
PHYSICAL OBJECTS/KINGDOM REALITIES

by Gary H. Patterson

Does God use physical things as a means for us to grasp and experience His Kingdom realities?

The physical things to which I am referring include the waters of baptism, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, anointing oil, and such things. All these physical objects can be found in Scripture, but, sadly, some have been reduced to mere rituals and mystical observances in certain sects of Christendom. Even so, that does not invalidate the true power and impact that such will have on those who truly understand their purpose and validity for today.

Are water baptism and the Lord's Supper only rituals or are they physical things that serve as points at which our faith links us to the unseen substance of the Kingdom?

Water Baptism

There are two passages of Scripture that some may use to argue against the practice of water baptism today. The first is when Paul stated that he thanked God that he baptized none of them except for two people (1 Cor. 1:14).

Can we rightly conclude from this passage that Paul was teaching against water baptism? Was he not promoting baptism being done for the right reason when he stated that he was glad that he had only baptized a couple of them? According to the context, his reason for saying this was so that none of them could say they were baptized in his name. He was teaching against the divisiveness that came from the Corinthian's claim to greatness based on who baptized them. Obviously, Paul did baptize some of them and

so did Apollos and Peter, but his stating that Christ did not send him to baptize is not an indictment against it.

The second passage that some may use to argue against water baptism is found in John 4:1-3, "Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (2) (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), (3) He left Judea and departed again to Galilee."

Some would argue that since Jesus did not personally water baptize anyone, then that makes it invalid today. As the same passage reveals, did He not tell His disciples to water baptize? Was He not also water baptized by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:13-17)?

Scripture does indicate the reason why Jesus did not personally water baptize people. In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist proclaimed: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." It was prophesied that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire and not with water. This was one important thing that distinguished Jesus the Messiah from John the Baptist (who came as the forerunner to the Messiah). Jesus' commitment to making that distinction clear was evident by Him not personally water baptizing anyone.

This in no way signifies that Jesus' baptizing people in the Holy Spirit and fire would replace water baptism in the New Covenant either. One would have to read into Scripture something that is not there (a.k.a. begging the question) in order to arrive at such a conclusion. Neither Jesus nor the apostles taught any such doctrine.

Did Jesus' death and resurrection fulfill water baptism? Some would use this argument also. If so, He would have not commanded his disciples to baptize after His resurrection. There would have been no need for it under *any* circumstances. Baptism in water and the baptism with the Holy Spirit are two very distinct entities and serve different and separate purposes.

Christ has obviously commanded us to water baptize and, thus, fulfill part of the Great Commission as revealed in Matthew 28:19-20.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

We are to teach all nations *all* things that Christ has ordained and commanded us. This includes water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. If Jesus commanded it, should that not be enough?

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (12) buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:11-12).

One can clearly see how God works *through* physical objects in water baptism. Notice that faith is not to be put in our being immersed in or raised out of the water, but it must be placed in the inward working of God who raised Christ from the dead. *The immersion into and the raising out of the water serve only as a means through which we express our faith to God.* The passage does not say that water baptism represents our death with Christ, but it states that we *are* buried with Him in baptism. There is no distinction made here between the act of water baptism and our actually experiencing a work of God within us.

The expression of true faith in God through such physical means is what makes them indistinguishable from the Kingdom realities symbolized by those very things.

Paul gave more evidence of this in Romans 6:3-4:

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Water baptism is obviously an initiation into a new walk. We have the life of God in us when we are born again. Our spirit becomes a new creation in Christ. It is raised up in new life with Him, but that new life needs to be

translated into our walk. This happens through our co-death with Christ. Scripture obviously states that this can be accomplished through (not by) water baptism. The accomplishment of this co-death through the waters of baptism applies to our soul (basically the mind, will, personality, and emotions). The state of these faculties affects how we walk out the new life we have in Christ. While Scripture teaches that water baptism is a means that the Lord has commanded to initially help us walk in newness of life, this does not mean it cannot be accomplished apart from it. God instated water baptism for us, and we were not created for it. It was given to help strengthen or undergird the faith of the new disciples of Christ. Like other physical things, it is a tangible means that connects us to Kingdom realities.

Someone might respond, "How do you know that the above passages are referring to water baptism?"

Every place in Scripture where the word "baptism" is used alone is safely assumed to be referring to water baptism. Scripture is always clear where reference is given to any other baptism. This was obviously assumed by Paul and the readers during that time. Paul would have distinguished it as being another baptism if it were otherwise. Does it bear witness in your spirit? Note that I did not say, "Does it agree with your doctrine or thinking?" We have an anointing from God by which we can know and rightly discern the truth (1 Jn. 2:27).

Water baptism is also far more than a ritual. The Apostle Peter taught that it has saving power like unto how Noah and his family were saved through the water while everyone else perished. "Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (21) There is also an antitype [counterpart] which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt. 3:20-21). This is obviously referring to water baptism.

Failure to bring our walk into alignment with the life of Christ within us will eventually end in condemnation from God. This is how water baptism can save us: by helping our faith link the seen with the eternal and unshakable unseen. It is much easier for us to believe Jesus died for us than to believe that we died with Him. So, God has helped us to believe and experience it

through water baptism. This is why it is commanded by God as the finalization of repentance, so that we will not be condemned.

