

A Call for Ecclesiological Renewal: Paige Patterson’s Theology of the Ordinances

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A small, motley group of Texas Rangers rode their tired horses at a slow gait across the dry Monument Valley. They had spent the last several days pursuing a marauding band of Comanches, who had attacked a white homestead killing the adults and kidnapping two young girls. Suddenly on the horizon, a lone Comanche warrior makes his presence known to the Rangers. Quickly fellow warriors who seemingly appear out of nowhere join him, and they are ready to make their charge. The hunters have now become the hunted. The Ranger captain Reverend Samuel Clayton calls out to his scout, “Mose, how far’s the river?” The aging half-senile scout inexplicably replies, “I’ve been baptized, Reverend. I’ve been baptized.” Unbeknownst to the writer of the film or the actor who voiced the line, these words presented the exact sentiment of countless Christians regarding the ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were past events now having no effect on their present salvation!

Paige Patterson has lived his life as a warrior for Jesus Christ with his primary constituency the Southern Baptist Convention. Even though he is most well known for leading the denomination in a twenty-year battle in returning the convention to its historic position on the inerrancy of Scripture, this has not been the only theological emphasis of his ministry. Throughout his nearly sixty years of public ministry, Patterson has preached, written, and taught often on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, urging believers to recognize that the past event of justification in Jesus Christ has ongoing effects in their present salvation that will continue until their day of glorification, and these effects are demonstrated in baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

This article will use Patterson’s published writings and sermons to examine his understanding of the ordinances. It will examine Patterson’s emphasis on the need for Southern Baptists to recover the historic Baptist understanding of the ordinances and their connection to a regenerate church membership and proper church discipline. For Patterson, church membership and baptism are interrelated, and church discipline is to take place at the Lord’s Table. Thus, while the focus of this article is the ordinances, it will also examine these accompanying issues and their connection to the ordinances in Patterson’s theology. Special attention will be given to his emphasis on sanctification as portrayed in the ordinances.

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A Return to Baptist Roots

Patterson has proclaimed the need for “ecclesiological renewal” for at least twenty-five years.² In a portion of his essay published in 1991 titled “My Vision of the Twenty-First Century SBC,” pointing to the pattern of the Anabaptists, Patterson argues for the recovery of church discipline as a practice of the local church, suggesting Southern Baptists should give “serious reflection to the Lord’s table as a fellowship meal from which recalcitrant members should be excluded” but only as a “last resort after all efforts”; thus, exercising church discipline becomes part of the Lord’s Supper.³ As a result, he argues, “The memorial supper itself would become a *koinonia* of Christ’s body rather than the post-preaching addendum that it so often has become” and an impetus for a “restoration of meaningful church membership.”⁴ Here Patterson does not make mention of baptism or expand on this idea of church membership in the same manner that he does in later writings.

Years later Patterson lamented for Southern Baptists that “lack of care with new converts and the virtual absence of church discipline have created fellowships that mirror the conditions in other Protestant churches, which tend to emphasize the necessity of conversion far less than Baptists do.”⁵ While noting that Baptist churches, which are credobaptist by confession, are often pseudo-paedobaptist by practice due to the increasingly younger age of baptismal candidates, Patterson dismisses accusations of pastors only “being interested in numbers” but hastens to point out “that sincerity of purpose is not to be equated with either wisdom or the New Testament pattern.”⁶ He then suggests,

if contemporary Baptists find a way out of the present malaise, they must discover, as did our Anabaptist fathers, a way to make church membership meaningful. If Baptists, without loss of evangelistic zeal, once again would begin emphasizing repentance from dead works and affirmation of faith in Christ witnessed by the commitment of baptism with all that is intended therein, adoption of church discipline would prove far less traumatic.⁷

Here Patterson identifies an emphasis on baptism as a type of discipline or discipling of new converts that works to decrease the need for formal church discipline because of a commitment to walking in repentance and in the new way of life in Christ.

Within the past decade, prompted by yet another convention resolution on church discipline that seemed to not impact the majority of Southern Baptist churches in any meaningful way, Patterson reflected, “We have been working on the wrong end of the train. Focusing on the repair of the caboose deserves little commendation if the locomotive will not run or at least will not run efficiently. Indeed, attempting to repair the caboose in light of a

² Paige Patterson, “My Vision of the Twenty-First Century SBC,” *Review and Expositor* 88 (1991): 43.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁵ Paige Patterson, “Learning from the Anabaptists,” in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 126.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷ Paige Patterson, “What Contemporary Baptists Can Learn from the Anabaptists,” in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity: Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 19.

runaway engine may be more destructive than helpful.”⁸ For Patterson, baptism and church membership must be made meaningful before any attempt at church discipline can be addressed, with the Lord’s Supper an important transition between the two ends of his train analogy.

