

Growing in Christ Lesson 9 3Q 2012

The Church: Rites and Rituals

Thoughts about the title?

Key thought: “God has instituted ordinances that, properly understood, help to reinforce our faith.”

What is the “key” to the key thought? “properly understood”

What happens if the ordinances, rituals, and rites, instituted by God are not properly understood?

Any examples of problems with such rituals not being properly understood?

Isaiah 1:10-20

- ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom;
listen to the law of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
- ¹¹ “The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?” says the LORD.
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
- ¹² When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?
- ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—
I cannot bear your evil assemblies.
- ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts
my soul hates.
They have become a burden to me;

- I am weary of bearing them.
- 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood;
- 16 wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.
- 18 “Come now, let us reason together,”
says the LORD.
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.
- 19 If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best from the land;
20 but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
For the mouth of the LORD has
spoken.

What do you hear in this passage? What does it mean? What are the take home points?

- Were the rituals they were doing made up on their own, or were instituted by God?
- Was God happy with them performing the rituals, he instructed them to carry out?
- Why not?
- What does God NOT have pleasure in?
 - The blood of bulls and lambs and goats
- What does God have pleasure in?

- Loving others, helping people
- What is it in the beginning of this section God calls them to pay attention to?
 - His law – which is what?
- What then does he call them to act like later in the section?
 - To do justice – which is what?
 - Why is this justice and not the infliction of punishment?
 - Because God’s justice is restorative, not punitive!
 - If you haven’t read the book *Healing the Gospel* by Derek Flood, I highly recommend it. It does such a powerful job of making it clear the Bible teaches restorative justice, not punitive justice.
- What does reasoning have to do with pleasing God?
- Did you notice that reasoning and cleansing are linked? Why?
- Why will they be blessed if they obey, but destroyed by the sword if they don’t? Is God threatening them?
 - If a doctor said, “if you stop smoking, drinking, using IV drugs, and start eating healthy, exercising, and loving God and others you will get healthier, feel better, have less disease, but if you don’t you will die miserably” – would the doctor be threatening?

When we think of Rituals and Rites, what are some of the legitimate purposes of these ordinances?

- Teaching – education
- Group unity and cohesion
- Increase trust as adherents to rituals communicate their intentions and commitments to the group and their ideals
- Change of mindset, empowerment, mental health improvement, increased confidence, commitment
 - Does being knighted have an impact on one’s mindset?

- Does receiving a military commission and taking one's oath of office have an impact?
- How much more if that ritual is also accompanied by a belief of divine empowerment?
- A review of 850 studies conducted during the 20th century on religious ritual and mental health found:
 - “The majority of well-conducted studies found that higher levels of religious involvement are positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being (life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, and higher morale) and with less depression, suicidal thoughts and behavior, drug/alcohol use/abuse. Usually the positive impact of religious involvement on mental health is more robust among people under stressful circumstances (the elderly, and those with disability and medical illness).” (Rev. Bras. Psiquiatr. vol.28 no.3 São Paulo Sept. 2006 Epub Aug 10, 2006)
- What about improving moral order in society? Do religious rituals improve social morality?
 - An article, God's, Rituals and the Moral Order, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Volume 40, Issue 4, pages 619–636, December 2001, found that in a study of 427 societies, moral order was only improved when rituals were carried out by those who also held a belief in “powerful, active, conscious, morally-concerned gods.”
 - Which means what? The rituals were meaningless in and of themselves to improve morality, it was the connection to the intelligent, moral higher power that had the impact on societal improvement.

Have you been through any rituals that impacted you?

- Graduation? Does it make a difference to graduate, to get that diploma or not get that diploma? Does it change, in

any way, your mindset, your sense of self? How is it different to get the education, but be one music class short of the degree, and to actually get the diploma?

- What about religious rituals? Have you experienced any of those that impacted your life?

Does one have to participate in a ritual in order to experience salvation?

