Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Systematic Theology VI: Ecclesiology & Eschatology · Lecture 6 of 10

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Lecture by C. Michael Patton, Th.M., and Rhome Dyke, Th.M., from The Theology Program, published on their public channel. Study notes from Medina Community Church.

BEFORE YOU WATCH

Of all the commands Scripture gives the church, why do exactly two, baptism and the Lord's supper, carry the weight of marking a true church? This session runs both ordinances through the program's method: take the tradition apart, as Luther did, and rebuild only what deserves rebuilding. Listen for the moment the teachers insist that Rome's position makes more sense from inside than most Protestants have ever bothered to learn, and for where Patton finally plants his own flag at the table.

STUDY SHEET

1. Two ordinances under deconstruction

The second session on the ministries begins with review: the five functions drawn from Acts 2, worship, instruction, fellowship, outreach, and inreach, the serving of physical needs the deacons carried, and Calvin's two marks of a true local church, the preaching of the word and the practice of baptism and the supper. Then the method is restated: the program practices deconstruction, taking apart what we have received and rebuilding only what is worth rebuilding, exactly what Luther did at the Reformation. So the question is put honestly: Scripture commands many things; why have these two commands, out of all of them, carried the weight of defining a church for most of Christian history?

2. Ordinance or sacrament: what the words tell

Two terms must be distinguished. Ordinance is the Protestant term, really a term framed against Rome's sacramental system, for the two Christian rites commanded specifically by the Lord himself and handed to the church: baptism and the Lord's supper. Sacrament travels a longer road: from the Greek word mysterion, mystery, into the Latin from which our word comes, and it tips your hand. Call these rites sacraments and you are saying something more is happening there, a mystery, a stronger accountability, the kind Paul describes when some who took the supper unworthily grew ill and some died. Augustine defined a sacrament as an outward sign of an inward grace, and in the early centuries the word was generous: Augustine could count even the making of the sign of the cross among the sacraments. Protestants may use the word without embarrassment; it simply discloses how much mystery they see.

3. How seven became seven

The early church plainly practiced baptism and the supper from the beginning, and most believed, without ever articulating it, that Christ was somehow present in the bread and wine; the doctrine simply had not yet had its moment of definition. The list of seven sacraments was not fixed until the eleventh century, and it was Thomas Aquinas who articulated the mature theology: the sacraments confer the grace Christ won at the cross, entrusted to the church to give. Rome's two most important remain baptism, which removes original sin, and the eucharist, the sacrifice of the mass, which covers venial sins, strengthens against sin, and can even benefit the dead, which is why more masses are always better.

4. Closer than you think, and the one real difference

The teachers refuse a lazy contrast. Protestants also practice matrimony, also confess sins to one another, also anoint the sick with oil as James 5 directs; we simply do not call these sacraments. And Rome is often misrepresented: the priest in the confessional does not forgive sins, he declares and confirms the forgiveness Christ gives. The real dividing line is elsewhere: who administers grace. On Rome's account the church as institution administers God's grace through the sacraments, and the sacraments work ex opere operato, by the work performed, so that a priest's baptism removes an infant's original sin regardless of anyone's faith, by the authority vested in the church. That is the doctrine that made Tetzel possible, selling certificates of forgiveness in Luther's day, though the teachers add the fairness Trent deserves: the counter reformation saw those abuses and worked to correct them, and no tradition should be defined by its abuses, any more than Protestantism should be defined by its endless splintering.

5. Rome's logic, and the tradition we share

Where did the idea of administered grace come from? From Scripture, read a certain way. Peter walked on water by no power of his own; the disciples cast out demons and healed by the power of God, and after Acts 2, of the Spirit. God, on this reading, works through chosen representatives: Christ empowered twelve, not the whole crowd of five hundred, and said to Peter, upon this rock; the Roman church understands itself simply as the extension of the apostles, its roots traced to Peter. The teachers press the class to see the argument's strength before judging it with two thousand years of hindsight. And they widen the frame: before the Reformation this was everyone's tradition; all of us descend from the same catholic stream, practicing the same rites while understanding them with more mystery or less. What kills such rites in every tradition is folk theology: practicing traditions without knowing the reasons they carry, the pattern of Judges, where a generation wholly given to God is followed within three by one that does not know him, which is exactly why each generation must relearn what these things mean.

