementary than those of the sacrament of the Supper; that the connection of the child and of both the parents, with an ordinary case of infant baptism, calls for peculiar tenderness on the part of Church rulers, and that the rule of Scripture requires baptism to be given on an un-contradicted profession of faith , while an accredited profession is required to justify the Church in granting admission to the table of the Lord. The result of carrying these views into practice is well known; the number of members in full communion is comparatively small, and parents who have never communicated receive baptism for their children.

The Ross-shire Fathers of course held that the two sacraments were in general seals of the covenant of grace, and that as such they were equally valid. But they also held with Maastricht that they did not specially seal the same measure

of privilege. They regarded baptism as the sacrament of admission, specially sealing the believers' introduction into the covenant of grace, and his interest in the initial blessings of regeneration and justification, and formally admitting him into the general membership of the visible Church. They regarded the Lord's Supper as the sacrament of nurture, specially sealing the believer's right to all that is required to advance him to "the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus," and formally admitting him when first administered into full communion with the Church, as one who, by the seeming fruits of his faith, had established his claims to the Church's confidence. They also held that in the professions required from applicants there must be a corresponding difference; the profession in either case being suitable to what is specially sealed by the sacrament for which they apply - an applicant for baptism making a suitable profession when declaring his faith in Christ, and specially his willingness to receive Him as his Saviour, and his resolution to serve Him as his Lord; but that a person desiring to communicate must profess not merely the first exercise of faith in Christ, but a persuasion or a hope derived from an examination of his experience and his life, that his faith is that which "worketh by love," "purifieth the heart," and "overcometh the world." They, moreover, held that there must be a corresponding difference in the actions of the Church in administering the sacraments - that the Church ought to sustain, in the case of a person applying for baptism either for himself or for his child, a profession not made incredible by ignorance and immorality, but that none ought to be admitted to the Lord's table in whom, after examination, tenderly and wisely conducted, no seeming evidence of grace can at all be discerned; or, as Dr Macdonald was accustomed to state it, applicants for baptism should be admitted on an uncontradicted, and applicants for the other sacrament on an accredited, profession of faith.

There are here three distinct statements: the first, defining the distinctive characters of the two sacraments; the second, describing the profession required on the part of applicants for either; and, the third, laying down the rule of the Church's duty in dealing with these applicants. If the position assumed in the first of these statements is tenable, the defence of the others is secured. But let it once be determined that there is no such difference between the two sacraments, as has been indicated, and it will be impossible to hold the position that they ought not to be administered by the Church on the very same footing, or that she should require a different profession and a higher qualification from applicants in the case of the one than she insists on in

the case of the other. But if the distinctive characters of the two sacraments be such, as the Ross-shire Fathers were accustomed to define them, the practical distinction observed in their mode of administering them can be triumphantly defended. And yet it would seem an easy thing to defend the first point of attack, though one cannot but suspect that something is overlooked in examining the position, and that this accounts for the confidence with which it is scanned when he looks to the hosts across the Spey who are marshalled against him.

It is not denied that baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace, and that an interest in all the blessings of that covenant is secured to the believer at the moment of his union to Christ. Nor is it denied that the blessings which are said to be specially sealed to the believer by baptism are an earnest of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. At the same time, it is held that the blessings of regeneration and justification alone are directly presented in baptism to the understanding and faith of the believer, and that it was the divine intention, as declared in the divine Word, specially to seal by this sacrament an interest in these blessings alone. (Rom. 6: 1-4; Col. 2: 12; Acts 2: 38). It is difficult to see how, without this limitation of its special effect as a seal, baptism, once for all, is sufficient. The fact that it is administered only once to the same individual is instructive and necessary according to the view of it now given. It teaches the consoling truths that once in Christ the believer is for ever in Him; that once regenerated he is for ever spiritually alive, and that once justified he is for ever free from condemnation.

