

“Writing on the theology and practice of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which are hotly debated and deeply divisive topics, is a daunting task. The assignment should fall to a theologian who loves Christ’s church, understands the different perspectives, is irenic toward those with whom he disagrees, and is involved in a community in which baptism and the Lord’s Supper are regularly celebrated as gospel realities at the heart of worship. John Hammett is such a theologian. While a confessional Baptist himself, he takes great pains to faithfully and fairly represent the divergent theological views of the Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and other traditions. And he not only engages theological issues but addresses how baptism and the Lord’s Supper are practiced. The forty-question format makes this book a very accessible resource, and John’s clear thinking and writing render it a pleasure to read. Christ’s church will be enriched as its members become more theologically and practically prepared to celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”

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Professor of Christian Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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40 QUESTIONS ABOUT
Baptism and the Lord's Supper

John S. Hammett

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40 Questions about Baptism and the Lord's Supper

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*To the twelve churches in five states
and two continents
where I have celebrated
these ordinances with God's people*

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Introduction

No practices are more characteristic of Christianity than baptism and the Lord's Supper. When Christians today administer baptism or gather to remember Christ's death by eating and drinking, they stand in a line of millions upon millions of believers who have done these same things. But while these practices have been almost universal among Christians,¹ the understanding of these practices has been far from uniform. In fact, the different understandings that have developed over the years have prompted the questions this book seeks to answer.

Historical Prologue

The twin practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper appear almost immediately upon the inception of the church. Shortly after Jesus' ascension, three thousand were baptized on the day of Pentecost, the day regarded by many as the day of the church's birth (Acts 2:41). In the days following, the early church is described as "devoted . . . to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42), regarded by many as the practice of the Lord's Supper.²

Descriptions of how the post-apostolic church celebrated baptism and the Lord's Supper are given in documents like the *Didache* and the "First Apology of Justin Martyr,"³ and show the prominent place these observances had in the life of the church. The theology of the sacraments was powerfully shaped by the works of Augustine. He provided one of most widely used definitions of a sacrament (an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"),⁴ and reflected on the efficacy of the sacraments in his controversy with a group called the Donatists. They had argued that the efficacy of a sacrament in conveying grace to the recipient was dependent on the moral worthiness of the

-
1. The only Christian denominations that do not practice baptism and the Lord's Supper are the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and the Salvation Army.
 2. F. F. Bruce says, "The regular observance of the Lord's Supper is no doubt indicated" (*Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 79).
 3. See "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the *Didache*," and "The First Apology of Justin, the Martyr," in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).
 4. R. S. Wallace, "Sacrament," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 1047.

administrator. Augustine, however, countered that the efficacy of a sacrament rests on Christ, and not on the worthiness of the administrator or the recipient. This view of sacramental efficacy, described in the Latin phrase *ex opere operato*, became standard in the church for hundreds of years, until the time of the Reformation.⁵

Additional questions about the sacraments arose in the medieval era. There was a significant debate about the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in the ninth century,⁶ and the number of sacraments had been a matter of discussion since Augustine, who had seen the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as fitting his definition of sacrament. The twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor had gone as far as to suggest as many as thirty sacraments.⁷ The answers given to these questions by the medieval church were to become standard for Catholic theology, though disputed later by the Reformers.

The nature of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper was explained by the doctrine of transubstantiation, formally adopted by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and since then has been Catholic doctrine. The number of sacraments came to be fixed at seven, with confirmation, penance, holy orders, matrimony and extreme unction being added to baptism and the Lord's Supper. The list of these seven sacraments was first formulated by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century, received the important endorsement of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, was formally adopted by the Council of Florence in 1439, was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1547, and is the number of sacraments practiced by Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Church today.⁸

The importance of the sacraments was reaffirmed by the Reformers, particularly in the Reformed definition of a true church as one in which the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. One suspects that this definition was derived, at least in part, from the perception of the Reformers that the Roman Catholic Church was most in need of reformation precisely on these two points: they were not preaching the Word of God rightly, nor were they practicing the sacraments rightly. At any rate, the Reformers were one in attacking the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, though for different reasons and in different ways. On baptism, the magisterial Reformers followed the Catholic Church in maintaining infant

5. Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 77.