6. Four views of baptism

The Reformers re-evaluated the whole system and kept two ordinances, those commanded by Christ himself and clearly carried in the practice of the church through Acts and the epistles, as against single mentions like the anointing of James 5, which we still practice without ranking alongside them. On baptism the chart shows four views. Roman Catholic: baptism removes original sin, the inherited guilt of Adam, regardless of the faith of the subject; given once, never repeated, to infants and adults alike; argued from the administrative authority given the church and the support of pre-Reformation history. Lutheran: baptism imparts saving grace to the one who already believes, and so is necessary for salvation, argued from the way the Bible links faith and baptism in Acts 2:38 and Titus 3:5, with the caution that Lutheran does not always mean Luther, a transitional figure still in motion. Reformed: baptism is the initiation rite into the covenant community, the new circumcision, given to infants of believers as circumcision was, argued from salvation by faith alone, from the church's inheritance of Israel's place, and from the household baptisms of the New Testament. Baptist: baptism is a testimony to the salvation of the believing recipient, an outward sign that confers nothing, given only to those who believe, argued from faith alone, from the fact that baptism always symbolizes the faith of the one baptized, and from the reply that the baptized households are also said to have rejoiced in the Lord, which infants cannot do, leaving the household argument inconclusive.

7. Trent, limbo, and what Rome was and was not saying

Trent pronounced its anathema on anyone who calls baptism optional and unnecessary for salvation, and the teachers work hard to have it heard rightly. Trent was not answering the question every Protestant instantly asks, what of the person who believes and dies before reaching water; Rome had no categories for that question, because Rome was never focused on a moment of conversion but on a whole life of salvation and sanctification, inside which you are baptized because the Lord commanded and modeled it. Before Vatican II the line was hard: infants were baptized within days, instantly if death threatened, and for the unbaptized infant the church developed limbo, a place outside heaven, hell, and purgatory, since original sin bars a soul from purgatory, which handles only venial sins, and no mass can pray anyone out of limbo. The whole apparatus grew from the debate between Augustine and Pelagius over original sin, with Gregory, about a century after Augustine, more truly the father of purgatory. Vatican II in 1965 changed the face of Roman Catholicism toward inclusivism, though the teachers note that some congregations still teach the older line.

8. The battle of the symbols

The Reformed and Baptist views agree the water confers nothing, so they argue over what it symbolizes, and the symbol decides the mode. If the primary picture is the washing away of sin, then sprinkling, pouring, any water will carry it, and the Reformed find that picture in baptism's prehistory: when a Gentile became a proselyte to Judaism, three things were required, a sacrifice, circumcision, and a self administered washing, always in the middle voice, the convert washing his old life away as he entered a new community. Initiation and washing, they argue, has always been the meaning, and Paul's use of baptism in Romans 6 is a preacher's illustration, not a new definition. The Baptist answers from Romans 6 itself, which nearly all interpreters take as water baptism: do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Buried with him through baptism, raised as Christ was raised, to walk in newness of life; a picture of death, burial, and resurrection that only going under the water can paint. The teachers lower the temperature: neither side rebaptizes the other over mode, and the Reformed never insist on sprinkling; the dispute over the subjects of baptism, believers or their infants too, is the weightier one.

9. The passive voice: baptized into a community

One grammatical observation carries a doctrine. Jewish proselyte washing was reflexive: you baptized yourself. What made John's baptism startling, and Christian baptism after it, is that someone else does the baptizing: the New Testament speaks of baptism in the passive, you are baptized by another. The teachers draw the meaning out: you cannot baptize yourself into a community. The church baptizes you into it, and the act itself teaches that you are joining something larger than yourself, which is why some denominations bind baptism to church membership as a single act, while others keep them distinct; either way, what the rite signifies is your incorporation into the universal body of Christ.

