

I Intro.

God has given to the church two ordinances. An ordinance is “something regularly done because it is formally prescribed, especially a religious ceremony such as Communion.” There is a difference between an ordinance and a sacrament. Ryrie says, “Although ordinance and sacrament are listed as synonyms in the dictionary, there are some practical theological differences in what they connote. Sacrament usually has the idea of conveying grace automatically to the one partaking of the sacrament. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent said, ‘A sacrament is something presented to the senses, which has the power, by divine institution, not only of signifying, but also of efficiently conveying grace.’ Ordinance, on the other hand, though variously defined, usually does not include the concept of effectively conveying grace to the participant. Using the basic idea in ordinance of ‘prescribed rite or practice,’ a working definition of an ecclesiastical ordinance might be ‘an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church.’ Such a definition would reduce the possible number of ordinances to two—baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”¹

Today we observe the ordinance of water baptism prescribed by Jesus for believers who desire to become His disciples. Two weeks ago, we observed the Lord’s Supper. In neither ordinance is there any grace administered to the participant. Rather the two ordinances have other purposes. In the case of the Lord’s Supper, the purpose is plainly stated to be in remembrance of Jesus (1Cor. 11:24-25). The purpose of believers’ baptism is not so plainly spelled out, but we know from our studies that the purpose is public identification with Christ. It is indeed, the first official public step of discipleship in the NT.

II The Christian Ordinance of Believers’ Baptism (Mt. 28:19-10)

A. It is indeed the first step of discipleship.

1. Salvation is free (Rev. 22:17; Rm. 4:5; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Jn. 3:16; 20:31).

2. Discipleship is costly (Lk. 14:25-33).

B. To embark on the journey initiated by baptism is the wise choice.

1. God encourages His people to do it. See our main text and those in the parentheses, which are just some of the examples (Mt. 19:27-29; Mk. 10:28-30).

2. However, one must count the cost (Lk. 14:25; Mt. 10:34-39).

3. One thing is for certain, and that is that whatever other life choice one makes is second-rate as compared to the full-fledged life of being a disciple of Jesus. Compare what you see in Jn. 12:37-43 with what Jesus promised in Mk. 10:28-30.

C. God will see you through, enabling you to keep your commitment.

1. Remember that baptism is not a picture of maturity—it’s anything but! Rather, it’s much closer to acknowledging that you’re in the first grade, while demonstrating a desire and a commitment to go on to maturity.

2. You’ve enrolled or matriculated (to be enrolled at a college or university) in a school that has no graduates on earth. School ends the day you die, or the day that the rapture takes place. Then you will face your final examination at the judgment seat of Christ, where your reward will be determined, *not* your eternal destiny.

3. Admittedly there are some dropouts, many, or maybe even most people who enroll drop out. The Bible is replete with people who didn’t finish their lives well at all. But by God’s grace, we can all finish well. (Use the Dean Emery illustration.)

4. Before we hasten to point an accusatory finger at the dropouts, we must pause and consider ourselves in regard to this matter: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1Cor. 10:12).

III Conc.

Join in celebrating with me the commitment of these brothers and sisters in Christ to the only life that makes sense while we trod this terrestrial ball.

¹Ryrie, Charles C., *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press) 1972.