Lesson 5 Ordinances and Sacraments

Student Notes

Follow the slides and record questions as we compare how Christian traditions understand Christ's commands, the church's outward acts, and God's grace.

Slide 1 Ordinances and Sacraments

What does the church do, and what does God do through it? This lesson traces the history and theology of Christian rites from the New Testament to today. Later lessons examine baptism and the Lord's Supper individually.

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Slide 2 Two Words Different Emphases

An ordinance is a practice Christ commanded the church to observe, often emphasizing obedience, witness, remembrance, and faith. A sacrament is a visible sign or rite through which God communicates or seals grace. Traditions explain this differently. Many Protestants use sacrament, and ordinance need not mean mere symbol.

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Slide 3 Start with Scripture

Read the full passages in context. Peter connects baptism with an appeal to God through Jesus Christ's resurrection, while distinguishing it from washing dirt from the body. Paul describes the cup and bread as participation or sharing in Christ's blood and body. How does each passage relate the outward act to God's saving work?

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. Use NASB 1977 for the class reading.

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Slide 4 The Core Theological Questions

Does a rite represent a spiritual reality, participate in it, or both? How are grace and faith related to the act? What makes a practice an ordinance or sacrament for the whole church? Who instituted it, and who may administer it? Distinguish a rite's efficacy from the idea of automatic effects.

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Slide 5 The Earliest Christian Pattern

Baptism marked entry into the Christian community, and the gathered church shared the Lord's Supper. Other practices also existed. The early church did not yet have a universally fixed list of seven sacraments. A practice can predate its later classification within a theological system.

Read Didache 7-10, 14; Justin Martyr, First Apology 61, 65-67.

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Slide 6 Early Voices

The Didache, commonly dated to the late first or early second century, gives instructions for baptism, thanksgiving prayers, and the Lord's Day gathering. Justin Martyr, writing around AD 150, describes baptism, prayer, and the Eucharist. He understands communion as more than ordinary food. The dating of the Didache remains debated.

Read Didache 7-10, 14; Justin Martyr, First Apology 66.

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Slide 7 Augustine and Sacred Signs

Augustine describes sacraments as sacred signs pointing beyond themselves to spiritual realities. He distinguishes God's action from the church's outward act. His use of sacrament is broader than the later fixed list of seven, and his theology should not be reduced to a later denominational category.

Read Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 2.1; Against the Letter of Parmenian 2.13.28.

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Slide 8 How the Number Became Seven

In the twelfth century, Peter Lombard lists seven sacraments in the Sentences. The Second Council of Lyon names seven in 1274. Florence in 1439 and Trent in 1547 reaffirm the list: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. These milestones concern classification as well as practice.

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Slide 9 Different Reformation Answers

Luther retains baptism and the Lord's Supper as instituted means of grace and sometimes discusses absolution sacramentally. Reformed churches emphasize signs and seals received by faith. Zwingli strongly emphasizes confession and remembrance. Many later Baptists describe two ordinances without grace inherent in the acts. Reformed theology should not be equated with memorialism.

Read Luther, Large Catechism, Baptism and Sacrament of the Altar; Calvin, Institutes IV.14-17; London Baptist Confession of 1689, chapters 28-30.

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Slide 10 Trent and the Catholic Response

Trent affirms seven sacraments instituted by Christ that communicate grace. Their efficacy rests on Christ's work, rather than human merit or the minister's personal holiness. The Latin phrase ex opere operato expresses this grounding. The recipient's disposition still matters and can impede the fruit of the sacrament.

Read Council of Trent, Session VII (1547), canon 1 and the canons on sacraments in general.

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Slide 11 Eastern Orthodoxy and the Holy Mysteries

Eastern Orthodox Christians commonly call sacraments holy mysteries. Baptism and the Eucharist hold central importance. Seven is a familiar teaching list, but Orthodox usage can extend beyond a fixed number. The emphasis falls on transformation and participation in divine life.

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Slide 12 Protestant Diversity Today

Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed churches generally understand baptism and communion as instituted means through which God works, with important differences. Baptist and many free-church traditions emphasize obedience, proclamation, remembrance, and identification with Christ. Protestant is a broad category rather than one sacramental theology.

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Slide 13 Compare the Main Traditions

Tradition	Typical count	Characteristic emphasis
Roman Catholic	7	Effective signs of grace
Eastern Orthodox	Often 7	Holy mysteries and participation in divine life
Lutheran	2 primarily	Word and promise; means of grace
Reformed	2	Signs and seals; grace received by faith
Baptist / free church	2 ordinances	Obedience, witness, remembrance

Counts are broad summaries. Orthodox usage can be broader. Lutherans sometimes include confession or absolution. Anglicans commonly distinguish two sacraments of the Gospel from five other rites commonly called sacraments.

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lide 14 What Changed and What Continued

Christians practiced baptism and the Lord's Supper from the beginning. Definitions, numbers, and explanations developed over centuries. The continuing question is what Scripture promises through these acts. Discuss: Does the distinction between ordinance and sacrament clarify or obscure the biblical evidence? Next lesson: baptism.

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