6. For more, see David Hogg, "Carolingian Conflict: Two Monks on the Mass," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, ed. Thomas Schreiner and Matthew Crawford, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 127–150.

7. "Sacrament," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1218.

8. *Ibid.* See also the discussion in chapter 2 of this book.

baptism, but gave different rationales for doing so. The Anabaptists and later, the Baptists, were more radical, rejecting infant baptism altogether. As to the other five sacraments, all were rejected, as only baptism and the Lord's Supper were seen as authorized by Scripture.

In the centuries that followed, one of the fuels for denominational proliferation was the conviction that the right administration of the sacraments was important, if not essential, to a church being a true church, coupled with the lack of agreement on what constituted right administration. Rather than allowing member churches to agree to disagree on the sacraments, or allowing a diversity of practices among their churches, denominations coalesced around their theology and practice of the sacraments. Some even began to use a different term for these practices, calling them ordinances. To this day, differing views on baptism and the Lord's Supper are often identified by denominational labels.⁹

In the twentieth century, ecumenical concerns prompted reexamination of views on baptism and the Lord's Supper. The modern ecumenical movement, usually seen as beginning with the 1910 Edinburgh International Missionary Conference, was sparked by the concern that denominational divisions were hampering the missionary enterprise of the church. After all, Jesus had said that the world would believe that he had been sent from the Father if believers were one (John 17:20–21). Unfortunately, over the years the organizations that developed to pursue ecumenism, especially the World Council of Churches (WCC), lost the emphasis on missions and, to many evangelicals, appeared to pursue unity at the expense of doctrinal purity. Timothy Weber notes evangelical objections to “the rather nebulous doctrinal basis of the WCC and its seemingly weak commitment to evangelism.”¹⁰

However, the ecumenical movement has borne some fruit. The 1982 statement, “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” was the culmination of fifty years of discussions and labor among groups associated with the WCC, and has been the basis for discussions among numerous groups.¹¹ Even more recently, a series of dialogues between Roman Catholics and Reformed church leaders resulted in a statement pledging mutual recognition of baptism, signed by

9. For example, a recent book giving four views on baptism devotes chapters to Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Christian Churches/Church of Christ views (John Armstrong, ed., *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007]). A similar book on the Lord's Supper is divided into chapters on Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic views (John Armstrong, ed., *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007]). Still another book goes further, incorporating a fifth view on the Lord's Supper, a Pentecostal view (Gordon Smith, ed., *The Lord's Supper: Five Views* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008]).

10. T. S. Weber, “Ecumenism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 364.

11. “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). An electronic version of the paper is available through the website of the World Council of Churches.

representatives of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church, and the United Church of Christ.¹²

Among evangelicals, while there have been some formal organizational efforts toward visible expressions of unity, ecumenism has flourished more informally, among numerous parachurch organizations. Not being churches, they refrained from celebrations of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and thus could enjoy fellowship across denominational lines, despite disagreements on the sacraments. They viewed their evangelical unity on what they saw as first-order doctrines, matters such as the authority of Scripture and the meaning of the gospel, as more important than their disagreements on what they regarded as second-order doctrines, such as the meaning and practice of the sacraments. Such ecumenical or inter-denominational fellowship has been especially meaningful for those in denominations or circles where there is not agreement on these first-order matters. Many feel closer kinship with those who share their beliefs on first-order doctrines but differ on second-order doctrines than with fellow church members who do not share their views on first-order doctrines. Second-order doctrines are seen as important, but secondary, and certainly no barrier to informal fellowship in parachurch settings. Perhaps it has been this increased contact with others across denominational lines that has sparked a renewed interest in discussions of baptism and the Lord's Supper in recent years.