If these blessings alone are specially sealed by baptism, how and when is an interest in them obtained? At the moment of the soul's union to Christ, and, in the case of an adult, when he first exercises faith in Jesus. If so, this act of faith is what an applicant for baptism must profess. He may at once, yea, he ought immediately to profess it; and on that profession he may be "baptised straightway." Such was the profession on which the Pentecost converts, the Eunuch, the Philippian jailer, and Lydia were baptised. It was the invariable rule to sustain such a profession in the days of the Apostles. They did so not as men inspired to judge infallibly the state of those who applied to them. Instead of this, they refrained from forming any positive judgment regarding the state of professing believers. They acted as wise men, but as mere men and charitable, not as inspired men and infallible; and, casting the responsibility on those who made it, they administered baptism on an un-contradicted profession of faith.

Proof that they were not infallible is furnished by every reported case of apostasy, and proof that they did not venture to pass judgment on the state of applicants is clearly furnished in Paul's method of dealing with the Philippian jailer. What but a merely un-contradicted profession of faith could there have been in the case of one whose conversion could only have occurred a few minutes before? He "was baptised, he and all his, straightway." There was no opportunity of knowing him by his fruits. He professed to have just believed in Christ, and there being nothing known to forbid the hope that his profession was genuine, he was at once baptised. Now, if it was the same profession that was required by the Apostles for the baptism of oneself, as for the baptism of his child, and if it was and could only be such, as the "charity" that "thinketh no evil" alone could accept, was not this exactly the practice of the Ross-shire Fathers in administering that ordinance?

It may be objected, however, that the profession of a parent educated under the Gospel ought to embrace more than that of a recent convert. We ought, indeed, to expect more knowledge in the former case; but, if that is competent, and if his conduct furnishes no positive evidence against him, why should not his profession of faith be accepted? And there is in his case a reason why it should, not found in the case of one claiming baptism for himself. He is already a member of the Church, and as "the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptised," on no ground can the baptism of his child be refused that will not justify the Church in excommunicating or suspending him. The fact of his not being a communicant is held in the south to be a sufficient reason for refusing the baptism of his child. If it be so, it must be a good reason for at least suspending him from the enjoyment of all the privileges of his status, as a member of the Church. To refuse baptism is but to take that suspension for granted, when there is no such act of the Church to which to refer. And the strange thing is, that the very man who would be punished, to the extent of disallowing his membership altogether, would be, at the very same time, rewarded with both the sacraments, if he would take them! The one, which demands the larger exercise of charity in its administration, is refused, but both would be given him at once! He, who is on the eve of being excluded from the pale of the Church, will be welcomed into the full communion of the Church, if he will only offer himself to her embrace!

It may be said that, by not accepting of both the sacraments, he proves himself unfit for either of them. This might be allowed, if it might be taken for granted

that in absenting himself from the Lord's Table he indicated a wilful contempt of Christ's authority and a wanton neglect of His ordinance. But surely this is not always the case ; and we are firmly persuaded that such a feeling as often finds expression in the conduct of those who go to the table of the Lord as in that of many in the north who refrain from communicating ; the difference between some of either class being simply this - the former, being dead to all the solemn considerations suggested by the ordinance of the Supper , are bold to go forward, while the latter, having some sensitiveness of conscience, shrink from approaching the table of the Lord , fearing that it is neither legitimate nor safe for them to do so.

It is altogether unfair to charge on the Ross-shire Fathers any remissness in requiring from parents the due discharge of their duties towards their children. They were careful to seek security to the Church for "the godly upbringing of the young"; but this they obtained more effectually than by making each parent a communicant, by taking pains in private and public catechising to teach them the doctrines of grace, and the requirements of the law of the Lord. The plain truth is that they were invariably more strict in administering baptism than their brethren in the south, who differed from them mainly in this - that while opening the door of admission more widely than they, these laid the other sacrament in front of it, not as a barrier against the rush of the multitude, but as a broad stepping-stone to facilitate their access.

The views of the sacrament of the Supper, and the practice in administering it, which are peculiar to the north, remain to be considered. The difference between it and the other sacrament, insisted on by the ministers in the Highlands, has been already pointed out. This distinction was clearly seen and firmly acted on by the Ross-shire Fathers. They were fully persuaded in their own minds as to this matter. They had no difficulty in regarding the sacrament of the Supper, as intended by the Lord, especially to seal something other and higher than that which is specially sealed by baptism. They called it, with Mastricht, "*sacramentum nutritionis*," as being intended to be an occasional feast to believers during all their wilderness journey. They beheld in the symbols of Christ's body and blood the clearest and the closest manifestation of the glory of the Lord, and in the exercise of those who partake of them the nearest approach to the Lord that can be on the earth. They regarded the guests at that table as having the most conspicuous connection with the cause and glory of Christ. They saw the Church pointing the eye of the world to a.

communion table, to inform them whom she accredited as the true people of God. On all these accounts they felt that they were specially called to guard the passage to the table of the Lord, and to subject to the closest scrutiny all who would approach it. And surely they were right. And if they were, how can an indiscriminate, a wholesale, admission to this sacrament be justified, when the mass is just as heterogeneous as that with which they had to deal?