Theology of the Ordinances⁹

Fighting the instinct by some Christian traditions to only consider the ordinances important through sacramentalism, Patterson asserts, “Finding sacramental significance in the ordinances is not necessary in order to rediscover in them purposes that transcend the ‘merely symbolic.’”¹⁰ In Patterson’s theology, baptism and church membership are interwoven. Patterson understands baptism to be “the rite of initiation” into the local church and identifies baptism as the true “public profession of faith” rather than “a public response to an invitation.”¹¹ Thus, we will first examine Patterson’s theology of baptism and then his theology of a regenerate church membership. Then, we will present his theology of the Lord’s Supper. For Patterson, “Another important aspect of the Lord’s Table is that the Supper apparently served the early church as an expression of the fellowship of the body and, consequently, as the appropriate locus for the exercise of church discipline.”¹² Consequently, a discussion of Patterson’s theology of the ordinances must also include a discussion of church discipline.

Baptism

Romans 6:1–6 stands as the “definitive passage in God’s word on Christian baptism” for Patterson.¹³ Noting the disagreement between commentators over the presence of water in this passage, he argues, “Interestingly, both positions are partially true. Whereas [verse] 3 probably speaks exclusively of the immersion of the believer into the body of Christ at conversion, [verse] 4 almost certainly refers to the picture of that ‘spiritual’ baptism in water baptism.”¹⁴ In examining these verses, Patterson raises several questions related to water

⁸ Paige Patterson, “Observing Two Ordinances—Are They Merely Symbols?” in *Upon This Rock: The Baptist Understanding of the Church*, ed. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 113.

⁹ Patterson emphasizes that only two ordinances were given to the New Testament church: “In stressing two ordinances of the church, there is explicit rejection of Roman sacramentalism in both the number and natures of the ordinances; and there is also a rejection of pedilavium as a bonafide ordinance of the church . . . the present thesis denies foot-washing the status of an ordinance because, unlike Baptism and the Supper, the washing of the saints’ feet carries no picture of the atonement, which, together with the incarnation, provides the foundational theology of redemption for the church of the living God” (Ibid., 104).

¹⁰ Ibid., 105.

¹¹ Paige Patterson, *The Church in the 21st Century* (Wake Forest, NC: Magnolia Hill Papers, 2011), 11.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Paige Patterson, “The Ordinance of Baptism,” in *We Believe: Sermons on Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Dallas: Criswell Publications, 1971), 109.

¹⁴ Paige Patterson, “Notes on Romans,” in *The Holy Bible: Baptist Study Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 1607.

baptism. We will see his answers to the issues of the necessity of baptism, the mode, the meaning, the subject, and the administrator of baptism.

What is the necessity of baptism in Patterson's theology? "Baptism is the public demonstration in which one pictures the spiritual transformation that has already occurred."¹⁵ It is an act of obedience to the Lord's Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20, in which the "new follower of Jesus acted out his confidence in the atoning death of Christ by being buried beneath the waters and raised up in the likeness of the Lord's resurrection."¹⁶ Answering the question concerning a professing Christian that refuses to be baptized by immersion after salvation, he says, "Baptism, therefore is essential to faithfulness in Christ, and that someone would claim to be a follower of Jesus but refuse to be baptized is quite unthinkable."¹⁷ However, this does not mean that baptism is required for salvation. Discussing Acts 2:38, Patterson argues, "neither this verse, nor the New Testament as a whole, assigns saving efficacy to the waters of baptism."¹⁸ Summarizing the matter in a chapel sermon, Patterson said, "Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary."¹⁹

What then does Patterson make of the mode of baptism? Noting the Greek word *baptizo* and its Anglicized form "baptize" used in Romans 6, Patterson does not attempt an exhaustive definition, instead stating, "the only adequate and accurate translation must include the idea of totally enveloping one substance in another."²⁰ Thus, "immersion is clearly the only option."²¹ However, Patterson does not argue immersion is the proper mode of baptism based on the meaning of the Greek word, the example of Jesus, or the "almost universal acknowledgement that the early church baptized only by immersion."²² Patterson believes immersion is the only proper mode of baptism because it is the way to properly picture death, burial, and resurrection.²³