The Contemporary Context

Whatever the reason, since the year 2000 there has been a rising tide of interest in what some call ordinances and others call sacraments. Baptists and pedobaptists have renewed their debate on infant baptism;¹³ books have appeared, offering four or five perspectives on the Lord's Supper;¹⁴ still others have discussed three or four views on baptism;¹⁵ and other authors have offered their thoughts on one or the other or both of these practices.¹⁶ Numerous Baptists, particularly British Baptists, have encouraged their fellow Baptists

12. "Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism," available at the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/Reformed/baptism.cfm), accessed 5/26/2014.

13. See, for example, Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003) and Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, ed., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006).

14. Armstrong, *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*; Smith, *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*.

15. Wright, *Baptism: Three Views*; Armstrong, *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*.

16. See the numerous post-2000 entries in the Select Bibliography at the end of this book.

to adopt a more sacramental view of baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹⁷ These books reflect the numerous questions being asked today about baptism and the Lord's Supper, questions this book is uniquely designed to answer.

This Book

In the midst of the current flood of books, this one is unique in several respects. First, whereas most books treat either baptism or the Lord's Supper, this book treats both. It begins with four general questions that pertain to both baptism and the Lord's Supper (Part 1), then addresses seventeen specific questions about baptism (Part 2), another seventeen questions about the Lord's Supper (Part 3) and concludes with two questions, again with both relating to baptism and the Lord's Supper (Part 4).

Second, most books focus on only one or two issues relating to either baptism or the Lord's Supper. For baptism, the focal point for discussion has been infant baptism; for the Lord's Supper, the nature of Christ's presence.¹⁸ This book includes discussion of these key issues, but also covers a much wider range of topics. The two main sections, Parts 2 and 3, are each subdivided. Each has a section engaging a number of important but often overlooked introductory questions (chs. 5–8 for baptism; chs. 22–25 for the Lord's Supper). Each section also gives an overview of the major denominational views on baptism (chs. 9–13) and the Lord's Supper (chs. 26–30). In each case, there is an additional chapter on "Other Traditions," traditions not covered in other books giving multiple views. Each main section also has a third sub-section tackling not only the central theological issue (infant baptism; the nature of Christ's presence in the Supper), but numerous other theological issues that also merit careful consideration (chs. 14–19 and 31–35).

Third, this book addresses a number of specific practical questions that other books often omit. Consideration of these questions should help pastors and worship leaders in planning how and how often to celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper; they should help parents think through when their children should be baptized; they should help all Christians to improve their worship through baptism and the Lord's Supper; and they call on all believers to ponder how these two critical Christian observances should shape their thinking about a host of related theological topics and how they should impact their lives as believers (chs. 20–21 and 36–40). Moreover, each chapter

17. Probably the most persistent advocate of such a movement has been Stanley Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 2 (Waynesboro, GA and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002). See also Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 5 (Waynesboro, GA and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003) and *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 25 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008).

18. These are the central issues in the multiple view books cited in nn. 15 and 16 above.

concludes with questions for reflection, many of which will call readers to consider practical application of these topics to their lives.

Fourth, the table of contents clearly indicates where each question is addressed, so that readers may go directly to those questions of most interest to them. Each chapter is relatively brief, but includes footnotes to direct readers to sources should they desire to go deeper on any topic.

It has been this author's pleasure to spend the past few months pondering these questions. My understanding of them has been shaped not only by academic research but also by my personal experience of baptism and the Lord's Supper as a worshiping member of a number of communities of believers over the years. Thus, this book is gratefully dedicated to the twelve churches, scattered across two continents and five states, that have nurtured my understanding of these topics by their practice of them, as I have celebrated these ordinances with them.

Abbreviations

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> . New Hope, KY: Urbi et Orbi, 1994
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>The Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
LCC	Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia, 1953–
LW	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> , ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia; Fortress, 1955–86
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975–1985
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NPNF¹</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBL	Studies of Biblical Literature
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

PART 1

**GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT
BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER**

QUESTION 1

Are Baptism and the Lord's Supper Sacraments or Ordinances?

Sacrament or Ordinance

Most Christian groups refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments, but some Protestants, especially Baptists, have preferred the term ordinances. More informally, they are sometimes referred to as rites, rituals, ceremonies, or even celebrations. No one of these terms can claim biblical usage as precedent, and so it might seem as if there could be no "right" or "biblical" term to use. This question would be no more than one of semantic preference were it not for a number of theological associations that have gathered around the term sacrament or sacramental over the centuries, associations that some find objectionable. Most Baptists have chosen to refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as ordinances, not merely as a semantic preference but on the basis of their understanding of the meaning and effect of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thus, this first question opens for us larger issues that will require further consideration in later questions; we will introduce them now in relation to this question of the proper term.

The Origin and Meaning of "Sacrament"

It is widely acknowledged that in Latin *sacramentum* originally meant an oath, especially a soldier's oath of loyalty to his commanding officer, but it entered the Christian vocabulary due to its usage to translate the term *mustērion* (mystery) in the Latin translation of the New Testament.¹ Nowhere

1. See "Sacrament," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1218; and Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series, ed. John Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 321–22. Allison notes seven places where the Latin Vulgate translates *mustērion* as *sacramentum* (322n. 4).

in the New Testament is *mustērion* or *sacramentum* used to refer to either baptism or the Lord's Supper, but some early Christians did refer to the Lord's Supper as a "mystery," and the category of mystery is still important in both Orthodox and Catholic understandings of the sacraments.² Tertullian seems to have been the first theologian to use the Latin term *sacramentum* with a theological meaning, drawing upon the idea of the oath of loyalty, and associating that with "the mystery of God's salvation" and "the symbols or rites which were associated with this salvation in the life of the church," namely, the sacraments.³

Further development of a theology of the sacraments came with Augustine. He is well known for giving the classic definition of a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace,⁴ but he applied it to formulas such as the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. As late as the twelfth century, a theologian such as Hugh of St. Victor would enumerate up to thirty sacraments.⁵ The proper number of sacraments will be considered in a later question, but the more important contribution of Augustine for this question is his formulation of the efficacy of the sacraments.

In his controversy with the Donatists, Augustine was confronted by those who claimed that the sacraments administered by priests who had collaborated with the Romans under persecution were not valid due to the personal unworthiness of the priests. In response, Augustine argued that the validity or efficacy of a sacrament depends "on Christ himself, not the merits of either the administrator or recipient."⁶ This view of sacramental efficacy is associated with the Latin phrase, *ex opere operato*, "on account of the work which is done," and means that the sacraments not only signify grace, but convey the grace they signify.

The magisterial Reformers maintained the term "sacrament" and an emphasis on God's action in them, but nuanced the idea of the conveyance of grace. Luther clarified the importance of faith in the right administration of the sacraments. He calls the mass (or Lord's Supper) "a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God . . . confirmed by the death of the Son of God."

2. See the discussion in Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 667n. 1. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the heading that begins the discussion of the sacraments reads, "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery" (277).

3. Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997), 496; see Tertullian, "Ad Martyras," in *ANF*, 3:694 (chap. III).

4. See Augustine, "On the Catechising of the Uninstructed," in *NPNF1*, 3:312 (ch. 26.50).

5. "Sacrament," Oxford Dictionary, 1218.

6. Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction of the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 77. McGrath cites from Augustine's work "On Baptism," which says, "When baptism is administered by the words of the gospel, however great the evil of either minister or recipient may be, the sacrament itself is holy on account of the one whose sacrament it is." For a more extensive discussion of Augustine and the Donatist controversy, see G. G. Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London: SPCK, 1950).

But the promise calls for the response of faith, and so Luther says, “nothing else is needed for a worthy holding of mass than a faith that relies confidently on this promise.” He even cites Augustine in support of his view: “Believe,” says Augustine, ‘and you have eaten.’”⁷

Calvin set the standard for the Reformed tradition by calling the sacraments “signs” and “seals,” and arguing for both a divine work in them and a human response. He defines a sacrament as “an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promise of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men.”⁸ Contemporary Reformed theologian Michael Horton adopts Calvin’s terms, signs and seals, as his heading for discussing the sacraments, and argues that the sacraments are “primarily a divine pledge,” but a pledge that creates and confirms the appropriate human response of faith and repentance.⁹

The Objection to Sacrament and Development of Ordinance

With the Anabaptists, we begin to see the word “ordinance” used for these two rites, but not to the exclusion of “sacrament.”¹⁰ Among seventeenth-century Baptists, the term “ordinance” begins to appear more frequently, especially in important confessions of faith, but there was no clear distinction between ordinance and sacrament.¹¹ The former term simply emphasized that these two rites had been ordained by Christ. In addition, ordinance was a broader term, used for other aspects of worship, such as the preaching of the word, prayer, and the singing of Psalms, in addition to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In contrast, sacrament had a narrower reference, to baptism and the Lord’s Supper only.¹² During the eighteenth century, Baptists began to use ordinance more

7. Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *LW* 36, 38, 40, 44.

8. John Calvin, *Institutes*, 21:1277 (4.14.1).

9. Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 113. His chapter on the sacraments is entitled “Signs and Seals” (99–123).

10. For the use of “ordinance,” see Menno Simons, “Christian Baptism” in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. John Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 231, 235, 274; for sacraments, see “The Waterland Confession,” in W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 60. Article 30 of that confession is entitled “Of the Sacraments.”

11. David Bebbington traces the changes among Baptists on this issue (*Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010], 177–95). Stanley Fowler covers much of the same ground, but with the focus more on baptism and less on the Lord’s Supper (*More Than A Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, vol. 2 [Carlisle, UK and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002], 10–88).

12. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 19; Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 550n. 13. Garrett cites the influential John Gill as one who included the ministry of the word, prayer, and singing among the “public ordinances of divine worship” (John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal*

frequently and sacrament less often, though without any explicit rejection of the latter term. It was during the nineteenth century that Baptist opposition to the term sacrament as a matter of theological principle developed.

While scholars cite numerous possible reasons for this development, a central reason seems to be the idea that the term “sacrament” denotes the transmission of saving grace to recipients, *ex opere operato*, and that such an understanding of the sacraments threatens the idea of justification by faith.¹³ Baptists wanted to emphasize that we receive God's saving grace by faith, not by sacraments. Fowler describes the results of this developing opposition: “By the end of the nineteenth century, it was widely assumed by Baptists that baptism is an ‘ordinance’ *as opposed to* a ‘sacrament,’ an act of human obedience *as opposed to* a means of grace.”¹⁴ This attitude continued into the twentieth century and is typified by this statement by E. F. Kevan: “Baptists have normally preferred to use the word ‘ordinance’ rather than ‘sacrament’ because of certain sacerdotal ideas that the word *sacrament* has gathered to itself.”¹⁵

The Contemporary Context and the “Great Divide”

Today opposition to the term sacrament is still present among many Baptists, but is weakening some.¹⁶ Stanley Grenz wants to retain “the primacy of the designation ‘ordinance,’” but thinks we may also draw significance from the original meaning of *sacramentum*.¹⁷ But regardless of the term used, a significant difference remains in terms of what different groups see as happening

and Practical Divinity [London: np, 1839; reprint, Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1987], xvi, 896, 915, 924, 932).

13. Fowler gives six possible reasons (*More Than a Symbol*, 87–88); Bebbington offers five (*Baptists through the Centuries*, 185–90). Both specifically include the importance of the Anglo-Catholic Tractarian movement in nineteenth-century England, and, more generally, “the enduring power of anti-Catholicism” (Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, 188).
14. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol*, 87 (emphasis original). While Fowler addresses only baptism, the same attitude would be true concerning the Lord's Supper.
15. E. F. Kevan, “Baptist Tradition, The,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, UK and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 139.
16. Wayne Grudem believes there is no “significant point at issue” in the use of the terms sacrament or ordinance, but does see an important difference between what Protestants and Catholics mean by referring to them as “means of grace” (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 951–52, 966). Gregg Allison perhaps reflects a growing view among Baptists in stating, “Out of deference to evangelicals who use both terms, I will refer to these rites as both *sacraments* and *ordinances*, though I personally prefer the latter term” (*Sojourners and Strangers*, 322).
17. Grenz. *Theology for the Community of God*, 671. A similar position was reflected decades earlier by A. H. Strong who wrote: “No ordinance is a sacrament in the Romish [Roman Catholic] sense of conferring grace; but, as the *sacramentum* was the oath taken by the Roman Soldier to obey his commander even unto death, so Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments, in the sense of vows of allegiance to Christ our Master” (*Systematic Theology* [Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907], 930).

in baptism and the Lord's Supper. Leonard Vander Zee calls this the "great divide" in interpretations of the Lord's Supper and baptism: "On the one side are those for whom the sacramental signs merely point to Christ and invite our faith in him but do not involve any action on God's part. On the other side, God uses the signs to point us to Christ and bind us to him." Another way of putting this divide uses the different terms: "the 'ordinances,' as they are often called, are means of *expressing faith to God*, and on the other side, sacraments are a means of *receiving grace from God*."¹⁸

The terms "ordinance" or "sacrament," in themselves, are both fairly broad and flexible words, capable of carrying a variety of meanings. They are theologically important only insofar as they are indicators of different understandings of what is happening in baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those different understandings have produced divergent views of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both within Protestantism, and between Protestants as a whole and Catholics.¹⁹ Exploring those different understandings will be involved in answering many of the questions in this book; here at the outset we simply want to acknowledge that for some the term ordinance or sacrament carries a particular understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. That is not the case for the author of this book. I will use both terms to refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper because I think both have something valuable to contribute to our understanding. But the reader should understand that I desire to use them in as neutral a sense as possible, without prejudging the question of human versus divine activity in baptism and the Lord's Supper. That is another and separate question that we will explore later.

Summary

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are called *sacraments* by most Christian groups. But some, especially Baptists, began to object to the term *sacrament* because of its association with Catholic views, which they thought threatened the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. They began to use the term *ordinance*. Neither term is used in Scripture for baptism or the Lord's Supper; neither in itself defines the effect of baptism and the Lord's Supper in a particular way. In practice, however, most of those who use ordinance

18. Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 30.

19. Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom insightfully explain that there are "two separations"; one between those who see the sacraments as primarily human actions and those who see God doing something important in them (this separation operates within Protestants), and a second separation of all Protestants from Catholics, due to the Catholic view that "the church and its officers are essential as the institutional prerequisites for the sacraments in a way that they are not for evangelicals" (*Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* [Bletchley, UK: Paternoster and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 236).

accent the human activity involved in baptism and the Lord's Supper; those who use the term sacrament tend to see an important role for divine activity, though they differ in terms of exactly what that activity is.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does it really matter what we call baptism and the Lord's Supper? Why or why not?
2. What are baptism and the Lord's Supper called in your church? Is the meaning of the term explained or is it assumed that everyone understands its meaning?
3. What does it mean to call baptism and the Lord's Supper sacraments, and why do some object to that term?
4. What does it mean to call baptism and the Lord's Supper ordinances, and why might some object to that term?
5. What about terms like rites, rituals, traditions, and celebrations? Do any have the right connotations for the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper? Are they positive or negative terms? How may we best refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper?