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BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER





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Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

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TOM NETTLES

Introduction: The Church's One Foundation

The last edition of the Founders Journal gave exposition to paragraphs 1-6, 10 and 14, 15 of chapter 26, "Of the Church," of the *Second London Confession*. This edition will complete our commentary on that chapter. Also, it will include commentary on chapters 27-30 on the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The editor has given attention to paragraphs 7-9 and 11-13 of Chapter 26 to bring to an end our exposition of that lengthy chapter. The two-fold provision of officers for the church designated by Christ, elders and deacons, are discussed. Also, he has discussed the issues of baptism and the Lord's Supper as presented in chapters 28 – 30. These articles complete the confession's statement on the distinctive ecclesiological marks of Baptist theology.

Scott Callaham has written an excellent piece on chapter 27, "On the Communion of Saints." This is a strikingly thorough discussion, a virtual biblical theology, of that rich biblical idea. He brings to bear a comprehensive grasp of the distinctives as well as the unity of the Old and New Testaments, an excellent competency in the biblical languages, and a love for doctrine that arises from careful exegesis. This is an encouraging and spiritually edifying look at the blessing that God has given in our fellowship and union in the gospel.

Complementing these studies, Jeff Robinson provides a book review of *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry* (P&R, 2020) by Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson. Jeff brings together several qualifications in evaluating this book on pastoral ministry.

He has been and is a pastor, experiencing week by week some of the very issues dealt with in this book. He is a reader on this subject and has brought to bear his broad knowledge of this genre of pastoral theology in making his evaluations. He is a writer—I mean, more than an occasional article or book idea, but a day-by-day producer of usable material for a wide range of readers. He does this as a job, but more importantly, as a conscientious steward of the written word, a theological commitment to the perpetuity of truth through the written word.

The Lord Jesus built his church on the Father-determined, Spirit-wrought confession that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God. On this confession the gates of hell which enclose the whole world will be made to tremble as God's power will bring to naught its ability to keep incarcerated even one of God's elect. Christ himself is the church's one foundation, its cornerstone, and his redemptive work provides its confession of truth. Christ died for his church and will bring it to himself as a bride—unspoiled, unspotted, unwrinkled, unblemished—on that day when sinless eternity begins in the presence of the one true God. We pray that this Founders Journal will help grow biblically-founded conviction of the importance of maintaining faithfulness to the purpose of Christ set forth when the Father “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1: 22, 23).



TOM NETTLES

Is Anything Needed More than Christ has Given?

Paragraph seven of chapter 26 highlights the independence and spiritual-giftedness of every local congregation—”To each of these churches.” Each has been given “power and authority” for executing biblically required worship and discipline. They need no interference from outside on matters of discipline, though they may request wisdom from other congregations (paragraphs 14, 15). Nor is their worship mandated from an outside source of human generation such as The Book of Common Prayer. The local congregation may carry out fully the elements of church life as required by Scripture. Every member of the body is gifted for particular functions within the body and “as each part does its work” the entire body is edified (Ephesians 4: 16).

These local congregations, when organized in a fully scriptural manner “according to the mind of Christ” will be constituted by members and officers (8). Members already have been described in paragraph 6 as “Saints by calling” who evidence their desire for holiness of life, fellowship with other believers and submission to the intent of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (described in chapters 28-30). All believers should see membership in a local body as a spiritual privilege and duty (12). Being admitted to the privileges of worship granted to the church by Christ himself, everyone who embraces membership also commits to be under the instruction, censure, and government of the church executed “according to the Rule of Christ.”

Two kinds of discipline will characterize a healthy New Testament congregation. The first is

formative discipline. Each member will receive regular instruction from called and qualified teachers—normally, but not limited to, elders—in sermons preached to the whole congregation in corporate worship. In addition, special times of instruction in smaller groups may occur in ways consistent with the needs of various segments of the church’s membership “which are to be ordered according to the light of nature, and Christiana prudence according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (I. 6). Formative Discipline is the most common kind employed by the church in accordance with apostolic principle. It includes prayer, worship, giving, taking the ordinances, reading the Scripture, and learning how to detect and mortify the jealous struggles of the flesh against the working of the Spirit and truth. Paul wrote frequently to give encouragement and substantial teaching in this process of formative discipline. To the Colossians, a church that he had not visited as yet, he instructed, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Colossians 2: 6). As he continued, Paul wrote, making specific applications of doctrine: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Colossians 3: 12, 13). At the end of the letter Paul insisted, “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord’” (Colossians 4: 16, 17). Such kinds of insistent apostolically-generated instruction could be multiplied greatly. This instruction, the ethical and practical application of doctrinal truth, gives godly formation to the attitudes and actions of Christians. Rescued from the power of darkness, we must now be transformed by the power of the word, the renewing of the mind, in order to be able to test and prove the will of God for a life of worship and obedience. This is formative discipline.

A second type of discipline is corrective discipline. Its first manifestation deals with private offenses that might escalate into the necessity of discipline of a more public nature. The confession refers to 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 14, 15. Both sternness and gentleness befit pastoral involvement: “Warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” These Scriptures highlight the importance of apostolic teaching in saying, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks not according to the tradition which he received from us.” Also, Paul reminded the church, “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.” Both in conduct and in belief the apostolic practice and word was to govern the congregations established under apostolic missionary labors.

In cases of private offense, the rule of Matthew 18: 15-17 is to be followed. If an understanding and restoration of confidence, trust, and fellowship is achieved in the private meeting, nothing further needs to be done. If such resolution cannot be reached, it then becomes a church matter. In such a case, the person who initiated the attempt at resolution should not “disturb church order, or absent themselves from” church attendance or partaking of the ordinances. They must wait patiently on the will of Christ as executed through the “further proceeding of the church” (13). There are times when difficult circumstances in a local congregation can be aided by consultation with another congregation of like faith and order, but the final policy and action in all such cases is a matter of the authority of the local congregation itself. [Tom Hicks dealt with this in his discussion of paragraphs 14 and 15 in another issue of the Founders Journal]. Each congregation must test all counsel and advice in light of the word of God as it speaks to the particular situation under consideration.