Patterson has described the meaning of baptism as being pictured in "a historical reality, an experiential encounter, and an eschatological assurance."²⁴ Emphasizing the historicity of "the second person of the Trinity" coming to earth, Patterson declares: "As the candidate for baptism steps into the baptismal waters, he reenacts the death of Jesus, His burial, and His resurrection. In so doing, the disciple of Christ openly confesses his confidence and faith in that historic reality as the sole purpose of his salvation."²⁵ Not only that, but according to Patterson, the baptismal candidate is affirming an experiential encounter which "has effected a radical change in his life" and thus is resulting in "both a confession and a declaration on the part of the disciple of his sincere intention to walk according to the precepts of new life in Christ."²⁶ Furthermore, Patterson writes, "The immersion of the believer in water

¹⁵ Paige Patterson, *A Pilgrim Priesthood: An Exposition of the Epistle of First Peter* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 147.

¹⁶ Paige Patterson, *What Is Baptism?* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2011), 8–9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Paige Patterson, "Baptism," Chapel Sermon, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, September 22, 2016; <http://media.swbts.edu/item/2227/baptism>, accessed December 12, 2016.

²⁰ Patterson, "Notes on Romans," 1607.

²¹ Patterson, "Ordinance of Baptism," 112.

²² Patterson, *What Is Baptism?* 16.

²³ Patterson, *Church in the 21st Century*, 11.

²⁴ Patterson, *What Is Baptism?* 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

pictures that coming death and burial; but when the believer rises from the water and walks out, he displays his full confidence in the return of Christ at the end of the age and in the resurrection to the glorification of his own body.”²⁷

As to the subject of baptism, Patterson states unequivocally, “The subject of the New Testament baptism is always a believer. There is not a single instance in the New Testament in which anyone other than one who has had an experience with the living Lord was baptized.”²⁸ The proper administrator of baptism is a New Testament church, not the pastor but the church itself.²⁹ Not limiting the definition of a New Testament church to those of his own denominational stripe, Patterson sees a “New Testament church as any church clearly teaching God’s grace in salvation and baptizing believers by immersion for the proper reason.”³⁰

Patterson’s theology of baptism impacts his practice of baptism. Practically speaking, he places a great emphasis on gently lowering the candidate into the baptismal waters so that the water barely ripples in the same manner as one tenderly lowers their loved one’s casket into the ground, because, after all, baptism is picturing the death of Christ, and the death of the candidate.³¹ Because baptism is to be the public profession of faith, Patterson encourages pastors to periodically have their baptismal service in a public, outdoor body of water if possible, thereby creating an opportunity for the baptism to not only be a truly public testimony of faith but to also be an evangelistic opportunity.³² Also, Patterson strongly believes pastors need to be involved in the business of baptizing new converts in their church rather than passing that task off to subordinates. While not insisting that the “senior pastor” conduct every baptism, Patterson believes that if the pastor wants to convince his people of the importance of baptism, the pastor himself has to be involved.³³ Patterson’s conviction that there is a right way to conduct the ordinances led him to conduct two separate chapel services in the fall of 2016 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary modeling baptism and the Lord’s Supper, respectively, in order to give students a visual lesson on how to put this theology into practice.³⁴

Regenerate Church Membership

As the son of a Southern Baptist pastor and steeped in Baptist theology from an early age, Patterson points to his reading of Franklin Littell’s *The Anabaptist View of the Church* during his college years as cementing his view that “the New Testament church and the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation in Europe were right in defining a true church as being

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ Patterson, “Ordinance of Baptism,” 112.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Patterson, “Baptism.”

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Paige Patterson, “Baptism,” and “Church Discipline and the Lord’s Supper,” Chapel Sermon, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 13, 2016; <http://media.swbts.edu/item/2240/church-discipline-and-the-lords-supper>, accessed December 12, 2016.

made up of those with a new-birth experience who had followed Christ in faith-witness baptism by immersion.”³⁵ Patterson even asserts that the “impetus behind the growth of Baptists across the years” is this “lofty concept” that identifies the church as “a regenerate body of believers who by baptism have provided a public profession of that faith and who engage in self-discipline so as to remain a holy and sanctified body.”³⁶ Further discussing this idea in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:4, Patterson states:

Together with other “living stones,” we become a “spiritual house,” a metaphor which yields itself nicely to the concept of a believer’s church. This is the precise point at which the Swiss and South German Anabaptists . . . moved beyond the reformers . . . and consistently applied the principle of *sola fide*. The Anabaptists saw that a spiritual house or a church could only be constructed out of living stones, that is, men who had experienced regeneration by coming to Christ.³⁷

While conceding that “no single passage [serves] as a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the church,” it is this idea of a church made up only of believers having publicly professed their faith through water baptism that is at the core of the rest of Patterson’s ecclesiology.³⁸ Thus, baptism and church membership are inseparable in Patterson’s theology.