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:16). “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The Lord’s Supper

This is Paul quoting Christ concerning the Lord’s Supper:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; (24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ (25) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ (26) For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Notice that Jesus did not say that the bread and the cup represent His body and blood. He said that they *are* His body and blood. He is making no distinction between partaking of the bread and the wine than from experiencing oneness with Him. Of course, He is not referring to a literal eating of his natural flesh and blood. These contain no inherent spiritual life because Jesus stated that the Spirit gives life and the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63). What we are actually partaking of is what the tearing of His flesh and the shedding of His blood represent. Through His death, He opened the way into the throne room of God once for all. We can be one with Him and the Father now without fear of death or punishment. The physical bread and wine are physical means (among others) that God uses to reveal and impart to us the unseen Kingdom substance that Christ’s death has purchased for us.

The Lord’s Supper is more than just sitting down and having a meal together. God forbid! In fact, Paul told the Corinthians that if they were hungry that they should eat at home (11:22 & 34). The Lord’s Supper is an actual encounter with Christ and is not an occasion to satisfy our bodily

appetites. The Corinthians were selfishly doing it for this reason and were bringing judgment on themselves (vs. 29-30).

To eat and drink the Lord's Supper unworthily (in a selfish or inconsiderate manner) makes us guilty of the blood and body of Christ (v. 27). According to this, Jesus likens the physical bread and the wine with what His sacrificial body and blood represent. In this context, if we partake of the physical unworthily, then we violate the spiritual because we are partaking of the Lord through a physical means. Do you perceive the implications of this? Do you see the substance and power in a physical object that God has ordained as a point at which our faith links the seen with the eternal and unshakable unseen? The Lord's Supper is a premeditated, deliberate, and formal event. If we take bread and wine as our Lord prescribed, it will have a life-changing impact on us. If those who partook of it unworthily died, then what are we to expect who partake of it worthily?

This is one effective way that we proclaim Christ's death until He comes.

We can conclude that water baptism is commanded, and the Lord's Supper ordained by the Lord to be physical points at which our faith makes a link between the seen and the unseen substance of the Kingdom of God. They are not mere rituals.

WAYS OF HEALING THE SICK

Anointing Oil

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jas. 5:14).

God has provided the Church with various means to heal the sick (see 1 Corinthians 12 & 14). Anointing with oil is one of them and is a valid Biblical practice. There are those who have taught that this is only referring to the healing properties that naturally exist in the oil. This is quite ridiculous. Try putting anointing oil, pour the whole bottle on them if you like, on someone who has a terminal illness and see if that heals them. Again, this is another physical object that God has ordained to be a point at which our faith links the seen with the eternal and unshakable unseen.

When the Lord told a prophet in the Old Testament to anoint someone with oil, the immediate result, in most cases, was that the Spirit of God came upon them (see 1 Sam. 16:13). Any delays in the response of the Spirit of God in this matter was for the sole purpose of waiting for the conditions He had set forth to be met (see 1 Sam. 10:1-10). This clearly reveals that there is no distinction between the carrying out of the physical act of anointing with oil, and the Spirit of God coming upon the individual. This is where the New Testament concept of anointing with oil came from.

God has commissioned the elders of the Church to anoint the sick with oil. The Apostle James continues: "...and the prayer of faith *will* save the sick." Beyond that, we are also assured that any sins we have committed will be forgiven. When the oil is applied, then the healing and forgiveness is correspondingly applied by the Holy Spirit. God honors what He ordains as long as it is done in faith and in cooperation with the Spirit of God. Faith sees into the unseen realm of God's Kingdom, perceives what He has determined to do, and works with Him in carrying it out. The anointing oil is a that physical point of contact that releases God's provision from heaven into the earth.

Handkerchiefs

The conclusions made concerning anointing with oil are applicable for healing the sick with handkerchiefs with two exceptions. 1.) Knowing that the articles were taken from Paul's body and then sent to heal the sick and cast out demons indicates that there was a transference of anointing into the cloth material. The anointing was then transferred from the cloth to the sick or oppressed. 2.) The healing of the sick with handkerchiefs was considered a special or unusual miracle and was not taught as a practice of the Church. Such things as these are to be done *only* by the prompting of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:11-12).

The Apostle Peter's Shadow

"And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, (15) so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. (16) Also, a multitude gathered from the

surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed” (Acts 5:14-16).

This passage does not actually state that Peter’s shadow healed anyone, but it does indicate that the people were expecting to be healed when his shadow fell on them. It would be safe to assume that it had possibly happened before or else they would have no expectation of it happening. If such is the case, was it Peter’s shadow that was healing them? A shadow cannot heal any more than oil or a handkerchief. Could God use someone’s shadow to heal the sick? Of course, He can use whatever He chooses. God’s glory may have so rested on Peter that anyone coming within a shadows distance of Him was affected by it. Whatever the case, God does use physical things to link the seen to the eternal and unshakable unseen.

In Conclusion

Why would God use physical things to link us to the unseen realities of the Kingdom of God? The only answer that I could give would be this:

He saw the need for it and knows the weakness of our flesh and has made it easier for us to grasp His Kingdom realities. God-ordained physical objects to enhance our ability to have faith in Him.

Faith is primarily the eyes of our spirit or its ability to perceive God. As our natural eyes serve to validate the existence of natural things, even so faith is the evidence or validation to us of the existence of the eternal and unseen things of God (Heb. 11:1). These physical objects, covered in this section, are but reflections of the unseen Kingdom realities. Only by faith can we see through the reflections into those secret realities of God. God obviously uses such physical objects as windows through which we can see and experience His Kingdom. While these are not the only way in which God reveals Himself to us, yet they are a blessing to those who truly know their power and purpose. Apart from having faith in God in our use of them, these things are merely physical objects. We cannot put faith in the objects; otherwise, they will be reduced to talismans or magical rituals.