Within the church, God has given some of whom is required the “peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power, or duty” (8). The leadership in the use of means for both formative and corrective discipline falls largely on the shoulders of those so gifted. The members of each congregation search out and call those who have been gifted as officers. The two officers of the church are bishops and deacons. These offices, “appointed by Christ,” are to execute their duties in the church, for the benefit of God’s people and the glory of God, continuing in them “to the end of the world” (8). The common suffrage in electing these officers also is extended to the practice of corrective discipline, a “punishment by the majority” (2 Corinthians 2: 6). Though elders and deacons lead, the final application of discipline is to be done “when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus,” at which time they are to “purge the evil person from among you.” Disciplinable offenses are listed by the apostle: “anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler.” The purpose of the discipline is reclamation in light of the coming final judgment (1 Corinthians 5: 4, 5, 15). The purpose and prayer in such cases is for repentance and exuberant restoration so that the disciplined person will not be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” The church is to “reaffirm your love for him,” “to turn to forgive and comfort” such a one (2 Corinthians 2: 6-8).

These officers are set apart by the church. While the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are given to every member, the “laying on of hands” is reserved for those biblically-mandated and qualified leaders of the congregation—“fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit.” The words bishop, elder, and shepherd all designate a single office from different perspectives of function and character. The *Savoy Platform of Polity* lists “Pastors, Teachers, Elders” as separate offices. The Baptists, who depended on this statement of polity for much of their wording departed from the Congregationalists at this point. The elder so qualified is “chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself” (9). This is a solemn, soul-shaping congregational responsibility and

so should be accompanied “by fasting and prayer.” When elders are tested and elected, they are set apart for the service by laying on of hands. The confession references 1 Timothy 4: 14: “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”

Although God may not call them as elders to exercise authority over the flock, he gives ability and unction of proclamation to others. Both Stephen and Phillip, two of the first deacons, were gifted as preachers and evangelists and God pressed them into service. The confession points to the scattering of the church after the persecution that arose over Stephen. At that time, those who were scattered were “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Others went to Antioch and engaged the Hellenists “preaching the Lord Jesus.” God blessed the effort “and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11: 19-21). Considering this phenomenon, the writers of the confession said, “Yet the work of preaching the word is not so peculiarly confined to them; but that others also gifted, and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, and approved, and called by the Church, may and ought to perform it” (11).

Christ has provided for his churches all that is needed for their knowledge of his word and their conformity to his image. The functioning of the church in accordance with the loving regulations given in Scripture under the guidance of the officers that he has set in place will cause us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” “Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5: 25-27).

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SCOTT N. CALLAHAM

On the Communion of Saints

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Affirmation after affirmation rolls off the tongue in the triumphant crescendo of syllables that concludes the Apostles’ Creed. In Protestant printings of this text, a footnote or parenthetical statement jarringly interjects to assure readers that “catholic” doesn’t actually mean “Catholic,” but in fact carries an earlier meaning of the adjective: “universal.” In light of the earnest impulse to preclude possible misunderstanding of the term “catholic,” it is interesting that the following phrase “the communion of saints” then passes without prompting a similar rush to explanation. Yet doesn’t “the communion of saints” also deserve a moment’s reflection on its meaning? What should one believe when professing this kind of conviction, and what difference does it make?

Background of “On the Communion of Saints” in the Second London Baptist Confession

The First London Baptist Confession of Faith (1644), Article 34, simply states that “all men” ought to come into the church “to have communion here with the Saints.” The confession does not further develop the concept of this communion nor specify the identity of these “saints,” other than perhaps paralleling “saints” with “believers” in Article 31.

In contrast, within the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) appear the two

paragraphs of Chapter 27, titled “On the Communion of Saints.” The text weaves together elements from both the Westminster Confession (1647) and the Savoy Declaration (1658) treatments of the topic, for the most part accepting Savoy Declaration edits but retrieving from the Westminster Confession a closing defense of the concept of private property.

A literary composite, “On the Communion of Saints” in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith adheres closely to its sources. That said, appropriation of that source material into a Baptist context frees the text from its prior denominational commitments. For Baptists, the value of the Confession’s treatment of the communion of saints lies in the degree to which it reflects the theology of the Bible.

Biblical Theology within the Chapter

Scripture passages cited in paragraph 1 include some of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of union with Christ, in that Christ is the head of his body, the church. The Spirit works upon those who are within the body, whose old selves have experienced crucifixion and are now dead. These renewed people receive Christ’s grace and experience fellowship with each other, as well as with God the Father and the Son. This fellowship among the “saints” is dynamic, involving encouragement, admonishment, and sacrifice for each other’s sake.

Paragraph 2 builds upon themes from Paragraph 1, explicitly stating what might have otherwise remained implicit. For example, the Confession first cites the exhortation in the book of Hebrews to meet together for mutual edification: a surprisingly fresh and convicting word from the Lord for the present day. This edifying relationship begins in the family and extends to the church, exemplified in Paul’s well-known “body parts” analogy in 1 Corinthians 12:14-27. As mentioned previously, it seems that the framers of the Confession felt burdened to specify that the generosity one exhibits toward others flows from retaining personal property rights rather than surrendering them to the community. Whatever prevailing conditions may have prompted emphasis on this point in 17th century England, contemporary readers would do well to remember that the question at hand was whether to hand over one’s property to the community of faith, not to civil government.

Observations on the Chapter

Regarding both paragraphs of Chapter 27 taken together, at least three observations seem appropriate. First, the Chapter is rather short. This brevity could lead to a misperception that its content is perfunctory: confessionally necessary perhaps, but not of primary concern. Yet since the Chapter clearly touches upon ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church—, lack of length need not signal insignificance. In fact, since the theological currents of our contemporary era seem to

throw the nature of the church into open question, it would be especially helpful for present-day Christians to pay attention to Chapter 27.

Second, the scriptural basis of the Chapter does not directly draw from the Old Testament. In truth, limited interaction with the Old Testament is characteristic not only of the rest of the Confession but also of most Christian statements of faith. Yet since no domain of Christian thinking should suffer lack of influence from the full counsel of God, the present study aspires to thrust the roots of the Confession's ecclesiology even deeper into biblical revelation than the Confession roots itself.

Third, the Chapter characterizes what the "communion of saints" should be like without defining either "communion" or "saints." If all believers were to share a common understanding of these terms, such definitions would be unnecessary. However, it would be difficult to argue that agreement on the meaning of the "communion of saints" prevails even within single churches, let alone broadly among all Christians. So let's examine what we can learn from Scripture about the "communion of saints."

Saints

The expression "the communion of saints" does not appear in the Bible, though the main terms *koinonia* (fellowship, or "communion") and *hagios* = (holy, or "saint" when used as a noun) each appear frequently in the New Testament. Since we are interested in the "communion" that "saints" experience, it is helpful at the outset to identify these "saints."

First, we should note that New Testament "saints" are not an especially holy caste, set apart from other believers. Instead, "saint" appears to refer to believers generally, as in Romans 1:7: "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." "Saint" can refer to both the living and the dead. As for deceased saints, there is no support in the Bible for church traditions that following their deaths, saints begin functioning as otherworldly mediators standing between humanity and God, whose intercession adds merit to the prayers of believers who are still living.

The normal grammatical gender of "saint" in New Testament Greek is masculine, but this is a matter of grammar and not sex. Enoch exclaims in Jude 14, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones." Here the "holy ones" word (which is the "saints" word) is feminine, but only because "ten thousands" is without exception grammatically feminine in Biblical Greek. In the one Scripture passage in which the reader might suspect that there is a male-specific use of "saint," Acts 9:41, the "saints" and the "widows" are indeed two distinct groups. However, this is only because these widows had been the specific group of women inside a house in verse 39,

whom Peter in verse 40 then sent outside with everyone else.

At first glance it might be tempting to view the New Testament's use of "saint" to refer to all male and female believers as a desecralization of the word, a pulling down of a lofty term to a common level, a divesting of special meaning. In other words, if everyone in the church is a "saint," then the word seems to lose its uniqueness and become merely a synonym for a Christian brother or sister. However, Old Testament use of a related term suggests that there may actually be a theological motive behind New Testament authors choosing to call believers "saints."

In Leviticus 11:44–45, all Israelites received the command to be holy (qadosh), because God himself is holy. However, there are only three Old Testament passages that go on to use that Hebrew "holiness" term for people as a noun, two of which are in the Psalms: Psalm 16:3, "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight," and Psalm 34:9, "Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!" Yet there seems to be a certain hesitation to apply the adjective that describes God's very nature to his people, for other "saint" passages in the Psalms use a word communicating devotion (*asid*) rather than holiness.

Then in the apocalyptic visions of the book of Daniel appears the only other use of qadosh as a noun for people, and that Hebrew word in Daniel 8:24 follows six rapid-fire appearances of the Aramaic cognate qadish in only five verses in Daniel 7. These "saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever" (Daniel 7:18). Tracing this eternal kingdom backward in time, in Daniel's vision this is the kingdom already given to the one "like a son of man" who came "with the clouds of heaven" and was presented before the Ancient of Days, seated on his heavenly throne (Daniel 7:13). Further back in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's post-madness confession revealed that this everlasting kingdom belongs to the Most High God (Daniel 4:3, 34).

Therefore, moving forward again through the logic of Daniel 7, the Most High God gives his kingdom to the one "like a son of man," who receives the worship of all peoples (Daniel 7:14). Then the "saints of the Most High" receive the kingdom, apparently after an eschatological judgment (Daniel 7:27). However, this "receiving" of the kingdom is not a transfer of lordship, because the Most High still receives worship at the end of the vision. These "saints" do not somehow meld with the Most High to become one being with him (nor with the one "like a son of man"), nor do they usurp the Most High's rule. Even so, there is some kind of significant sharing of the Most High's kingdom, without fine delineation of everything that sharing entails.

At the time of the writing of Daniel 7, its visionary events were in the far future. However, in the Gospels, Jesus (with a roundabout, third person manner of speaking) explicitly identifies himself as the Son of Man, and furthermore as one who comes on "the clouds of heaven" in Mark

13:26 (also Matthew 24:30) and Mark 14:62 (also Matthew 26:64). Additionally, John's vision in Revelation 1:7 more directly states that Jesus "is coming with the clouds." From a biblical theology standpoint, the "Son of Man" in the New Testament is the one "like a son of man," and likewise the "saints" in the New Testament correspond to the "saints" in Daniel 7.

Keeping these Old Testament theological roots in mind, it is possible that the New Testament practice of referring to all believers as "saints" conveys both present and future implications for the church. As for the present, by virtue of being categorically called holy as "saints," through Christ, believers are holy in a way that ancient Israel was not. As for the future, the "saints" as God's holy people will indeed inherit the kingdom of God. In tension with this blessed hope, then, are the New Testament's warnings about those who will not in fact inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, 15:50; Galatians 5:19–21). Simply put, they are not among the saints.

Communion

Koinonia refers to an exceedingly close relationship characterized by action in a spirit of unity, frequently entailing partnership in activities and mutual sharing. This strong mutuality of koinonia clarifies the interpretation of Philemon 6, which the ESV renders "And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Contrary to the plain English reading of the sentence, Paul does not express a general wish that Philemon's evangelistic efforts (Philemon's "sharing" of his faith) may become more effective. Instead, the "sharing" here is koinonia. Paul prays that Philemon will actively live out his faith in tight connection with Paul and other Christians. This "sharing" fellowship newly includes the runaway slave Onesimus, whom Paul calls a "beloved brother" in Philemon 16. No wonder that the former master and slave relationship had to change drastically, for Philemon and Onesimus should henceforth live in koinonia!

Interestingly, while mental images that spring from the English word "fellowship" typically consist of people warmly interacting with each other in the same place, the bond of believers in the physically dispersed body of Christ could generate significant acts of partnership and sharing across long distances. For example, Romans 15:26 mentions that believers in Macedonia and Achaia "have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem," in which the "contribution" is itself koinonia. Among the members of these churches in Greece there need not have been a single personal connection to Jerusalem, but they were in fellowship with the church in Jerusalem nonetheless.

Koinonia was such a lived reality for the early church that New Testament authors freely used

this term to describe believers' relationship with God. Christians enjoyed koinonia with God (1 John 1:6), the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3), the Son (1 Corinthians 1:9, 10:16; Philippians 3:10), and the Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14, Philippians 2:1). If believers experience such comprehensive fellowship with every member of the triune Godhead and with each other, it is little wonder that Paul would express thankfulness for "koinonia in the gospel" with fellow believers (Philippians 1:5).

With this biblical sense of the deep mutual interconnectedness of koinonia in mind, it is understandable that the framers of the Second London Baptist Confession would want to affirm in paragraph 1 that union with Christ does not entail merging with him into a shared state of personhood, which would unavoidably entail believers' participation in deity along with Christ the God-man. This same distinction between the "saints" and God pertains in Daniel 7, although describing the God-human relationship with the special term koinonia would need to wait for New Testament revelation.

The Communion of Saints for Today

The "communion of saints" is a doctrine in need of recovery in the contemporary church. In Western cultural settings, the church must continually contend with fragmentation incited by exaggerated individualism. Rugged individualists have little interest in continual engagement with other saints to "promote their mutual good" by extending their sharing "to the whole household of faith" (using terms from the Confession). After all, the depth of relationship entailed by the communion of saints is uncomfortably demanding of time and other resources. As for discomfort, the isolated saint may simply think it unreasonable to try to have communion with some other saint when he or she doesn't even like that person.

Unfortunately, recovery of the "communion of saints" in the contemporary church requires more than a cultural shift among the saints in general. The leadership and management structure of most churches itself resists the full engagement of every church member in the life of Christ's body. Generally speaking, ministers do ministry, and congregants receive ministry, whatever system of church polity is in place. If congregations were to shift toward a more active posture of ministry engagement for all without changing expectations of what leaders do accordingly, the leaders would rapidly burn themselves out in the attempt to lead in the same programmatic ways they had before.

In addition, a relatively new enemy of the communion of saints is many churches' passivity or even abandonment of ministry in an age of virtualization. The model of "body life" encapsulated in the concept of the communion of saints requires a high degree of investment of one's self

in others as a gathered, functioning community. Real fellowship entails sacrifice, relational vulnerability, and thus toleration and management of risk. Regrettably, many churches essentially decline to take risks of any kind, and their primary “ministry” has become narrating briefing slides to miniature, grainy images of half-dressed saints against virtual backgrounds. At best, whatever unfolds on the screen before them commands a fraction of their attention as they crouch over electronic devices in isolation.

All told, the lack of spiritual vitality in many contemporary churches is depressingly palpable. Turning around this lamentable situation is certainly not a matter of simply placing greater emphasis on certain theological themes, even the often professed but increasingly seldom believed doctrine of the “communion of saints.” In contrast, what the church needs to do is to repent and believe the gospel. This is because the gospel brings about not a mere change of attitude, but a re-creation, a new creation.

In the new covenant community, all of the redeemed are saints, and all receive the commission to serve. Obedience to Jesus’s commands takes place most naturally through full participation in the body of Christ and the sharing of its burdens, not merely knowing the “right answers” to theological questions. Indeed, “If we say we have fellowship with him (God) while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:6–7) May the contemporary church rediscover the thoroughgoing communion that saints are to enjoy with each other and with God, and may the resulting revolution of sacred love within the body of Christ fuel the revival we pray that the Spirit would begin in us.

NOTES:

[1] W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 183–184.

[2] *Ibid.*, 268–269.

[3] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. 3: *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 659–660.

[4] Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 396–397.

[5] The only biblical passage in which these two words appear close together is the final verse of 2 Corinthians as Paul writes “may . . . the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

[6] Peter later cites this passage and applies the same logic to Christians in 1 Peter 1:14–16; their conduct should reflect God’s holiness.

[7] See the similar use of *koinonia* in the sense of “contribution” in 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 9:13.

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TOM NETTLES

Baptism and Lord's Supper

Articles 28–30: Second London Confession

Jesus Reminds Us

Under the authority of Christ, the church practices two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Chapter 28 of the 2LC says that these two are of "positive, and sovereign institution; appointed by the Lord Jesus the only Law-giver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world." They are to be administered by those called and qualified by Christ. Both of these are proclamations of the chief aspects of the covenant of redemption in accordance with which Christ was crucified (Romans 6:3; Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25). In his baptism, Jesus foretold that his obedience to the Father would lead him to a bloody death. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus established a remembrance of his abused body and bleeding wounds just prior to their infliction.

The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper manifest the Trinitarian character of the covenant community, the church, and the specific trinitarian rhythm that should always be present in the witness of corporate worship. As does the entire revelation of the New Testament, these ordinances set forth a vigorous Christocentric trinitarianism.

These ordinances do not highlight themselves as sources of salvation but point to the historical work of Christ when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. They are solemn and serious proclamations of the central facts of the gospel always to be enacted in the context of explanation and proclamation. Their power is not primarily existential, but they draw attention to the finality

of the historical redemptive event. In doing so, they remind us that all spiritual blessings flow to us from the consummated ransom of Calvary.

The ordinances teach us submission to the governing authority of the revealed word of God. Participation in them calls for a mental and spiritual embracing of their truth. Each directly affirms the worship of God in Spirit and in truth. Only the Spirit qualifies a person to receive them; and only by the word of God does the Spirit change our minds and fit our hearts to bear in our bodies their reality. By the word of God, we learn the truth, and by the Spirit of God we confess the truth that Jesus is Lord and receive the mercies resident in his resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:2; 5:1; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Romans 10:8-13). The article on baptism states, "Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance." Likewise in the Supper of the Lord, (30: 1) it is given to believers "to be observed in the churches unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and showing forth the sacrifice in his death confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to, all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other."

There is no room for guess-work in interpreting these symbols. Though they are symbols, they are clearly interpreted symbols. Though they are short dramas, they have a prescribed meaning. God certainly is not opposed to the expressive power of symbol and drama and has designated these two enactments of the victorious passion of Christ as the church's play.

Every vital aspect of plot, character, conflict, resolution, and denouement makes deep impressions on the entire participating community as the church regularly enacts the drama of redemption. We see man as fallen and under the curse of death with nothing he can do to release himself from its verdict. He is under the threat of eternal death, and moreover is oblivious to the roiling waters of divine vengeance ready to surround him. He comes to himself; we sense the difficulty of an awakened conscience in futile efforts to reverse this just sentence, and we struggle with the helplessness of man. We learn that an eternal covenant has been arranged just fit for this situation, expressive of the eternal wisdom, immutable justice, and invincible love of God. As designated in this covenant, the only person who can possibly rescue these sinners appears. He accomplished the work necessary for salvation through unimaginable cost: a conflict with the unbelief of those he came to save, an extended contest with the arch-fiend, the devil, and, most wrenching, he places himself in the stead of those who should receive from the Father "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (Romans 2:8, 9), a cost that none but that one could pay. The covenant involves the shedding of blood, the beating of his body, an entombment behind a sealed rock. His hard work is rewarded by his Father, he rises from the dead with such

abundance of approval that eternal spiritual blessings accrue to all those who trust his work, and his work alone, for their acceptance before God. They are given the promise of eternal life, hope in this life, a renewal of soul to love and reach for holiness, and a sense of final resolution through the kingly return of their suffering servant.

A solemn but lively presentation of each ordinance helps each participant and observer enter the perfection of these ultimately true dramas. They are the dominically warranted proclamations of the real story that do not call for speculation as to their meaning. Their meaning is repetitively pressed on the mind and heart of the community. Their repetition draws us, not to the drama itself or to the elements that bear the story, but to its once-for-all divine enactment historically “in his body on the tree” as interpreted authoritatively in the present day according to divine revelation. The article on the “Lord’s Supper” (30) specifically rejects the idea that it constitutes a “real sacrifice,” but is a “memorial;” it affirms that the people must be given both the bread and the wine, not have the wine withheld from them; it rejects as an unscriptural superstition and as idolatrous the doctrine of transubstantiation, which in addition is repugnant “even to common sense and reason.” Scripture sometimes calls the elements of bread and wine by the “things they represent,” the broken body of Christ and his shed blood.

These ordinances do not operate as mere appendages to corporate worship, stuck on or pressed in with clumsiness or without connection to the entire experience, but reflect the essence of body life. They are so vital in expressing the particular event that has given the church existence, that they must constitute, along with the appropriate concentration on the word, the substance of the church’s confessional witness in worship whenever they are celebrated. They embody the singularity and absoluteness of the truth, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Baptism

Jesus commanded his disciples immediately before his ascension, “As you go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19). The confession states, “The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It continues by affirming, “Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.” (29: 3, 4).

They Obeyed His Command According to his instructions: Exactly according to his word, we find the disciples at Pentecost responding, “So those who received his word were baptized” which

consisted of “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:39, 41). We find the same order true in Samaria, “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). When the gospel came with power to the house of Cornelius through the preaching of Peter, in the presence of the “believers from among the circumcised,” Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” On that basis, therefore, “He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:47, 48). When the Philippian jailer heard the message, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,” he took Paul to his house where Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:31, 32). The promise of salvation through faith was to him and to his household, so they too must hear the word in order to believe. They did and “he was baptized at once, he and all his family.” The last part of verse 34 should read, “And he rejoiced, all of his house having believed in God.” The whole household was instructed in the word, the whole household believed, and the whole household was baptized.

Baptism is Trinitarian. In the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 4:13-17), we see the clearly trinitarian arrangement of the ordinance. The Son of God is there, submitting to all righteousness; the voice of the Father is there proclaiming the belovedness and the eternal sonship of the Son; and the Holy Spirit is there descending as a dove showing that, in this mysterious incarnation, the Son of God himself must indeed fulfill all righteousness as a man who “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” (Hebrews 9:14).

Immediately after this initiatory event and the manifestation of the trinitarian nature of this mission, the continuing element of the Spirit’s involvement becomes clear. Jesus was “full of the Spirit” and was led, really driven, by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. This began the tests in which Jesus fulfilled all righteousness that we might be justified and adopted.

For us, baptism reflects the work of the Spirit both in fitting us for union with Christ by regeneration and empowering us for “newness of life,” that is, sanctification. He unites us with the Lord Jesus in his perfect work of salvation, and testifies to our place as a member in the body of Christ, the church. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13). This is one reason that baptism is so closely tied to church membership. All of the “members of the body” bear witness that they too were “made to drink of one Spirit,” that is, have been subject to the saving operations of the Spirit, and were placed by the Spirit, not only into the universal church composed of all the elect of all ages, but into this local congregation. There, by the gifting of the Spirit, we work “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Baptism also draws attention to the powerful operation of the Father in raising Christ from the dead –“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). Again, Paul inserts the operation of the Father into the meaning of baptism in writing, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Baptism signifies that Christ is the “firstborn among many brothers,” and as we have followed him in his death so we are released from “bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” We are sons of God through faith in him and the Father has received us as his children.

When Paul explained the meaning of our baptism (“as many of you as were baptized into Christ”) as the expression of our having “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27), he gave a pungent summary of the trinitarian foundation of salvation. Under the initiatory authority of the Father in the eternal covenant of grace, he sent the Son. By this work of redemption, the Father then sent the Spirit. “But when the fullness of time had come,” that is, the time established in eternity when the Father gave to the Son a people to save (John 17: 3, 4), “God sent forth his Son,” that is, at the precise moment that the “power of the Most High” (Luke 1:35) overshadowed Mary, “born of woman,” for in addition to the overshadowing of the Most High the Holy Spirit had come upon her so that child was both Son of God and son of Mary born of her flesh, “born under the law,” that is, truly born as a Jew under ceremonial law and as the Son of Man under the moral law, “to redeem those who were under the law,” because the law held us captive to its true moral demand of death to the transgressor, “so that we might receive adoption as sons” for when the legal barriers are removed by his suffering he “is not ashamed to call [us] his brothers” (Hebrews 2:12). “And because you are sons,” So Paul continued, “God” that is, God the Father according to the terms of the covenant and on the basis of the reconciling work of Christ, “has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba Father!’” This new familial status means “you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:4-7). All of this meaning is invested in the putting on of Christ in the public testimony of baptism. The triune God is on our side, for us in mercy. The entire congregation, before whom this is done, remembers, confesses, testifies to the same understanding, and worships.

Baptism points to a finished work. One’s baptism signifies that he is bearing witness to the finished work of Christ and has taken to himself all that is implied in having been bought with a price. He confesses, as it were, “I do know that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within me, whom I have from God. I am not my own, for I was bought with a price. So henceforth, this body that has been buried and has risen again with Christ will be put to the service of the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). To “put on Christ,” therefore, as a voluntary act of obedience to the command of Christ is to reflect the work of Christ immediately, for when we are baptized

we are “baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3). The confession affirms that to the baptized person, this ordinance is “a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of Life.”

Christ’s death is the event that embodies all things that lead the sinner from death to eternal life. It sets in motion the powers brought to bear on the sinner to carry him from under the curse to the glorified state in heaven. From our being foreknown in Christ, to our being called, justified, sanctified, glorified, and appearing in his image before all the citizens of heaven, all flows in a never-ending stream from his death. “He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also, along with him, freely give us all things” (Romans 8:32). Baptism symbolizes that, testifies for the person and the church that vital truth, presses the historical reality on the conscience, and leads the church, not to rely on the symbol, but to confess more deeply their dependence on the Savior in his once-for-all work (Hebrews 7:26-28).

Baptism denotes identification with Christ’s suffering. Though baptism does not activate God’s saving work but symbolizes its content, that does not mean that nothing existential is at stake at all when a person submits to the ordinance. When disciples asked about their place in his kingdom, Jesus pointed to the fact that only through a baptism in blood and the emulation of it in the life of the disciples would the kingdom be established. “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? . . . The baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (Mark 10:38, 39). Christ’s obedience to this baptism of ransom blood would seal and mature his unbroken course of righteousness to the Father’s will (Matthew 3:15 – “Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”). In this baptism, he announced that, because of this perfected righteousness (Hebrews 5: 8, 9), after a baptism in blood (Mark 10:38-45), he would be raised from the dead.

Those elements of redemptive truth, present when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, define for us what should be present both in our minds and in the accompanying words during the practice of this ordinance. By entering into John’s baptism, he affirmed John’s message about Jesus himself and also the reality of sin in the human family and the need for repentance. Though he was sinless, he took on himself the debt of sinners. As we are baptized in water as he was, so we are committed to take up the cross, follow him, and be willing to be baptized in blood as he was. Having been brought to faith, we testify publicly that Christ’s life, death, and life-again is ours. Again, to this Paul pointed when he wrote the Galatian churches, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3: 26, 27). In baptism, the person announces that he has counted “all things as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and, in order that I may know

the power of his resurrection, I now show my commitment to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death” (cf. Philippians 3:8, 10).

It is not a time for light banter or humorous observation but a time for being committed to the resurrection of the righteous through dying the death of the righteous. It denotes that Jesus, being set apart by the Father for such a death, also consecrated himself for this death, that those given to him by the Father would be forgiven of sin and be granted eternal life by His righteousness. Our voluntary submission to this ordinance, following upon personal repentance and faith, therefore, means that we have submitted to the biblical principle that the life dependent on his death comes “that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:13). In his death, we died; in his resurrection, we live. Our true life, moreover, is but for a commitment of willingness to die in the cause of the Christ who bought us with his precious blood.

The Lord’s Supper (Paragraph 30)

The gospel writer Luke (22:19) recorded, “And he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave to them saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” We find that the first church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers” (Acts 2: 42). This ordinance was to be practiced by the whole church as a matter of deep solemnity and in demonstration of gospel unity. This ordinance was given by Christ for a “perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice of his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof.” Worshipful engagement in the Supper would provide “spiritual nourishment and growth in him,” and serve to remind them of the covenantal bond given them in Christ and likewise the spiritual communion of believers with each other (1).

The Manner and Mental Attitude in Partaking is Important: To reinforce that fact, Paul gave a sober warning to the Corinthian church about her attitude and conduct in the time of corporate worship when partaking of the memorial meal: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Corinthians 11:26-29). Solemn warning, indeed, and intended to discourage any reception of the Supper not permeated with both Spirit and truth.

The confession, therefore, warns that “all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to

enjoy communion with Christ; so are they unworthy of the Lord's Table." The descriptive words, "ignorant and ungodly," refers to those who are unconverted. They do not have a saving knowledge of Christ and thus are devoid of the Spirit of God and any affection for godly living. Consistently in the life of the established church these Baptists had seen the constant participation in communion of merely nominal Christians, baptized in infancy and required to commune. This practice drove unconverted persons into "great sin against him" while they remained unconverted. As such, they received the elements of bread and wine "unworthily and are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (8).

As an established perpetual element of corporate worship, the memorial should be approached with understanding. There must be no extortion of the heart in exalting the material of the Supper beyond biblical warrant. At the same time, it must not be demoted from its ordained place to effect sanctifying meditation on the redemptive work of the cross.

Symbols in Perpetuity – In the text in Matthew 26:26-29, Jesus used the words "Take, eat; this is my body." Also with the cup he said, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Some traditions receive these words as indicating that there is a perfect identity between the elements partaken and the body and blood of Christ. Roman Catholic theology asserts that transubstantiation takes place. The elements, maintaining all the appearance, feel, and taste of bread or wine actually become the real flesh of Christ and the true blood of Christ. This miracle of "transubstantiation" occurs at the use of the appropriate form by the priest and those partaking receive grace *ex opera operato*, that is, in the very act of taking, unless the recipient has committed mortal sin. Lutheran liturgy upholds a doctrine of "real presence" but not transubstantiation. Because of Christ's omnipresence, and through the words spoken, Christ's body and blood, united in one person with his deity, actually are present in the elements of the Supper, so they believe.

Although Zwingli and Calvin differed in some matters of expression, they agreed in this, "Hence, any man is deceived who thinks anything more is conferred upon him through the sacraments than what is offered by God's Word and received by him in true faith." Zwingli wrote of eating both spiritually and sacramentally. To eat spiritually was to receive the work of Christ by faith in that God has promised forgiveness through the death and resurrection of his Son to those who receive that work as the only means by which sinners can be reconciled. To eat sacramentally occurs when "you join with your brethren in partaking of the bread and wine which are the tokens of the body of Christ. . . . You do inwardly that which you represent outwardly."

As an expression of disgust, some have characterized the Zwinglian view as that of "bare symbol." If one means by bare, that no importance for spiritual growth and deepened worship of Christ is intended by it, then the word "bare" is a complete caricature. If one means that the elements add

nothing to the reconciling transaction that was accomplished in time and space in the body of Christ on the cross, then the word “bare” is a truly evangelical affirmation. The bread and wine are symbols, naked and unadorned, and do nothing but point, but point with sober poignancy, to the place where all was done.

The biblical narrative supports the idea that this is the use of a symbol by Jesus. Jesus often used the verb of being to speak of a symbol that depicted some aspect of his redemptive work. “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). John, in fact, called this manner of teaching a “figure of speech” or a “similitude” (10:6) “I am the true vine” (John 15:1). At Passover, Jews would say, “This is the bread of affliction,” meaning it symbolizes the affliction they had endured in Egypt. Jesus’ words, therefore, recalled this emblematic power already present in the Passover meal.

The historical reality is that Jesus stood before them and had not yet had his body broken nor his blood shed. He called the wine (“this is”) the “blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” That blood had not yet been shed, for, in accord with the covenant, it would be shed, poured out, but once to accomplish forgiveness. The book of Hebrews gives clarity that the reality of that historical event cannot be duplicated; in fact, it need not be duplicated for in completing the covenantal provisions it was sufficient once and for all (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 15, 24-28; 10:9, 10, 14, 18; 13:20, 21).

The symbols are to remind us of the perfect satisfaction provided by Christ in his once-for-all death on the cross. They do not draw attention to themselves as having any efficacy, but to the single event in which reconciliation occurred. He poured out his blood for many and in that death he brought to justification the many for whom he died: “By his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities . . . He poured out his soul unto death . . . He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:11,12).

If the disciples partook of his actual body, as yet unbroken and unbruised, did they partake of his mortal, unresurrected, unglorified body, or did they partake of the body that did not yet exist? Do we partake of the same body that they did, if in fact we take his literal body? Do we partake of the body as it was before his resurrection or after his resurrection? Or does Christ still have both a mortal body capable of death and a glorified body incapable of death? Or is this more likely symbolic language that draws our adoration to the great redemptive transaction on Calvary? For that purpose, he took on a body that he might die in our nature to give eternal life to our nature: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; . . . I have come to do your will, O God. . . . And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:5-10). The body that was offered once satisfied forever for the forgiveness of sins and the sanctification of the believer. That body was glorified in the resurrection, and never will be offered again.

Salvation comes not through any kind of intrinsic efficacy in the material elements of bread and wine themselves; rather it resides in the satisfaction of divine wrath justly manifested in time and space on one of our race who could lawfully, ontologically, and morally stand in as our substitute. Jesus was morally qualified to suffer vicariously for he had no transgression of the law as his own for which he must die. He was truly man and stood as our covenant head. He had a human body, a human mind, a human spirit all of which must endure fully the divine wrath due his people. This he did during his hours on the cross and finished the suffering. The confession insisted, "In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all, for remission of sin for the quick or dead; but only a memorial of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all" (2). No more will his blood be shed nor his body broken. His life was poured out with his blood on the cross and there is no occasion in which the blood of the covenant must be poured out again.

To the internalization by faith of this historic work the Lord's Supper calls us. The Confession says, "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally, and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified & all the benefits of his death." This does not mean that his body has spiritual presence in and of itself; that would be contradictory to the nature of the body. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24: 39). It means that we contemplate with our whole mind and affections the claim that such a death has on us and that we long for the continued transforming power of the gospel in our lives. The confession confirms this in continuing "The body and blood of Christ, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of Believers, in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses" (30: 7). By faith in the completed work of Christ, the emblematic presentation of that once-for-all substitution for our sake, gives spiritual conviction and energy to the believer. By Jesus' omnipresence and by his perpetual intercession, the believer has a heightened sense at the time of the Supper that "we have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 John 2:1).

It is a memorial. It is a "perpetual remembrance and shewing forth the sacrifice in his death" (30: 1). The passages in Luke 22 and in 1 Corinthians 11 point to the reality that, in partaking of the Lord's Supper, we remember what he did. Luke 22:19 recorded the words, "Do this in remembrance of me" after the giving of the bread. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul gives a straightforward presentation in which he records Jesus using the words of remembrance after both the bread and the wine. After breaking the bread, Jesus said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." When he took the cup he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

As they were taking the Passover, Jesus gave a simplified partaking of elements. The Passover had been predictive and prospective. Their partaking of the lamb was to serve as a promise of redemption. The yearly celebration reminded them of the promise, that God would provide a lamb in the future who would take away the sins, not of the Jews only, but of the world. As Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he presented it as a memorial. Its future celebrations would look to that which already was accomplished and was retrospective of the past work of Christ. This symbolic drama was to be surveyed by the heart in calling to mind the greatness of the sacrifice. Each recipient can say with Isaac Watts, "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride."

The element of the prospective was reinserted as we now look to the coming-again of the Lord in his glorified body. As the supper points to faith in that which has been done in his body, so it points to hope in that which will be done in our body: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Philippians 3:20, 21). "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28).

We do not look to the elements of which we partake at that moment as having redemptive significance in themselves, but only as they point us to the historic, time-space sacrifice of Christ. The symbols call us to look to Christ himself, presently interceding for us on the basis of the blood he shed at Calvary. In remembering, the participants actively press their minds to recall the biblical presentation of the historic event of redemption. This memorial presents an objective assurance that, once for all, Christ endured the portion of wrath due to them, so that "in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin" (Ephesians 1:7).

This event in the worship of the church is a time of proclamation of the gospel, for "we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." It is a time of preaching the gospel to our own souls for we partake of bread and wine in active remembrance of Jesus as the only redeemer. We do this in a sense of worship, with reverence, and repentant humility for this must be taken in a worthy manner lest we betray a heart that yet has not felt the gravity of Christ's sacrifice and we remain, not redeemed, but "guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord." It is, therefore, a time of sober examination, calling for deep discernment of the reason that Christ was given a body, a necessary sufferer in our stead. It is not a time for the careless or curious, the one merely fascinated by the quaintness of the process, but for the body of believers to "come together" to worship the one who underwent judgment for us.

NOTES:

[1] Parts of this article come from a chapter in an upcoming book published by Founders Press entitled Praise is His Gracious Choice.

[2] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, 2006) 2:1290.

[3] Huldreich Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," in Zwingli and Bullinger, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 259.

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JEFF ROBINSON

Pastors and Their Critics
**Provides Strong
Encouragement and Deep
Instruction for God's Men
Under Fire**

Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry (P&R, 2020) by Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson.

It could be written out as an axiom: Every man who spends more than a week as pastor of a church will face criticism.

Some won't like your preaching; they'll say it's dry as Ezekiel's bones and boring as a chemistry lecture or it doesn't have enough homespun stories or it has too many homespun stories, it doesn't include enough theology or it's way too theological. You're too deep. You're too shallow.

Some will complain that your sermons are too long. Though it's probably as rare as a frosty July day in Miami, a few may even bellyache that they're too short.

Some will grumble about your leadership—you don't lead from the front or they'll say you'd make a competent dictator over a small country. Others will wonder out loud why your car isn't sitting in front of the church at 5 p.m. each day or why your wife doesn't play the piano.

In nearly a dozen years in pastoral ministry, I've heard all of these (mostly through the church grapevine) and plenty more.

I'll never forget the first time I was roundly criticized as a pastor.

I'd served as senior pastor for a few weeks when one of the older ladies in our church appeared in my office on a Monday morning—not a time when a pastor is usually at his peak in terms of mood or energy level.

After reminding me she'd been a member of this church since Eisenhower was in office, she informed me that of all the pastors who'd graced the pulpit there, I was by far the record holder of lengthy sermons. She hadn't come to award me with an achievement medal. Since I insisted on preaching 45-55 minutes, moving forward she was going to allot me only 30 minutes each Lord's Day—the standard length, said she, of an authentically “Baptist sermon.”

I soon found out how she would apportion this half-hour.

For the ensuing three years, she'd saunter to her seat each Sunday about 10 minutes into the sermon, begin rattling her car keys and fumbling with her rather large purse 20 minutes later, then—at promptly 11:50 a.m. Central—she'd gather her things, rise and make like a fleeing bank robber for a side door. Privately, she gashed me to her church friends (they told on her) for not “getting the message.” I got the message—loud and clear.

How should a pastor deal with such criticism?

Joel Beeke's recent book, co-written with Nick Thompson, is not only the best work I've ever read on pastors and the criticism they receive, it's one of the best books for pastors I've read in many years. If you are a pastor, read this book as soon as possible. If you have a pastor, buy this book for him—and even consider reading it yourself. Beeke knows of what he writes, having served as pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for many years and is president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

Summary

This little volume is unique among books in the pastoral help genre—it not only gives a pastor practical tips on coping with criticism and real-life anecdotes like the one I wrote above, it builds a strong biblical and theological foundation for how to deal in a godly manner with criticism—first examining the Old Testament and then moving to Christological foundations in the New Testament on how to deal with criticism.

Part 2 is the meat of the book and Beeke/Thompson give some of the best and most instructive advice I've ever read for coping with this most difficult aspect of pastoral ministry, and they move down the path through the vehicle of four practical principles. And the principles are built on this counter-intuitive truth: criticism is a gracious gift to pastors from God. Why? Beeke writes: "Few things expose our hearts like criticism. When our character, reputation, abilities, or work are being questioned or denigrated, the state of our heart is immediately laid bare. . . . It exposes how self-centered we really are." Wow. Hard to hear, but absolutely true.

1. Receive criticism realistically.

The authors encourage pastors to lay aside the twin dangers of idealism and pessimism and instead receive criticism realistically, meaning, we should learn to see ourselves and the ministry realistically, not ideally. Pastors are sinners dealing with sinners, so criticism is inevitable while ministering in a fallen world.

To view the minister as being above criticism is to view ministers and the ministry in an unrealistic manner. Plus, criticism—warranted or unwarranted—is a means God uses to sanctify his under shepherds. The authors also encourage pastors to consider the source of criticism. Is the critic a mature, godly Christian who has your best interests at heart? Or are they a cold-hearted person who professes Christ, but who criticizes you as a way of intentionally undermining your ministry? And what are the motives behind the criticism? Great questions, all.

2. Receive criticism humbly.

"What three graces does a minister need most?" Augustine asked. "Humility, humility, humility." The trouble with humility is the level of difficulty in attaining it. Jonathan Edwards once compared pride—the enemy of humility—to an onion: You peel off one layer and there's always another beneath it. Pride, a universal pandemic, makes criticism hard to swallow.

And the authors point out that the only way for us to be prepared to receive criticism rightly is to drill an ever-deepening well of humility by the power of Christ's cross. As pastors, we must

humble ourselves before our critics and listen to them, inspecting our hearts for evidence of pride, seeking the counsel of others whom we trust. I probably need to read this chapter every day.

3. Respond with sober judgment.

The advice here is as easy to remember as it is profound with three P's: Be prayerful, be patient, be prudent in carefully answering your critics. The authors wisely commend "the Twenty-Four Hour Rule: delay responding to weighty criticism for at least 24 hours. I've used this rule for the entirety of my ministry. In fact, this past week I did just that. A critic texted me less than two hours after my Sunday sermon. I didn't respond until up in the day on Monday.

And sometimes, Beke recommends, "the best response to criticism is silence. Our wordlessness can speak volumes, often more than our words. Silence is not a failure to respond, but a particular way of responding to criticism. In certain situations, it is the most appropriate way to respond." I've used that tactic to great effect as well.

4. Respond with grace.

This chapter centers on the importance of a pastor keeping a clear conscience under grace. Then comes the even tougher part to swallow: "If we are living under the smile of God, we will learn to see criticism as a grace from His fatherly hand. Verbal critique is a tool that God uses to fashion His children after the image of His Son."

How do we enroll in God's gracious school of criticism so we may be sanctified and not sunk by it? The authors recommend we come to our critics with these presuppositions: I think far too highly of myself; I care far too much about myself; I am an under-shepherd, not the chief shepherd, and I desperately need the Lord. We must learn to embrace our critics with grace.

Final Chapters

Part 3 of the book turns the discussion to giving critique to others and cultivating a church culture in which constructive critique is welcomed and even invited—a reality that will require big grace for the sons and daughters of Adam. These two topics receive separate chapters and are profoundly helpful.

Part 4, which encompasses the final chapter, offers a theological vision for coping with criticism. We should develop a God-centered vision for all of life that lives in keen awareness that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day. Therefore, living our lives daily in the fear of God puts us, our critics, and God in their proper place in all our interactions. John Murray wrote of the soul that fears God as one in which "God is constantly in the center of our thought and

apprehension, and life is characterized by that all-pervasive consciousness of dependence upon him and responsibility to him.”

Get It, Read It, Heed It

Pastors and Their Critics may be the most helpful and insightful book for pastors I’ve read since Paul Tripp’s *Dangerous Calling* in 2012. It’s helpful because as a pastor, I am regularly criticized, and I’ve come to realize that its merely part of the calling.

But no matter how much criticism I receive, it’s never easy or enjoyable to hear—mainly because I am prideful and sinfully enjoy man’s applause. It’s insightful because Beeke and Thompson apply Scripture and theology to receiving (and giving) criticism in a way that helps a pastor to remain faithful to the Lord and spurs growth by a means of grace that very few tend would view it as that.

The authors have done some hard biblical thinking and heavy expositional lifting here. This, coupled with Joel Beeke’s many years of experience as a pastor (and many years of receiving criticism) make this a volume that every pastor should read.

The audience for this book is pastors, but it would make profitable reading for all Christians. Every Christian receives—and gives—criticism in some venue of life. This book will provide them with profound help in honoring God whether receiving or giving critique.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER:

Tom serves as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA. He’s married to Joy, and they have four children: Sophie, Karlie, Rebekah, and David. He received his MDiv and PhD degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with a major in Church History, emphasis on Baptists, and with a minor in Systematic Theology. Tom is the author of *The Doctrine of Justification in the Theologies of Richard Baxter and Benjamin Keach* (PhD diss, SBTS). He serves on the board of directors for Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary and is an adjunct professor of historical theology for the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies.