

Lecture 8: The Sacraments

Although Professor Grimes' students were not excited about meeting in the cluttered and dark basement of Old Main, the professor had made the best of the situation. He and Harold had carried away about a dozen of the crates, freeing up more floor space. Grimes brought in a few floor lamps to make the room a bit brighter. He even retrieved the old chalkboard from his former classroom and hung it on the wall – and he had managed to find some actual chairs. The basement was still a bit ominous and unappealing, but at least it was functional.

“Are we really going to be meeting here the rest of the semester?” Brad asked.

“Absolutely,” the professor replied. “Considering the overall state of the campus, this area is in fairly good shape. It will serve our purposes just fine.”

“But none of my other classes are held in basements,” Brad complained.

“You are only taking two other classes,” the professor pointed out. “In fact, you’re not even a full-time student. It just so happens that the two other classes you are taking didn’t have their classrooms destroyed in the storm, and so they can continue to meet in their assigned locations. This class *did* have its room destroyed, and there aren’t any other rooms available. It makes no sense to seize a room from another class and force them to meet elsewhere. Since our classroom was destroyed, we are the ones who must suffer.”

“I still don’t like it,” Brad muttered.

Professor Grimes shook his head. “If having to meet in a basement is too much pain and suffering for you, then you are not going to like Christianity at all. As I pointed out in our very first class, Jesus promised His disciples that their lives would be full of suffering. Since they were not of the world, the world would hate them – and that’s how things have been ever since. For thousands of years Christians have been hated, reviled, imprisoned, tortured, and executed for their faith. In our day this persecution is *spreading*, not receding. If you want a nice, comfy life

then Christianity is not the religion to pick.

“Of course Christianity *is* the only religion that can actually save you from going to Hell, so there’s that. You can have an easy life and a terrible eternity, or you can have a challenging life and an amazing eternity. Those are your options.”

Wally spoke up. “But there are lots of other religions out there, and they’re not all bad. Some of them have some pretty nice people in them.”

Professor Grimes sighed. “In John 14:6 Jesus told Thomas that He was the *only* way to be saved. If ‘leading people to an eternity of being burned alive’ is bad, then all other religions really *are* bad – but we’ll discuss that next week when we talk about false religions. Today we are going to talk about the sacraments.”

The professor suddenly heard a cell phone go off. “EMERGENCY ALERT,” the phone shouted. “THERE IS A TORNADO WARN-”

Isaac immediately whipped his cell phone out of his pocket and turned it off. His face was bright red. “Sorry,” he muttered. “I

didn't know it would do that when it was set to vibrate." He put the phone back in his pocket.

"Thank you," the professor replied. "See? Was turning off the phone really that hard? If Andy had simply turned off his computer then—"

"Wait a minute," Brad interrupted. "Did that phone just say there was a tornado warning for this area?"

"I believe so. In the event of a tornado warning the best thing to do is seek shelter in a safe place – like, for example, a basement. However, as it turns out you are *already* in a basement! So your best option is to stay right here and pay attention."

Brad grumbled but didn't say anything else.

Professor Grimes resumed his lecture. "As I was saying, today's class will be an easy one. There are only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both of these are fairly simple, so it shouldn't take—"

Wally interrupted. "The Catholic Church says there are more than just two. I think there are nine or something."

“Catholicism claims there are seven sacraments,” the professor corrected. “However, they are mistaken. The truth is they are mistaken about a great many things, but we’ll cover that in our next class. The Bible only contains two sacraments, and since its opinion is the only one that matters, that is what we are going to discuss.

“The first sacrament is baptism. Baptism is something that each Christian is commanded to do as soon as possible after being saved. It publicly announces to the world that they are now a Christian, and it identifies them with Christ’s death and resurrection. It—”

“Doesn’t it wash away your sins?” Wally asked.

“No, it definitely does *not*,” the professor replied. “I Peter 3:21 explicitly says that baptism does *not* wash away our sins or obtain forgiveness. Our sins were forgiven by Christ’s death on the cross, and they cannot possibly be forgiven by anything else. Baptism plays absolutely no role in the process. I John 1:7 says that the *blood of Jesus* cleanses us from sin – not the waters of baptism. In fact,

you can only be baptized *after* you have become a Christian, and since your sins are forgiven when you are saved, that means there are no unforgiven sins left by the time you are baptized.

“Now, it is true that being baptized is not required for salvation. Despite what some denominations teach, you won’t go to Hell if you don’t get baptized. In Luke 23:43 Jesus told the thief who was dying on the cross beside Him that he would be in Paradise – and that thief did *not* have time to go get baptized during his crucifixion. However, baptism is a command and it is one we should not take lightly. If you are a Christian and you have not been baptized then you should get baptized immediately.

“Baptism itself is simple and painless. It—”

Wally interrupted. “In my church people sprinkle water on your head.”