Then what is the purpose of the ritual?

SUNDAY

Read first two paragraphs, “During the early...” thoughts?

What do you understand the difference between the common understanding of sacrament versus ordinance to be?

A sacrament, is some type of mystical, magical, process in which divine power gets infused into a person because of the sacrament.

Does it sound kind of like, hocus pocus?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary – the term Hocus Pocus is a term used by jugglers and magicians to make things appear and disappear. And, it is thought to have its origins in the Latin, *hoc est corpus*, which was said by the priest as he places the communion wafer upon the lips, transubstantiating it from bread to the literal flesh of Christ – as they taught it.

From the Oxford English Dictionary:

“1655 Ady *Candle in the Dark* 29, I will speak of one man... that went about in King James his time.. who called himself, The Kings Majesties most excellent Hocus Pocus, and so was called, because that at the playing of ever Trick, he used to say, *Hocus pocus, talontes, vade celeriter jubeo*, a dark composure of words to blinde the

eyes of beholders to make his Trick pass the more currently without discovery. 1694 Tilloston sermon xxvi (1742) II. 237 In all probability those common juggling words of *hocus pocus* are nothing else but a corruption of *hoc est corpus*, by the way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the Church of Rome in their trick of Transubstantiation.” (Oxford English Dictionary, second edition, 1989 Vol. VII, p 281).

Thoughts?

Is there a difference between a symbol and a sacrament?

- Do the symbols have the ability to infuse “grace”?
- Does the symbols possess some power, or ability to change the life?
- What if a person believes in the symbol, the ritual, can the symbols, if believed in, actual result in a transformation in function in a person, including biological changes in neurochemistry?

Have you heard of a placebo and/or nocebo effect?

What we believe has power to change us, neurologically and psychologically.

In an article published in 2002 in the Am Journal of Public Health, voodoo death is documented throughout various cultures in the world (Cannon WB. “Voodoo” death. *Am Anthropologist*. 1942: 44 (new series):169–118., Am J Public Health. 2002 October; 92(10): 1593–1596.)

- In Brown’s *New Zealand and Its Aborigines* there is an account of a Maori woman who, having eaten some fruit, was told that it had been taken from a tabooed place; she exclaimed that the sanctity of the chief had been profaned and that his spirit would kill her. This incident occurred in the afternoon; the next day about 12 o’clock she was dead.

- At a Mission at Mona Mona in North Queensland were many native converts, but on the outskirts of the Mission was a group of non-converts including one Nebo, a famous witch doctor. The chief helper of the missionary was Rob, a native who had been converted. When Dr. Lambert arrived at the Mission he learned that Rob was in distress and that the missionary wanted him examined. Dr. Lambert made the examination, and found no fever, no complaint of pain, no symptoms or signs of disease. He was impressed, however, by the obvious indications that Rob was seriously ill and extremely weak. From the missionary he learned that Rob had had a bone pointed at him by Nebo and was convinced that in consequence he must die. Thereupon Dr. Lambert and the missionary went for Nebo, threatened him sharply that his supply of food would be shut off if anything happened to Rob and that he and his people would be driven away from the Mission. At once Nebo agreed to go with them to see Rob. He leaned over Rob's bed and told the sick man that it was all a mistake, a mere joke—indeed, that he had not pointed a bone at him at all. The relief, Dr. Lambert testifies, was almost instantaneous; that evening Rob was back at work, quite happy again, and in full possession of his physical strength. . . .
- In an article which included a section on death from malignant psychic influences, Dr. Cleland mentions a fine, robust tribesman in central Australia who was injured in the fleshy part of the thigh by a spear that had been enchanted. The man slowly pined away and died, without any surgical complication which could be detected. Dr. Cleland cites a number of physicians who have referred to the fatal effects of bone pointing and other terrifying acts. In his letter to me he wrote, "Poisoning is, I think, entirely ruled out in such cases among our Australian natives. There are very few poisonous plants available and I doubt whether it has ever entered the mind of the central Australian natives that such might be used on human beings." . . .

- [E]vidence of the possibility of a fatal outcome from profound emotional strain was reported by Mira in recounting his experiences as a psychiatrist in the Spanish War of 1936–39. In patients who suffered from what he called “malignant anxiety,” he observed signs of anguish and perplexity, accompanied by a permanently rapid pulse (more than 120 beats per minute) and a very rapid respiration (about three times the normal resting rate). These conditions indicated a perturbed state deeply involving the sympathico-adrenal complex. As predisposing conditions Mira mentioned “a previous lability of the sympathetic system” and “a severe mental shock experienced in conditions of physical exhaustion due to lack of food, fatigue, sleeplessness, etc.” The lack of food appears to have attended lack of water, for the urine was concentrated and extremely acid. Towards the end the anguish still remained, but inactivity changed to restlessness. No focal symptoms were observed. In fatal cases death occurred in three or four days. Postmortem examination revealed brain hemorrhages in some cases, but, excepting an increased pressure, the cerebro-spinal fluid showed a normal state. The combination of lack of food and water, anxiety, very rapid pulse and respiration, associated with a shocking experience having persistent effects, would fit well with fatal conditions reported from primitive tribes.

Dr. Marin Samuels, world renowned Neurologist from Harvard University, wrote an article published in the journal *Circulation* entitled Contemporary Reviews in Cardiovascular Medicine: The Brain-Heart Connection. (*Circulation*. 2007; 116: 77-84).

In the article he wrote:

- ...evidence has accumulated to support [Dr. Cooper’s] concept that “voodoo” death is, in fact, a real phenomenon but, far from being limited to ancient peoples, may be a basic biological principle that provides an important clue to understanding the phenomenon of

sudden death in modern society as well as providing a window into the world of neurovisceral disease (also known as psychosomatic illness).

George Engel collected 160 accounts from the lay press of sudden death that were attributed to disruptive life events. He found that such events could be divided into 8 categories: (1) the impact of the collapse or death of a close person; (2) during acute grief; (3) on threat of loss of a close person; (4) during mourning or on an anniversary; (5) on loss of status or self-esteem; (6) personal danger or threat of injury; (7) after danger is over; (8) reunion, triumph, or happy ending. Common to all is that they involve events impossible for the victim to ignore and to which the response is overwhelming excitement, giving up, or both.

Thoughts?

Any examples of this in Scripture? What about Ananias and Sapphira? Could they have died of a similar cause?

What does scripture say about Satan's power?

- Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil – Heb 2:14

What is Satan's power? He is the Father of lies, and to the degree he can get us to believe lies, falsehood, he has power over us.

Does this have any implication for religion and religious beliefs?

Does it have any impact on rituals and rites? Do rituals, sacraments and rites, have power because they impact the beliefs of the person? - Yes, this is exactly how they exert their power.

And what did Jesus said, would set us free?

Read bottom paragraph, “However much importance...” thoughts?

WEDNESDAY

The Lord’s Supper – Communion

What festival did the Communion replace? Who is the one who made this change? Jesus himself.

What did the Passover symbolize? What was the meaning of putting the blood on the doorpost of the home?

- We have made the proper ritual sacrifice, so God won’t come in here and destroy? The blood will be seen by God and God will pass over us and leave us alone?
- Or, we have sacrificed an offering to show our love and respect, and placed the blood on the door symbolizing that we have placed God’s character on our home, our lives, our being and we invite you in to dwell with us and protect us from all that would destroy? Thus the destroyer passes by because we are at-one with God?

Are we destroyed by uniting with God and inviting him into our lives, or when we go our own way and separate from him?

So, what does the Communion service symbolize? The internalization of Christ into the heart, affections, and character, becoming one with him in method, purpose and motive.

I was emailed a link in which a Catholic priest and a protestant theologian discussed the Eucharist and transubstantiation:

<http://amazingdiscoveries.org/12.10.24-debate-about-the-mass-and-transubstantiation>

They went back and forth over things like whether a priest could stand if for Christ, over sacrificing Christ again and again, over it being a violation of the law to eat blood etc.

But the real issue was uncovered when The Catholic priest said:

“There are two elements to any sacrifice the immolation and the offering. The immolation is a bloody death. The lamb is slain, what is precious about that is the life in the blood of the lamb is precious and that pays back God. That’s how the Old Testament rituals used to work. The immolation happened once but the offering is something Christ does for all eternity. He is right now in the presence of the Father, in the holy of holies, in the eternal presence, offering himself to the Father for the forgiveness of our sins.... Christ isn’t killed again and again and again, he is offered [in the Eucharist] in the same eternal presence as Christ offers himself.”

The priest said it was in this offering of his sacrifice over and over again that the sins were paid for. So each time we sin, we must take mass in order to have the sacrifice of Christ pay for that sin.

How do you think the protestant theologian responded? The protestant theologian responded, with the argument that Christ is not in heaven offering his sacrifice over and over, but offering his merits to the Father over and over. So to the protestant theologian, each time we sin we don’t need to go to a priest and take mass to have Christ’s sacrifice presented to the Father to pay for our sins. Our sins were paid for, past, present and future, all at the Cross. No, when we sin we go to Christ, who presents his merits to the Father, reminding the Father that he has already paid for our sins so the Father can forgive us and not punish us.

Thoughts? Don’t you see Satan laughing? Here we have Catholics and Protestants arguing, for centuries, whether

Jesus is offering his sacrifice to God over and over again to pay for our sins, or whether he is offering his merits to remind the Father that our sins are paid for.

What is the problem?

Daniel 7, the little horn power would seek to change God's law – how? By getting us to replace the truth that God's law is the law of love, the design protocol upon which life was built, with the idea that God's law is like a Roman emperor, put upon us to test our obedience.

Catholic and Protestant alike have accepted this change in God's law and both teach that Christ needed to die to pay for our sin, and both teach that Christ works to present something to the Father so the Father won't punish us.

But, the truth is God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That God so loved the world he sent his son. That the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ bodily, so that even though he knew no sin, he became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

When we accept the lie that God's law is imposed, then we create false doctrines that breaking the law requires the lawgiver to punish and Christ died to offer himself to the Father to pay the penalty for our sin.

When we accept the truth that God's law is the principle of love upon which life was built, we realize that breaking the law is incompatible with life and Christ died to destroy the infecting principle of selfishness and actually restore humankind back into harmony with God's design for life.

We have a message that is to lighten the world, to free minds from this insidious distortion of God and his character of love and people need this message, including many well meaning, sincere, good-hearted church leaders.

Read third paragraph, “Here we see...” thoughts?

How would you explain the idea of substitution?

TUESDAY

The ordinance of humility, or foot washing – read second paragraph, “Our world is so...” thoughts?

Do you think that our world gets it backward? Is getting it backward restricted to the world, or has such backward thinking entered the church? Any examples of getting it 180 degrees backward?

- Hell – the place of eternal burning and consuming fire is the place you don’t want to be, but Scripture teaches that place is God’s presence “our God is a consuming fire” and the righteous will spend eternity there (Isa 33:14,15)
- Christ as mediator is pleading his blood to the Father in our behalf – but scripture teaches that God was in the Son reconciling the world to himself. That Christ is God’s ambassador, envoy, and mediator to his intelligent beings to bring created beings into an ever-closer relationship with God. Christ mediates God’s grace to man, not to God.
- Justice – God is required by justice to punish sinners – but the Bible teaches that God’s justice is restorative, healing the damage, turning enemies into friends, not punishing the fallen.
- Judgment – that “fear God and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment has come.” Is taught to mean that God is sitting in judgment and determining who will be saved and who will be lost. When the Bible actually teaches, God has been falsely accused, and at the end of time, before Christ returns, God calls people to make a right judgment about him and trust him. Thus Paul says, in Romans 3:4, “You must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried.”

Have we struggled with a backward view? What underlies this? Misunderstanding God and his character of love, his law of love, his methods of love. When we project earthly, worldly, human governmental concepts onto God we get it backward.

So, what about the ordinance of humility. In God's kingdom the first will be last, and the least will be the greatest – why?

What is God's law? The law of love, the principle of giving and the more you give the more you receive. This is how it operates, give little receive little, give much receive much.

Thus those who are the greatest in serving others are the greatest in the kingdom of God.

MONDAY

Baptism – what do you understand baptism to be and what is its significance?

Read second paragraph, “Baptism symbolizes a...” thoughts?

What did circumcision represent in the Old Testament? What kind of circumcision are we to have today?

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Rom 2:29

What does this text mean? Can a ritual act as an infant result in healing of the character? No, and if the ritual act was required, what about women? Were only men saved?

What was the purpose of this act? Why not something different? What was the benefit?

- Walking around in the community can you tell who is circumcised and who is not? Why not? Because the “change” is in a place that is not viewable publicly.
- Walking around in the community can you tell who is circumcised in heart, i.e. converted and who is not? Why not?
- Circumcision, would it be painful?
- Is conversion painful? Why?
- Did people circumcise themselves?
- Do we cut the ties from our own hearts?
- Circumcision typically happened as infants
- We are to have our hearts cut away from the ties to the world when we are babes in Christ, reborn into his kingdom
- Were some circumcised as adults? Was it harder?
- Are there some who are in the church for years before their hearts are circumcised, is it often harder on them?
- And symbolically, God created us as sexual beings, to reveal things about his nature. As two beings come together in love, they join together and create beings in their image. Circumcision could represent removing any barrier to that union.
- Likewise circumcision of the heart is to remove any barrier to our intimacy and union with God.
- Was circumcision, perhaps, instituted by God, because he knew the nature of the temptation the Jews would face in the fertility cults around?

Did the physical act of circumcision, do anything to the heart? Or was the heart to change and be committed to God first and then the act of circumcision was performed?

What about baptism? What is the baptism that actually heals? It is the immersing of the mind, heart, self into oneness with God via the Holy Spirit. Being washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit, which is then followed by baptism in water.

Read the third paragraph, “Many years...” thoughts?

Any thoughts on infant baptism?

One of the arguments for those who practice infant baptism is that, as the lesson states, baptism replaced OT circumcision, and circumcision was done on infants, therefore baptism is done on infants of believers, and on new converts at any age.

Thoughts?

From the Catholic Catechism:

"Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called . . . The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth" (p 1250).

What truths are presented in this theology, and what problems are presented?

- Truth - That since Adam all humanity is fallen, born with a condition they didn't choose, but which operates outside God's design and if not remedied will result in death
- Problem – a ritual, done by the church, with ceremonial water, has some transforming, healing, or saving power. That the problem is something other than what happens in the mind, heart, character.
- Problem – The idea that a ritual done by the church to a child who is unaware results in “rebirth”.
- Problem – if this ritual isn't performed and a child dies their salvation is in jeopardy.
- What does this say about God?

THURSDAY

Anticipating the second advent – are we? Are we really anticipating it?

This past week after the election I had several patients quite distraught over the outcome, and worrying about the future of our nation. Should we worry about the future of our nation? Why or why not?

What did Jesus say would happen before his return?

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains. MT 24:4-8

When a woman goes into labor, does she turn to her husband and say, “Can’t we put this off for 9 more months?”

How many today say they want to put off the coming of the Lord?

Does a woman going into labor expect it to be pleasant? Then why does she want to do it? What comes at the end of labor? Do we expect delivery? Do we expect celebration and joy?

Is there any thing we can do to hasten the day of his coming?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 2-4