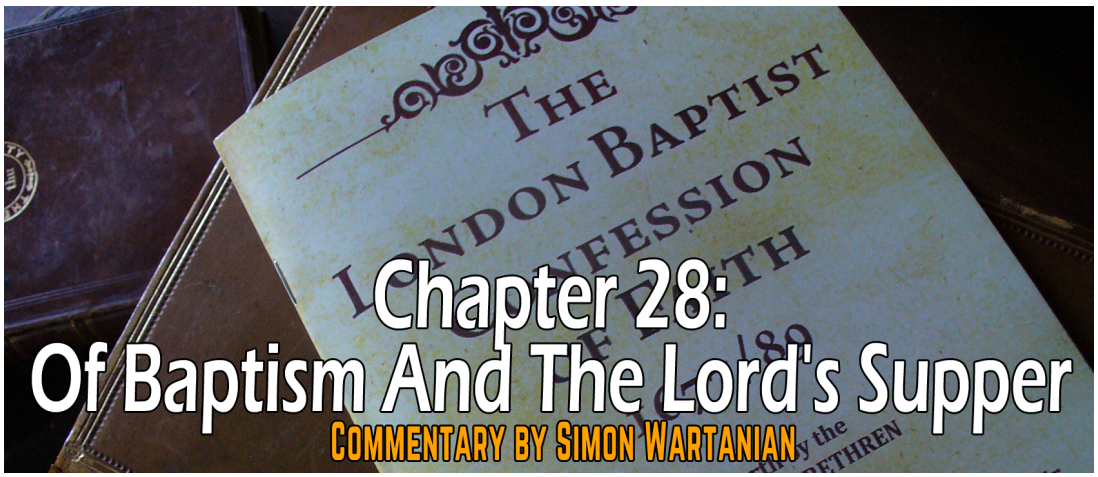
# 1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 28: Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper - Commentary

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## Chapter 28: Of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

What does it mean that the ordinances are positive institution? What is the difference between the Reformed and Roman Catholic understanding of the sacraments? Who may administer the ordinances?

## §1 Ordinances Of Positive And Sovereign Institution

1. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are **ordinances of positive and sovereign institution,** appointed by the **Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver,** **1** to be continued in his church to the end of the world. **2**
    1. Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-25[1]
    2. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 1:13-17; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; 1 Cor. 11:26; Luke 22:14-20

**Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances** and commandments of **positive and sovereign institution**. They have been instituted and commanded by the **Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver** and are, therefore, to be obeyed and **continued in His church to the end of the world** (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:26). What does it mean that the ordinances are **of positive and sovereign institution**? It means that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are moral commandments which are added to the moral law already existing. They are not things which of themselves are moral, but they are moral because they have been instituted and **appointed by the Lord Jesus**. They are given to us as a law, which the Lord Jesus Christ, by His power and authority as Head, King and Lawgiver of the church has instituted. Finally, baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only ordinances under the New Covenant which the Confession speaks about. Christ has given us only to ordinances which we ought to obey, not seven sacraments according to Roman Catholic teaching.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two ordinances or sacraments which the Lord Jesus by sovereign authority instituted and commanded us to observe. Now, what does the word "positive" mean in the sentence "positive and sovereign institution"? Does it mean something that is happy and good, over against something negative and bad? No, that is not the contextual meaning of the word. Rather, by "positive institution" or "positive command," the Confession means an institution or a command that is *not inherently moral*. A person who has not read the Bible or heard of the God of the Bible, still knows that murder is wrong and lying is bad. But, can it be argued that they know that not being baptized is sin and not partaking of the Lord's Supper is sin? Obviously not. So, these things, just like the command of Genesis 2:16-17 in the Garden, are things

which are not inherently moral, but become moral when God commands them. They are things that are good because commanded, in contrast to pure moral laws that are commanded because they are good. The Lord Christ, by His own power and authority, established two ordinances for the New Covenant people of God. But, what do we mean by ordinance or sacrament? A.H. Strong writes, "By the ordinances, we mean those outward rites which Christ has appointed to be administered in his church as visible signs of the saving truth of the gospel. They are signs, in that they vividly express this truth and confirm it to the believer."[2] They are the only visible signs which God has given His people to show the truths of the gospel with. He has not allowed us to use images of any of the blessed Persons of the Trinity (**see here**), but has given us the bread and wine, and the waters of baptism as signs which symbolize the truths of the gospel.

These two ordinances are to be continued to the end of this world. In the case of the Supper, this could be seen in 1 Corinthians 11:26. We proclaim the Lord's death *until* He comes. Therefore, since He has not yet come, we should celebrate the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, His coming will be at the end of the age (Matt. 13:36-43). Therefore, as long as this present age goes on, the people of God ought to proclaim the Lord's death through the cup and the bread. As for baptism, the Lord, before ascending to His rightful throne, commanded us:

> Matt. 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

An important part of discipleship is the baptism of believers. Therefore, as long as people believe, baptism should be practiced. As long as the Lord Jesus receives new disciples, baptism should be observed. After the end of the world, there will be no more new disciples, therefore, that is the time when baptism will cease.

The importance of this chapter is seen at the backdrop of the sevenfold sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism
    - It removes the guilt and effects of Original Sin and incorporates the baptized into the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ on earth.
2. The Sacrament of Confirmation
    - ...it was administered immediately after the Sacrament of Baptism. Confirmation perfects our baptism and brings us the graces of the Holy Spirit that were granted to the Apostles on Pentecost Sunday.
3. The Sacrament of Holy Communion
    - This sacrament is the source of great graces that sanctify us and help us grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ.
4. The Sacrament of Confession
    - In reconciling us to God, it is a great source of grace...
5. The Sacrament of Marriage
    - It reflects the union of Jesus Christ and His Church.
6. The Sacrament of Holy Orders
    - The Sacrament of Holy Orders is the continuation of Christ's priesthood, which He bestowed upon His Apostles. There are three levels to this sacrament: the episcopate, the priesthood, and the diaconate.
7. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick
    - Traditionally referred to as Extreme Unction or Last Rites, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered both to the dying and to those who are gravely ill or are about to undergo a serious operation, for the recovery of their health and for spiritual strength.[3]

Instead of merely two, the Roman Catholic Church has declared as sacraments five more things. The sacraments, according to Roman Catholic theology, in themselves administer grace. While on the other hand, Reformed theology says that the sacraments/ordinances do not in themselves administer grace, but must be joined with faith for them to be effective. According to the Roman system, "Instead of being the external manifestation of a preceding union with Christ, they are the physical means of constituting and maintaining this union."[2]

## §2 To Be Administered By Those Only Who Are Qualified

2. These holy appointments are to be **administered by those only who are qualified** and thereunto called, **according to the commission of Christ.** **1**
    1. Matt. 24:45-51; 28:19-20; Luke 12:41-44; 1 Cor. 4:1; Titus 1:5-7

The **holy appointments** or ordinances are to be **administered by those only who are qualified** and **called** to this task, **according to the commission of Christ**.

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Now here there is a little difficulty. Who are the persons qualified to do these things? In a local church, those persons would be the elders. But, does this exclude any regular member in administering the ordinances or helping in the administration thereof? I do not see any biblical command that only the elders may do these things, nor any prohibition against regular members helping. Obviously, within the local gathering of God's people, the elders would undertake to administer the Lord's Supper and Baptism. They may, perhaps, ask the help of some brothers or sisters for the Lord's Supper, for example, to pray for the bread and wine and distribute the elements. I do not see why that would not be permissible. Obviously, having the elders administer the ordinances is much better, as they are the ones who are in the position to lead the church and are known as the church leaders. Therefore, having them baptize a person or administer the Lord's Supper, is much more authoritative than a regular member. Philip, for example, who was not an elder, baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38). I do not advise people to go and baptize others *outside* the church. That is not my point. But rather, my point is that I see nothing in the Bible (I am open for change) which restricts the administration of the ordinances to elders alone.

As for the Lord's Table, the disciples in the early church in Jerusalem, it seems, were regularly celebrating it (e.g., Acts 2:42). But the Lord's Supper was especially celebrated on the Lord's Day in the corporate gathering of God's people (Acts 20:7). The people of God were gathered on the first day in Troas to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians, when they came "together as a church" (1 Cor. 11:18) observed the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20). This would indicate that the Lord's Supper is generally to be administered on the Lord's Day in the corporate gathering of God's people. The Lord's Supper should not be celebrated by one person, but rather in a gathering of more people. There may be occasions when a group would want to celebrate the Lord's Supper outside of the gathering of the church, or a sick brother or sister not in the corporate gathering may want to partake of the Lord's Table. I do not see any prohibition of such a thing. But we should note that the common, regular, and normal observance of the Lord's Supper is within the corporate gathering of God's people on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper is not a "me and Jesus" moment, but it is "me and Jesus and the congregation" unity moment. It is vertical as well as horizontal. In fact, the believers at Troas were gathered one the first day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7). When Paul spoke against the Corinthian misuse of the Lord's Supper, he addressed it in the context of corporate worship (1 Cor. 11:17ff). Therefore, private celebrations should be discouraged. The gathering of God's people is the proper context for the Lord's Supper as well as Baptism.

In conclusion, we give the words of Bob Carr:

> While there is nothing in the Bible that says that only ministers may administer the ordinances, surely it is reasonable to believe that the baptism of new disciples and the serving of the elements of the Lord's Supper ought to be under the supervision of the ministers. Ordinarily, they will administer the ordinances themselves. There may be unusual circumstances, however, under which they may delegate the tasks to other men selected by them and recognized by the congregation. The wording of the Confession at this point provides for appropriate flexibility.[4]

## Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. a, b *A. H. Strong. Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). p. 930.*
3. ^ *Summarized from Sacraments. Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide.*
4. ^ *Bob Carr. The London Baptist Confession of Faith | Exposition of Chapter 28.*