10. Spirit baptism and water baptism

The New Testament speaks of two baptisms, one the reality and one its sign. John announced the first: I baptize you with water for repentance, but one mightier is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and the risen Christ repeated it in Acts 1, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now, fulfilled at Pentecost, the day the church was born. The clearest statement is 1 Corinthians 12:13: by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jew or Greek, slave or free. The picture in the word itself is immersion: to be baptized in the Spirit is to be plunged into him, filled, dipped, wholly identified with the body of Christ. Water baptism is the outward sign of that inward reality, the visible enactment of what the Spirit has already done.

11. Acts 2:38 and Matthew 28

Two texts often misread get careful handling. When the Pentecost crowd asks what to do and Peter answers repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, some conclude baptism saves. The teachers answer with the analogy of Scripture, letting the whole testimony interpret the part: in that world, trust and baptism corresponded one to one, so Peter speaks of them together the way we might tell a seeker to trust Christ and pray to tell him so, where the prayer expresses the trust rather than accomplishing the salvation, just as Romans 10 joins confessing with the mouth to believing in the heart. And in the Great Commission the grammar itself teaches: make disciples is the main verb, and baptizing and teaching are the two participles that tell how, so baptism is not an extra after discipleship but the initiation of it, as teaching is its continuation.

12. The four significances of baptism

What, then, does baptism mean? The teachers refuse to pick one: it carries all four. A sign of repentance, the washing away of sin and rebellion. A sign of commitment: the early church would not baptize until commitment was certain, and to be baptized was to declare yourself a follower, which is why Paul, facing the Corinthian factions, asks whether any were baptized in the name of Paul, and is glad he baptized only Crispus and Gaius, for whoseever name you are baptized into names whose disciple you are. The teachers cite Richard Averbeck's observation that the early Christians could not conceive of a believer in the local church who was unbaptized: the nearness in time between trusting Christ and baptism shows that expressing the commitment was never optional; a person either trusted and was baptized, knowing what it would cost, or rejected the message. A sign of identification with Christ: the Romans 6 picture of death, burial, and resurrection. And a sign of initiation into the church, the outward sign of the Spirit's baptism into the body. Two closing observations: our society, unlike theirs, no longer knows what baptism means, which argues for real discipleship between conversion and the water rather than a quick plunge; and God deliberately chose the common element, water, which every culture on earth encounters daily, rather than something exotic, so that the ordinary would carry the holy, felt cold and wet on the skin, a word preached to the senses. And scripturally, the teachers add, anyone can baptize: on the mission field, do not wait for an institution.

13. The Lord's supper and its names

The second ordinance carries many names, each with a history: the breaking of bread in Acts 2; the eucharist, from the Greek for giving thanks; the table of the Lord and the cup of the Lord; the Lord's supper; the mass, from the Latin dismissal, go, you are sent, a name with nothing sinister in it; and the last supper, a popular name with no biblical precedent as a title for the meal the church repeats. Four views map the possibilities, and this time the spectrum runs from a literal presence through a spiritual presence to a symbolic one.

14. Transubstantiation and consubstantiation weighed

The Roman view: in the mass, Christ's sacrifice is continued, and by consecration the whole substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of his body and blood, transubstantiation, while the accidents, the taste, feel, and smell, remain unchanged; the elements confer forgiveness of venial sins, strength against sin, hope of resurrection, and grace even for the dead. Rome and, in large measure, Eastern Orthodoxy hold it, resting on the words themselves: this is my body. The teachers weigh it: the literalism proves too much, for Christ also said he is the door, the vine, and the bread of life, in John 10, 15, and 6; a continued sacrifice fails to reckon with a work finished once for all; and a body present on every altar borders on the old christological error of Eutychianism, communicating deity's omnipresence to Christ's humanity, the very mingling Chalcedon ruled out, and which would unfit him to be our truly human high priest. The Lutheran view, consubstantiation, keeps the presence while refusing the change: Christ's body and blood are in, with, and under the bread, as heat is in hot iron without becoming it. Luther could not stomach a resacrifice, but neither could he surrender the words: at his famous meeting with Zwingli, the other great reformer, he wrote on the table between them, this is my body, and would not move, and the two never joined forces, to the Reformation's lasting cost. The weaknesses, the teachers judge, are the same literalism and the same everywhere present body, unless one argues the resurrection body can be in many places, which they allow could be an argument.

15. Spiritual presence, memorial, and where Patton lands

The Reformed view holds a spiritual presence: the supper is a remembrance and a proclamation of Christ's death in which Christ is really present, spiritually, and something of grace and mystery attends the partaking, though its critics note Scripture never explicitly names a sacramental grace conferred. The Zwinglian view, the memorial view proper, held by Baptists, Anabaptists, and many non denominational churches, sees remembrance and proclamation only, a symbolic act of an inward change with no mystery at all, exactly parallel to its view of baptism. Against it the teachers press the New Testament's own weight: a practice kept sometimes daily, and the severity of 1 Corinthians 11, where taking the elements unworthily brought weakness, illness, and death, sits oddly on a bare symbol, and if it were merely a memorial, one could arguably remember Christ better other ways. Patton shows his hand: he stands in the Reformed camp, a spiritual presence, something more than a symbol and less than saving grace, and he marks the boundary of Protestant orthodoxy at the refusal of the continued sacrifice, noting that one author has argued the mass itself is what started the Reformation.

16. Principles of the table, and the covenant parallel

The closing principles gather what the supper does. It is an act of worship that communicates the death of Christ by vivid illustration. It symbolically confesses trust in the substitutionary atonement: taking the elements says that Christ died in your place. It uniquely confesses the unified body of Christ: a whole congregation partaking of one body together becomes, visibly, one body. And by 1 Corinthians 11:26 it uniquely proclaims the Lord's death until he comes, an announcement with evangelistic reach built into the meal itself. The last slide sets the development in one line, an echo of progressive covenantalism: the people of God under the old covenant, Israel, with circumcision for initiation and Passover for commemoration; the people of God under the new covenant, the church, with baptism for initiation and the eucharist for commemoration, not a new program but the same covenant grown larger. The marks of a false church, the teachers announce with apologies, must move to the appendix for reading at home.

SCRIPTURE IN THIS LECTURE

Matthew 3 · Matthew 28 · John 6 · John 10 · John 15 · Acts 1 · Acts 2 · Romans 6 · Romans 10 · 1 Corinthians 1 · 1 Corinthians 11 · 1 Corinthians 12 · Titus 3 · James 5

KEY TERMS

Ordinance

The Protestant term, framed against Rome's sacramental system, for the two rites commanded specifically by the Lord and carried in the church's practice from the beginning: baptism and the Lord's supper.

Sacrament

From the Greek mysterion, mystery, through the Latin: a rite in which something more happens, an outward sign of an inward grace on Augustine's definition. Using the word discloses how much mystery you see in the ordinances.

Ex opere operato

By the work performed: Rome's teaching that the sacraments confer grace by the church's administration itself, independent of the faith of the recipient, so a priest's baptism removes an infant's original sin by the authority vested in the church.

Transubstantiation

Rome's doctrine, fixed at Trent, that in the mass the whole substance of the bread and wine changes into the body and blood of Christ, while the accidents, taste, feel, and smell, remain.

The accidents

The scholastic term for the outward properties of the elements, everything the senses can test, which on Rome's account remain unchanged while the substance beneath them is transformed.

Consubstantiation

The Lutheran view: Christ's body and blood are present in, with, and under the bread, as heat is in hot iron without becoming it; a real presence without a change of substance and without a resacrifice.

Spiritual presence

The Reformed view of the supper, and Patton's own: a remembrance and proclamation at which Christ is really present spiritually, with mystery and grace attending, more than a symbol and less than saving grace.

Memorial view

The Zwinglian position held by Baptists, Anabaptists, and many non denominational churches: the supper is remembrance and proclamation only, a symbolic act of an inward change with no mystery, parallel to the same view of baptism.

Paedobaptism and believer's baptism

The dispute over baptism's subjects: Rome, Lutherans, and the Reformed baptize infants, the Reformed as the covenant sign replacing circumcision; Baptists baptize only those who profess faith, since baptism symbolizes the recipient's own faith.

Spirit baptism

The reality water baptism signifies: by one Spirit all believers are baptized into one body, as 1 Corinthians 12:13 states, promised by John, repeated by Christ in Acts 1, and fulfilled at Pentecost, the birth of the church.

Limbo

The state Rome developed before Vatican II for unbaptized infants, outside heaven, hell, and purgatory, since original sin bars purgatory and no mass can reach it; part of the apparatus that grew from the Augustine and Pelagius debate.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer each question, then check yourself against the key at the end of this section.

1. What does calling the ordinances sacraments disclose about your view?

   A. That you reject them entirely

   B. That you see mystery in them, something more happening, with the stronger accountability Paul describes for taking the supper unworthily

   C. That you believe they were invented by Rome

   D. That you require ordained clergy to administer them

2. When was the list of seven sacraments fixed, and who articulated its mature theology?

   A. At Pentecost, by Peter

   B. At Nicaea, by Athanasius

   C. In the eleventh century, with Thomas Aquinas articulating that the sacraments confer the grace Christ won, entrusted to the church to give

   D. At the Reformation, by Luther

3. What is the one real dividing line between Rome and the Protestants on these rites?

   A. Whether the rites should be practiced at all

   B. Whether water or bread is used

   C. The number of ministers required

   D. Who administers grace: Rome holds the church administers it through sacraments working ex opere operato, independent of the recipient's faith

4. What common misrepresentation of the confessional do the teachers correct?

   A. That priests forgive sins; in Roman teaching the priest declares and confirms the forgiveness Christ gives

   B. That confession was abolished at Trent

   C. That Protestants never confess sins

   D. That confession requires public announcement

5. How does Rome argue its administered grace from Scripture?

   A. From the absence of miracles in the Gospels

   B. From Old Testament sacrifices alone

   C. God works through chosen representatives: Peter walked on water by Christ's power, the disciples healed by God's power, Christ empowered the Twelve, and the church traces itself to Peter

   D. From the parables of the kingdom only

6. What kills inherited rites in every tradition, on the teachers' diagnosis?

   A. Persecution from outside

   B. Folk theology: practicing traditions without knowing their reasons, the pattern of Judges, where within three generations a people no longer knows the Lord

   C. Changes in language

   D. The expense of maintaining them

7. What is the Reformed view of baptism?

   A. It removes original sin regardless of faith

   B. It imparts saving grace to the believer

   C. It is only a testimony of the recipient's faith

   D. It is the initiation rite into the covenant community, the new circumcision, given to believers' infants as circumcision was

8. Why do the teachers say Trent's anathema is usually misheard?

A. Trent was not answering what happens to a believer who dies unbaptized; Rome had no categories for a moment of conversion, only a whole life of salvation in which the baptized life is commanded

B. Trent never discussed baptism

C. Trent applied only to infants

D. Trent withdrew the anathema a year later

9. Why did Rome develop limbo?

A. To house the righteous of the Old Testament

B. As a waiting place before resurrection for all believers

C. For unbaptized infants: original sin bars purgatory, which handles only venial sins, and no mass can pray anyone out of limbo

D. As a temporary state ending at Vatican II

10. How does the symbol decide the mode of baptism?

A. The mode was fixed by the apostles in writing

B. If the picture is washing away sin, sprinkling carries it; if it is death, burial, and resurrection with Christ from Romans 6, only immersion paints it

C. Warmer climates require immersion

D. The symbol has no bearing on the mode

11. What made John's baptism, and Christian baptism after it, grammatically startling?

A. It used no water

B. It was performed only at night

C. It required a priest

D. Proselytes had always baptized themselves, middle voice; now someone else baptizes you, passive voice, because you cannot baptize yourself into a community

12. What is the clearest statement of Spirit baptism?

A. 1 Corinthians 12:13: by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jew or Greek, slave or free

B. Genesis 1:2: the Spirit hovering over the waters

C. Psalm 51: create in me a clean heart

D. Revelation 22: the river of the water of life

13. How do the teachers handle repent and be baptized in Acts 2:38?

A. They conclude Peter taught baptismal salvation

B. They conclude Peter's theology was corrected later

C. By the analogy of Scripture: trust and baptism corresponded one to one in that world, the water expressing the trust as a seeker's prayer expresses it, as Romans 10 joins mouth and heart

D. They treat the verse as a later addition

14. What does the grammar of the Great Commission teach about baptism?

A. Baptism precedes faith in every case

B. Baptism replaced circumcision explicitly there

C. Baptism is commanded only for the apostles

D. Make disciples is the main verb, and baptizing and teaching are the participles that tell how: baptism is discipleship's initiation, teaching its continuation

15. What is Richard Averbeck's observation, as the teachers cite it?

A. The early Christians could not conceive of an unbaptized believer in the local church; the nearness of trust and baptism shows the commitment was never optional

B. Baptism was rare in the first century

C. Most early baptisms were of infants

D. Baptism began in the second century

16. Why do the teachers say Christ chose water rather than something exotic?

A. Because water was rare and precious

B. God takes the common element every culture meets daily and makes it carry the holy, a word preached to the senses

C. Because the Jordan river was sacred

D. Because olive oil was forbidden

17. What christological problem do the teachers raise against a body present on every altar?

A. It denies the resurrection outright

B. It divides Christ into two persons, the error of Nestorius

C. It communicates deity's omnipresence to Christ's humanity, the mingling Chalcedon ruled out, which would unfit him to be our truly human high priest

D. It makes the incarnation unnecessary

18. Where does Patton land on the Lord's supper?

A. Transubstantiation, with Rome

B. Consubstantiation, with the Lutherans

C. The bare memorial view, with Zwingli

D. The Reformed spiritual presence: more than a symbol, less than saving grace, with the boundary of Protestant orthodoxy drawn at the refusal of a continued sacrifice

19. What does the closing covenant parallel display?

A. Israel with circumcision and Passover, the church with baptism and the eucharist: the same covenant grown larger, not a new program

B. That the old covenant had no rites

C. That the church must keep Passover

D. That initiation rites ended with the apostles

Answer key (fold under before you begin): 1 B · 2 C · 3 D · 4 A · 5 C · 6 B · 7 D · 8 A · 9 C · 10 B · 11 D · 12 A · 13 C · 14 D · 15 A · 16 B · 17 C · 18 D · 19 A

TALK IT OVER

1. The teachers argued that our society no longer knows what baptism means, so the church must teach it. If you have been baptized, what did you understand it to mean at the time, and which of the four significances, repentance, commitment, identification, initiation, was missing from your understanding?

2. Where do you land on the spectrum at the table, literal, spiritual, or symbolic presence, and what actually happens in you when you take the bread and cup? Does the severity of 1 Corinthians 11 change how you will come to it next time?

3. Rome's position, the teachers insisted, makes sense from inside its own definition of the church. Practice stating a view you reject at its strongest, the way this class did: what does that discipline do to how you hold your own?

ONE VERSE TO CARRY

Paul hands on what he received from the Lord in 1 Corinthians 11: the bread broken and the cup of the new covenant, taken in remembrance of him, so that as often as the church eats and drinks, it proclaims the Lord's death until he comes.