



THE PASTOR'S PEN

Volume 44, No. 15

October 08, 2014

Doctrines of the Christian Church (DoC) Ordinances

Welcome to the first installment of “*Doctrines of the Christian Church (DoC)*.” In this first article we begin with the very heart of our faith and practice by looking at the ordinances that are at the center of our denomination. To start though, the first question that must be answered is: “What is an *ordinance*?” The word *ordinance* is the term that we use for the *sacraments* of the Church. So, what is a *sacrament*? We were taught in school that a *sacrament* is a religious rite or ceremony that is regarded as an outward act or visible sign of an inward, invisible grace that has been given to a person by God. This term, sacrament, comes from the older Latin word, via the Old French, for “sacred oath” and it equates to the older Greek term translated as “sacred mystery.” Both of these older terms refer to God’s promise to extend His grace to those who sincerely participate in the *rite* that is being performed to receive His grace.

In many Christian communities for a *rite* (which is an act of worship that follows a set, consistence, repeatable form) to become a sacrament/ordinance, it must have two conditions attached to it to make it both sacred and binding upon the Church. First of all, it must be a channel for God’s grace to work through. Second it must have been commanded by Christ for His followers to do, just as He did it during His earthly ministry. However, the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and a few other groups take exception to this definition. In their faith and practice, for a rite to become a sacrament, it must only be a channel for God’s grace to work through. This difference results in most Protestant, all Restorationists and the majority of the rest of Christendom having only two sacraments in their faith and practice. These sacraments are Baptism and Communion. At the same time, by their definition, the Roman Catholics have seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, The Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Ordination, and Matrimony), the Orthodox have a minimum of seven sacraments (The Eucharist, Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick, along with additional rites that do not apply to all members of the Church) and the Mormons, interestingly enough, have only one (The Lord’s Supper).

For all three branches of the brotherhood of the Christian Church (Non-Instrumental, Independent and DoC) we follow the practices of having only two ordinances: Baptism and Communion. We have these two ordinances as our faith and practice for three reasons:

1. Because we believe that they are channels of God’s grace to His children.
2. Because Christ participated in or established these rites during His earthly ministry.
3. Because Christ commanded all Christians to do them.

Because we, as a part of the Christian Church, reject the other rites used by Catholics, Orthodoxes and other Christian groups as sacraments, we are separated from them in the very basics of our faith and practice. Now this is not to say that members of our congregations totally agree with our official doctrinal viewpoint in this matter. No doubt, there are some exceptions in every local congregation who believe that there are more or less than two sacraments. None the less, the individual's beliefs that differ from those of the denomination do not change the official doctrine and position of the Christian Church (DoC) on these matters.

People who have differing viewpoints about the ordinances of the Christian Church (DoC) are not excluded from our fellowship. However, it is the responsibilities of the Elders and the congregation to identify and be aware of these differences and to see to it that the correct doctrinal position is taught and supported in our Sunday schools and congregation worship. As a result, the membership of the local congregation is totally responsible for what that congregation teaches to its members and to those who are seeking to know God's will for their lives. It is **our** collective responsibility and duty to know and to be able to share, with anyone who is seeking, how to receive God's grace and His salvation. As the old saying goes: "If you are alive and breathing in this world, you are either a missionary or a mission field!"

So, now that you know that we as Disciples of Christ are all responsible for what our congregation officially teaches, how much do you know about our ordinances? How much do you know about Communion and Baptism? Study up and decide what you know, what you believe and why it is important, because next month we will talk about Baptism and the position of the DoC on this ordinance of the Church.

Searching the scriptures with you,

James

Questions to think about:

1. What is a *rite*? What rites do you follow in your life?
2. What is an *ordinance*? How many ordinances do you think exist in the Church?
3. In which ordinances have you participated? Why?
4. How do you receive God's grace though these ordinances?
5. Where can you find these ordinances given to us and where are we commanded to follow them in the Bible?
6. Who is responsible for what a local congregation officially teaches to its members and the community around it about these ordinances?
7. Are you a missionary or a mission field?

