

Does It Matter?

(The message today opens the discussion as to why it is important to know what one believes and why he should believe it. In a world that proclaims that truth is relative, we find that foundational principles of what one believes forces him to hold to a world view and that view is not relative. It is truth to him.)

In our last study we discussed the belief of the reformers that baptism and the Lord's Supper are designated as sacraments. We further pointed out that this does not agree with the scriptural view that baptism is a figure (picture or type) of the death, burial, and resurrection and the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Many today will raise the question, "Is it really all that important?" And further asked, "Does it really matter that much?"

According to the reformer John Calvin, the proper observance of sacraments is a sign of the church. He also stated that if this is maintained along with the preaching of the word, it is still a church regardless of how many other faults it may have. He further asserted that to disregard such a congregation is to desert religion. Listen as I read from his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 1, paragraphs or sections 10 and 12, pp. 289-290, 291.

10. We have said that the symbols by which the Church is discerned are the preaching of the word and the observance of the sacraments, for these cannot anywhere exist without producing fruit and prospering by the blessing of God. ... Be this as it may, when the preaching of the gospel is reverently heard, and the sacraments are not neglected, there for the time the face of the Church appears without deception or ambiguity and no man may with impunity spurn her authority, or reject her admonitions, or resist her counsels, or make sport of her censures, far less revolt from her, and violate her unity (see Chap. 2 sec. 1, 10, and Chap. 8 sec. 12). For such is the value which the Lord sets on the communion of his Church, that all who contumaciously alienate themselves from any Christian society, in which the true ministry of his word and sacraments is maintained, he regards as deserters of religion. So highly does he recommend her authority, that when it is violated he considers that his own authority is impaired. ... For there is no small weight in the designation given to her, "the house of God," "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). By these words Paul intimates, that to prevent the truth from perishing in the world, the Church is its faithful guardian, because God has been pleased to preserve the pure preaching of his word by her instrumentality, and to exhibit himself to us as a parent while he feeds us with spiritual nourishment, and provides whatever is conducive to our salvation. Moreover, no mean praise is conferred on the Church when she is said to have been chosen and set apart by Christ as his spouse, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27), as "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Whence it follows, that revolt from the Church is denial of God and Christ. Wherefore there is the more necessity to beware of a dissent so iniquitous; for seeing by it we aim as far as in us lies at the destruction of God's truth, we deserve to be crushed by the full thunder of his anger. No crime can be imagined more atrocious than that of sacrilegiously and perfidiously violating the sacred marriage which the only begotten Son of God has condescended to contract with us.

12. When we say that the pure ministry of the word and pure celebration of the sacraments is a fit pledge and earnest, so that we may safely recognise a church in every society in which both exist, our meaning is, that we are never to discard it so long as these remain, though it may otherwise teem with numerous faults.

Here we see the importance of baptism and the Lord's Supper. But some may say that what Calvin said is not what is commonly believed by the reformers today. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which is the standard to which most of the reformers hold to today says in Chapter XXVII, Article 1, "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."

Since the reformers assert that baptism is an extension of the Old Testament and replaced circumcision and is performed by sprinkling, then unless one believes according to their views he is outside the church of God. The same may be said regarding the Lord's Supper. However, this position is not limited to the reformers. The *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* equally proclaims the importance of what is believed along this line. From Chapter XXVIII, Article 1, we read, "Baptism and the Lord's supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world." From this we find that both reformers and Baptists maintain that what is believed about baptism and the Lord's Supper is connected with the truth of the doctrine of the church.

My purpose here is not to determine when the candlestick is removed from a congregation. That is determined only by the Lord Himself. However, I believe we can agree that where one congregation believes the reformed position and another congregation believes the Baptist position they cannot accept each other's policies and practices. This does not mean that there should be bitter hatred and malice toward each other. It simply means that they cannot fellowship each other in these beliefs.

While the above is true, allow me to further say that the point is not to belittle one view and exalt the other, but to emphasize the importance of knowing what the truth is regarding these things and then defend it with wisdom and love. Too often in this ecumenical society it is published that we need to remove all boundaries and walk together. However, as G. K. Chesterton said, "Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up." With this in mind, I want to challenge my listeners (and especially the Baptists) to know what the boundaries are and why they were established by our wise forefathers. Yes, I can and do respect many who hold to reformed principles, but (like them) we must know that it is important that we know why we believe as we do and that it is important that we defend and hold the line of scrimmage. Remember the words of the apostle Peter, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear," I Pet. 3:15. In connection with this verse, allow me to give two other verses that, I believe, compliment the spirit of I Peter 3:15. They are found in the book of James. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls," Jas. 1:21. Next is James 3:13, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

In future messages we plan to look at baptism and the Lord's Supper in detail. Since these practices are foundational to the congregation of the Lord, it is important that we have a biblical understanding of these practices. There are many benefits derived from partaking of these ordinances that both Baptists and Protestants can agree. However, as we have already seen, basically, there are differences in which they are not compatible, and regardless of how much we may appreciate and admire some who hold the reformed views, we have to defend that which (in our opinion) pictures salvation being totally of the Lord by grace.