As to the propriety of carefulness in granting admission to the table of the Lord, as a matter of opinion, there will be no dispute, whatever may be the difference in practice. Those who condemn the mode of administering the sacraments followed in the north must insist that there is no more urgent call to fence the table of the Lord than there is to guard the sacrament of baptism. If they can establish this from the nature of the two sacraments, and from the Word of God, they may prove the Ross-shire practice to be wrong; but just as surely as they do so, they will fail in showing that their own is right. If there is an equally urgent call to be careful in the case of both, they may prove it is not right to make a distinction in administering them; but they cannot surely make out, what would be the only justification of their own practice, that it is right not to be careful as to either. But the former they will fail, and the latter they won't try, to prove.

It is surely unnecessary to furnish any proof of the statement that both the sacraments do not especially seal the same blessings, though both are, in general, equally seals of the covenant of grace. If it were not so, it would be impossible to show why there should be two; a second would be quite superfluous if it specially sealed no more than the first; but surely there is no redundancy where only two are acknowledged and administered. If baptism seals the believer's introduction into the covenant, and his interest in the blessings bestowed on him immediately on his union to Christ, and if these blessings are an earnest of all "spiritual blessings in heavenly places," the other sacrament directly seals his right to all of which he had a sealed earnest given to him before. The Lord's Supper as a seal was intended to assure believers of their interest in all that was required to prepare them for glory, and as a feast was appointed to be a means of applying that provision to their souls.

It is difficult to conceive how any serious objection could be offered to this representation of its use. "This cup," saith Christ, "is the New Testament in my

blood," the fullness of the blessings of that covenant as procured by His blood, being by these words, in explanation of the symbol, specially represented and sealed to believers. In only one of the four descriptions given in Scripture of the mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper is there any mention of the blessing of pardon, and there it is not spoken of as if specially sealed at the time. It is only referred to in such a way as to intimate that it was unnecessary specially to seal it, this having formerly been done. "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." In these words Christ mentions it in a doctrinal statement, to explain how the provision of the covenant was secured to His people by His blood, and what was the divinely appointed order in which that provision was applied. Their justification is taken for granted, and the abstract blessing is pointed to, only in its place in the arrangements of the covenant, as an earnest of all other spiritual blessings, and the benefits, of which it is an earnest, are alone directly represented and specially sealed.

If it seals a more advanced privilege, it teaches a higher lesson than baptism. It presents to us the mystery of Christ's person, and the mystery of Christ's death, in relation to the everlasting covenant of grace. Deeply did the disciples feel that these lessons were not easily learned. In presence of no other does a living soul feel more dependent on divine teaching than when before the lesson of the words, "this is my body which is broken for you." And who, being one of the "disciples indeed," will deny that he is only slowly creeping on his way to the high attainment of tracing his salvation, entirely and closely, to the death of Christ as its only channel, and to the covenant love of Jehovah, as its primary source? In baptism, on the other hand, Christ is represented in the general aspect of His office as a Saviour from sin, and its lessons are those which are given to the class of beginners - our need of cleansing from sin; Christ as the only "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness"; the necessity of an interest in Him; the infallible certainty of salvation to all who are found in Him; and the obligation resting on all who believe in His name to "walk in newness of life."

And surely those who are admitted to the table of the Lord are placed in closer and more manifest connection with the cause and the glory of the Lord than they ever were before. Even if the Lord's Supper were nothing more than a second seal it would have this effect. All the more, if it specially seals an advance of privilege. He who comes to the table of the Lord must come nearer

than before to the Lord of the table. At the great love-feast there spread, the guests are seated, as at the family table, in the House of the King, and those who admit them point the eye of the world to them as the accredited children of Zion. Of the merely baptised they may say, "These have come into the house of the Lord, but we merely admitted them, in the charitable hope that they might prove what they professed to be." But of these others they must say, "We have tried them, and we accredit them as approved followers of Christ."

Is there not then good ground for maintaining that the way to the table of the Lord ought to be more strictly guarded than the outer door of His house? Must not the applicant for admission to it profess that he has been regenerated and justified already? Can he sit down at a feast without professing that he lives, has appetite for the food placed before him, and has an invitation from Him by whom it was provided? Is he not expressly commanded to examine himself as to these things, "and so," and only so, "to eat of that bread and drink of that cup"? And can the Church deal faithfully with him without instituting a closer scrutiny than before into his knowledge, experience, and conduct, when he is now extending his profession and taking a nearer position to the Lord among His followers on earth? Can the Church be faithful to her Head without doing so? And was not this all that was done by the Ross-shire Fathers, though a supercilious sneer is very often the only notice taken of their conduct?

Whatever opinion may be formed of the grounds on which the practice of the Ross-shire Fathers was defended, it certainly has the advantage of being the only mode according to which the rulers of the Church can suitably express their varied feelings towards applicants for sealing ordinances. There will always be about the Church those who may be excluded and in the Church those who may be extruded without any breach of charity. Against these let the door of admission be shut. Within the Church also there have always been those who make a profession of religion which cannot be summarily rejected, but which can win no unsuspecting confidence. Let such be allowed to remain within her pale, but into full communion let them not be admitted. Let only such as have accredited their profession be received within the inner circle, by the sealing ordinance of the Supper. This is the only course of procedure on the part of Church rulers that can be suitable in relation to the three classes with whom they have invariably to deal; and this was the practice of the Ross-shire Fathers. Acting on their views of the distinctive characters of the two sacraments, they enjoyed a liberty in dispensing ordinances, which they cannot

have who, acting according to different views, are under the painful constraint of being compelled either to exclude an applicant from membership altogether, or to admit him within the innermost circle around the table of the Lord.

Am I not justified in cherishing the hope of their being Christians regarding some professors whom I cannot confidently embrace as brethren in the Lord? Ought I to admit them into intimate fellowship till I become more satisfied than I am as to their acquaintance with the power of godliness? Surely I am not required summarily to reject all whom I cannot confidently receive as Christians, nor to be on terms of intimate fellowship with all whom, in the judgment of charity, I regard as such. And why should not the same liberty be allowed to the Church? Is she bound to exclude from her pale all whom into full communion she cannot admit? Yet much would be her bondage if the two sacraments were to be administered on the same footing. But such fetters were never placed by Christ's hand on the conscience of the Church. They who are in the state of bondage have themselves forged their chains.

The practice peculiar to the North has another marked advantage: it is admirably adapted to meet the various feelings of applicants for sealing ordinances. When a Christian applies for admission to the table of the Lord, who is enabled to express a hope of an interest in Christ, and in whom some seeming marks of grace are discerned, at once, but not because any judgment of his state has been formed, his request is complied with. But among true Christians there have always been differences as to the measure of their hope. All of them incline to seek communion with the Church, but some of them can only come with a trembling heart to ask for the privilege. One of these comes to a pious Highland minister in olden times to speak to him about communicating. Does the minister insist on his expressing an assurance of his conversion before he grants him admission to the table of the Lord? Does he require him to satisfy him by a record of his experience that the change through which he passed was really spiritual and saving? Not at all. How then does he act? He examines him closely, but wisely and tenderly; and in the measure in which he finds such views and feelings as seem to indicate a work of grace in his soul, he labours to remove his difficulties, and offers him all

needed counsel and encouragement when giving him a token of admission to the table of the Lord.¹

¹Mastricht. Mosheim in his "Ecclesiastical History" speaks of Maastricht along with Voet, Andrew Rivet and Marisius as Dutch Theologians, who in the 17th century were in the highest reputation for erudition and soundness in the faith (P.833, sec. 30).
Principal Cunningham describes Maastricht's system of theology-as eminently distinguished for its ability, clearness and accuracy (Hist. Theol. Vol. II, p.306).