The Lord’s Supper

Patterson has said “there is no more beautiful expression in all of Christianity than that which is given as we come to the Lord’s table.”³⁹ He notes that “because of the rare beauty and the aesthetics of such an ordinance,” church history is filled with debates about the significance of the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁰ Patterson affirms the Zwinglian view of the Supper but insists there are more aspects to the Lord’s Supper than only as a memorial feast.⁴¹ In his exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:23–34, Patterson describes the Lord’s Supper as a eucharistic feast, a fellowship feast, a memorial feast, an evangelistic feast, an eschatological feast, and a diagnostic feast, with each descriptor correlating to a portion of the passage. This will be discussed below. He often brings these points to bear when preaching in churches by asking the question, “What do you do while the deacons are passing out the elements of the Lord’s Supper?”⁴² In these sermons, Patterson addresses how the Lord’s Supper is often

³⁵ Paige Patterson, “Shoot-Out at the Amen Corral: Being Baptist through Controversy,” in *Why I Am a Baptist*, ed. Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001), 66.

³⁶ Patterson, *Church in the 21st Century*, 3–4.

³⁷ Patterson, *Pilgrim Priesthood*, 73.

³⁸ Patterson, *Church in the 21st Century*, 6–7.

³⁹ Paige Patterson, “The Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper,” in *We Believe: Sermons on Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Dallas: Criswell Publications, 1971), 117–18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2011) 196–203.

⁴² For examples of this sermon, see “The SBC and 1 Corinthians 11,” Capitol Hill Baptist Church, May 28, 2000, <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/the-sbc-and-1-corinthians-11/> and “What to Do while the Deacons Dispense the Lord’s Supper,” *Southern Equip*, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/archives-and-special-speakers/what-to-do-while-the-deacons-dispense-the-lords-supper/>.

treated as an addition to the end of a busy service plan and is rushed through in order for the congregants to leave church at relatively the same time. Patterson points out that while the elements are being distributed among the congregation, minds often wander to various distractions rather than focusing on the meaning of the Lord's Supper. However, Patterson contends that properly understanding the Lord's Supper in the way he describes will enrich the observance of the ordinance so much that "one scarcely has time to concentrate on each of those elements in any single observance of the Supper."⁴³

Patterson first describes the Lord's Supper as a eucharistic feast. Noting the Greek word *eucharistēsas* used in 1 Corinthians 11:24 literally means "he gave thanks," Patterson explains this "indicates that the first important activity in which the church is to participate at the time of the Lord's Supper is the eucharistic activity or the offering of thanksgiving to God."⁴⁴ After examining the three most common views of the nature of the Lord's Supper, Patterson concludes that the Lord's Table is a commemorative feast "established as a memorial to the most significant event ever to transpire in the history of the race – the atonement of Jesus."⁴⁵ Based on the phrase "proclaim the Lord's death" in 11:25, he further describes the Lord's Supper as an evangelistic feast because, "Anyone observing the practice of the Lord's Supper, upon inquiry, would certainly be advised of the atoning significance of Jesus's death."⁴⁶ Believers are instructed in 11:26 to proclaim the Lord's death "until He comes." This eschatological feast "serves to remind the assembled fellowship that his ordinance will not endure perpetually. It is something that has been commanded for observance in the church only until the Lord returns."⁴⁷ Verse 28 instructs believers to examine themselves before participating in the Lord's Supper. This renders the meal a diagnostic feast, but Patterson reminds Christians this diagnosis is to ensure they do not take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner in terms of their attitude or spirit. He emphasizes this diagnosis is not to ask if we are worthy to partake because "our worthiness to approach the Lord's table is dependent upon our experience of the forgiveness of sin and full salvation in Christ."⁴⁸

Because it is vital to understanding the connection between the Lord's Supper and church discipline in Patterson's theology, the "fellowship feast" descriptor will be isolated and further explored. Citing 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, Patterson emphasizes the fellowship described therein as focusing "on the common experience that all the Corinthians had of the cleansing blood of Christ."⁴⁹ Likewise, the loaf of bread broken to be used for the supper emphasized the congregation's constituting "the body of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵⁰ Rather than being an individualistic experience, this "eating of a common loaf pointed to the unity of the body of Christ and reminded them of their fellowship together based on the experience of their common salvation." Underscoring the need for this renewed appreciation, Patterson says, "Understanding the Lord's table as a fellowship of the Lord's body would provide a much-needed emphasis to the contemporary scene."⁵¹

⁴³ Patterson, *Troubled Triumphant Church*, 200.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 197–98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Patterson, "Learning from the Anabaptists," 135.

Church Discipline

Patterson views church discipline as the caboose of the church locomotive and insists that instituting church discipline without strengthening church membership will not fix the problems that many see within their own churches today.⁵² For the sake of brevity, this paper will only examine Patterson's argument for the Lord's Table as the proper location of church discipline.

Contrary to popular ideas of excommunication, Patterson argues, "The ultimate response of the church to a rebellious and recalcitrant member is not erasure from the roll but exclusion from the Lord's table."⁵³ Citing 1 Corinthians 5:4 "when you are gathered together" (NKJV), Patterson argues that the matter of church discipline is given to the congregation as a whole, not to a group of elders.⁵⁴ Also, the purity of the local congregation is "the whole question before the reader in [1 Corinthians] chapter 5."⁵⁵ Patterson argues that Paul's analogy in verse 6-7 with the exhortation to "purge out the old leaven" is a direction to cast out the unrepentant offender for the sake of the purity of the congregation as well as the spiritual health of the offender.⁵⁶ The question for interpreters is how does this purging work. Pointing to the phrase "not even to eat with such a person" in verse 11, Patterson argues that Paul has not "trailed off" into a discussion of dining companions but is, in fact, referring to the Lord's Table.⁵⁷ Explaining how this all works together, he states:

For such a brother to be excluded from the opportunity to hear the word of God would be unthinkable. On the other hand, one of the major aspects of the Lord's Supper is its fellowship nature; to exclude one from the Lord's table would be a very public and official way of indicating to him that he was out of fellowship, communion, or harmony with the saints of God. . . . By the same token, it is also altogether appropriate that the meeting of the church at the Lord's table be the time when those who have been excluded, upon repentance, are invited once again to the Lord's table.⁵⁸

In Patterson's theology, there is no question about the connection between the Lord's Supper and discipline.

Just as Patterson's theology of baptism affects his practice of baptism, his theology of the Lord's Supper practically impacts how he conducts the ordinance. This is why he conducted a model observance of both the Lord's Supper and church discipline in the chapel of Southwestern Seminary; Patterson believes many students had never seen the ordinances conducted that way before.⁵⁹

⁵² Patterson, "Observing Two Ordinances," 113.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Patterson, *Troubled Triumphant Church*, 85.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 95.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Patterson, "Church Discipline and the Lord's Supper."

Sanctification in the Ordinances

Perhaps the most unique contribution Patterson makes to the discussion of the ordinances is his emphasis on their portrayal of sanctification:

The thesis, which I would like to advance, is that both baptism and the Supper not only provide a remarkable picture of the atoning sacrifice of Christ for our salvation but also move beyond that picture having to do with the historic act of God in Christ and picture perfectly for the church the three tenses of sanctification, which I shall call positional, progressive, and ultimate sanctification. I would further suggest that in the church's recovery of this understanding of the ordinances such ordinances will be revitalized in their practice and meaning and will provide motivation for purifying and sanctifying the life of the congregation in the midst of a secular world and further broadcast the hope for the future intervention of God, which ought to be a primary motivator for the church in this age.⁶⁰

Patterson defines positional sanctification as the understanding "that a person is sanctified or placed in Christ Jesus as a part of the benefits of salvation," referencing the multiple occurrences of the phrase "in Christ" found in the New Testament.⁶¹ "Progressive sanctification is the recognition that a believer should grow in his faith and in the deportment of his life" while ultimate sanctification, often called glorification, is "the final strophe in the soteriological plan of God whereby even the believer's body is sanctified and made holy unto God in glorification."⁶²

Positional sanctification is pictured in baptism as the believer is "immersed into His death" and thus can "be confident that you will also be in the likeness of his 'resurrection.'"⁶³ Patterson emphasizes, "A death has occurred. You die to the old way of life and are then safely in Christ Jesus."⁶⁴ Positional sanctification is evidenced in the Lord's Supper by the nature of the fellowship feast. "Only true believers could hope to grasp any real significance in the Lord's Supper."⁶⁵ To be present at the Lord's Table is to acknowledge positionally being "in Christ." Underscoring the importance of his argument, Patterson asserts that if the ordinances are "mere symbols,"

then the participant or the observers will find difficulty seeing anything more than the historical referent to what happened at Golgotha 20 centuries ago. If the two ordinances did no more than that, they would still remain critically important and worthy of practice. My contention, however, is that the failure of the church to testify to

⁶⁰ Patterson, "Observing Two Ordinances," 108. Patterson actually begins his teaching on sanctification as pictured in the ordinances with a discussion of the incarnation as pictured in the ordinances. For further reference, see *Ibid.*, 108-9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 107-8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

the enhanced symbolism of positional sanctification has led to a devaluing of the ordinance.⁶⁶

The greatest loss as a result of devaluing the ordinances to “mere symbol” comes at the point of progressive sanctification according to Patterson, “yet in both cases the ordinances vividly portray a commitment on the part of the believer to spiritual growth and to a new kind of existence.”⁶⁷ In baptism, based on Romans 6, the believer is committing to walk in the newness of life in Christ with a new way of thinking and a new way of living.⁶⁸ For an understanding of progressive sanctification in the context of the Lord's Supper, Patterson points to John 6:53–56, interpreting it as teaching “the assimilation of the life of Christ into the life of the believer.”⁶⁹ Thus, “when you come to the Lord's table, you should be reminded that you are inevitably in the process of assimilating the life of Christ into your own life.”⁷⁰ Just as one emerges from the baptismal waters to walk in the newness of life, they are to “come repeatedly to the Lord's table to [be reminded of] an ongoing, progressively sanctifying task” of assimilating Jesus's life into their own.⁷¹

Patterson summarizes the situation concerning ultimate sanctification in this way: “Though we are in Christ Jesus (positionally sanctified) and though we are growing in our set-apartness to Christ (progressive sanctification), yet ‘we groan in this body earnestly desiring to be clothed with our heavenly body’ (2 Cor 5:2). That hope for ultimate sanctification is perpetually witnessed through the practice of baptism and the Supper.”⁷² Just as baptism points to Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection and also to the believer's death to sin and resurrection to walk in the newness of life, it also points to the day when the believer will experience physical death and burial while awaiting the return of Jesus and the resurrection experience for the believer.⁷³ In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul makes clear those participating in the Lord's Supper “proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.” “In other words, the Lord's table is itself a testimony to the fact that this is something the church does in memory of the Christ who is going to come and once again sit down at the table with believers in the kingdom of heaven.”⁷⁴

Patterson concludes his argument for this enhanced understanding of the ordinances:

A recovery of the intention of the two rituals given by our Lord to the church to be practiced until He comes would, I think, revolutionize church life. If no candidate who did not comprehend that he was making a statement of positional, progressive, and ultimate sanctification were to be admitted to baptism and if no one invited to the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 114.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Lord's table was not aware that his participation there emphasized positional, progressive, and ultimate sanctification, the motivation for godly living and for church life honoring God would be greatly enhanced.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Paige Patterson's theology of the ordinances is, in most if not all instances, thoroughly not unique—and that is a good thing.⁷⁶ Patterson's understanding of the ordinances is rooted in the biblical text and built on the development of biblical and systematic theology throughout church history, particularly the Anabaptist and Baptist tradition. Great value exists in being thoroughly orthodox and uniquely Baptist without seeking to exceed the originality of the biblical text. Patterson's greatest contribution to Baptist life through his theology of the ordinances is not in the originality of his argument but in the fervor with which he has argued. Patterson's unique position within the Southern Baptist Convention has given him the opportunity to attempt to rally Southern Baptists back to not only the position of inerrancy but also to a meaningful observance of the ordinances. If Patterson's rallying cry is heeded, perhaps Southern Baptists will no longer be able to lethargically say, "I've been baptized, Reverend. I've been baptized." Instead, this renewed understanding of the ordinances could lead to a more faithful obedience to the New Testament and a more faithful witness to a lost and dying world.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114–15.

⁷⁶ One possible area of originality is Patterson's developed explanation of the ordinances picturing all three stages of sanctification. In order to confirm or disprove the originality of Patterson's thesis would require further study of a wide variety of Christian theology. Further development of this paper would also include a study of Baptist theology over the last four hundred years including some of the classic debates over the ordinances. Finally, a more detailed version of this paper would include a comparison of Patterson's theology of the ordinances to that of the Anabaptists, particularly Balthasar Hubmaier's theology, as Patterson often cites their writings as influential in his theology.