The professor sighed. “The word baptism comes from the Greek word for *immerse*. In fact, you could actually translate ‘baptize someone’ to mean ‘immerse someone in water’. The idea that sprinkling water on someone’s head is the same thing as

immersing them is preposterous. It astonishes me that there isn't a single command in the Bible that Christians haven't managed to get wrong. When you baptize someone you take them and immerse them in water. It's that simple."

"But what about the magic words?" Wally asked.

"What magic words?"

"You know – the words people say when someone is baptized. What about them?"

"There are no magic words," Professor Grimes said firmly. "Baptism is not some sort of magical rite where a certain magical incantation grants you magical powers. A lot of pastors say different things during the baptism ceremony and there's no harm in that. The person who baptized me said 'Buried with Him in baptism, and raised to walk in the newness of life'.²⁸ It did the job."

"But shouldn't it be more exact than that?" Brad asked. "It sounds to me like you're just making it up as you go along."

²⁸ For the record, I did not make that up. That's actually what was said at my baptism.

“It is unwise to be more exact than the text of the Scripture. The New Testament does not say ‘In the sacrament of baptism say these exact words, then immerse them in water for two seconds while standing to their left, and make sure the act is done on a Tuesday at high noon’. Some churches have come up with incredibly specific ways of doing things, but the Bible simply does not support that. Adding additional details to what the Bible says and then insisting that everyone do it that way ‘or else’ is *bad*. God gets very angry when people add to His Word.”

The professor went to pick up his notes and then realized that he didn’t have a desk anymore. Since his old desk in the Rutledge Building was a charred and water-damaged husk, he didn’t think it was worthwhile to bring it down into the basement. However, since he didn’t have a desk he no longer had a place to lay out his notes. *I’ll have to do something about that*, he thought to himself.

Instead, Grimes walked over to his briefcase, opened it, and took out his notes. “The next and last sacrament is the Lord’s Supper. This one is also very simple, but that

hasn't stopped people from getting some very wrong ideas about it. On the eve of Christ's crucifixion He had His last meal with His disciples. Matthew 26:26 says that Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to the twelve. He told them to partake of the bread because it symbolically represented His body, which was about to be broken for them. He then passed around a cup of wine and told them to drink it because it symbolically represented His blood, which was about to be shed in order to forgive their sins. After they had done these things He told them to continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper as a way to remember His sacrifice on the cross.

"In order to become a Christian you must repent of your sins and accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. You must partake of His death and have your sins washed away by His blood. The Lord's Supper is a way for Christians to commemorate His death. It reminds us of His sacrifice and of the price He paid to purchase forgiveness for our sins."

Wally spoke up. "Catholics call it the Mass."

The professor paused and then frowned.

“Catholic Mass is a very poor counterfeit of communion. First of all, Catholicism teaches that during the Mass the bread becomes the literal body of Christ, and the wine becomes the literal blood of Christ. They believe that communion involves *actually eating Christ’s body*. That is why Catholics will rush into burning buildings to save the communion wafers. They don’t want Christ’s body to be burned up in the fire.”

Brad looked surprised. “They do that?”

Professor Grimes nodded. “Oh yes – but it’s an utter waste of time. The Bible is very clear that communion is *symbolic*. The idea that you are actually eating Christ’s literal body, like some sort of cannibal, is both horrifying and unbiblical. It is *not* supported by the Word of God. On top of all that, Catholicism teaches that Christ is sacrificed again every single time Mass is held – and yet Hebrews 9:28 teaches that Christ was sacrificed *once* for sins. The Catholic beliefs about communion are a gross distortion of what the Bible actually teaches.”

The professor glanced down at his notes. “One thing I would like to emphasize is that

communion may only be taken by those who are actually Christians, and Christians ought to take it with reverence and care. In 1 Corinthians 11:30 the apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that since they were grossly misusing communion, to the point of actually getting drunk on the communion wine, God was striking some of them with illness *and death*. God takes this sacrament very seriously, and we ought to take it seriously as well. We should examine ourselves and make sure that we are partaking of it in a worthy manner.

“Finally, I would like to point out that the Bible does not specify how often communion should be celebrated. Jesus simply said ‘As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me’. Some churches celebrate communion every Sunday. Others do it once a month, and still others do it once a quarter. Since Jesus did not issue a hard-and-fast rule – and He certainly could have, if He had desired to do so – we cannot either. Christians have liberty to decide how often they celebrate it. However, they *are* required to celebrate it and they should not take it lightly.”

Professor Grimes paused. He knew that there was a storm outside, but the basement was so deep and the walls were so thick that he had trouble hearing it. Or maybe he was just old and his hearing wasn't what it used to be.

“That brings us to the end of our lesson today. Next time we will discuss false religions. You are dismissed – although, if there is still a tornado warning in effect, you may wish to linger here until it passes.”