

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 21 | Sacraments

WHERE REDEMPTION IS APPLIED: SACRAMENTS

How do we grow close to God?

Shorter Catechism - Q. 88. What are the *outward and ordinary means* whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?

A. . . . are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

- The three means of grace are Word, sacraments, prayer - Community is assumed here, why?

1 | Sacraments

WCF 27.1 - "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word." (Rom 4:11; Gen 17:7,10-11; Matt 28:19; 1Cor 11:23; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; 1Cor 10:16; 1Cor 11:25-26; Gal 3:27; Exod 12:48; Gen 34:14; 1Cor 10:21; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; 1 Pet 3:21; 1Cor 10:16; 1Cor 5:7-8)

1. **"Signs and seals"** - neither mechanical (Roman Catholic) nor merely memorial (Anabaptist), they are instruments in the hands of a sovereign God who has promised to use them for us by the Spirit through faith in Christ. Literally, *means of grace*, of God coming to us, rather than means of gratitude, where we serve or bring us or others to God
2. **"Immediately instituted"** - God commanded us to do them
3. **Purposes:**

1. Represent Christ and his benefits	3. Put visible difference
2. Confirm our interest in him	4. Engage us to God's service

27.2 - "There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other." (Gen 17:10; Matt 26:27-28; 1Cor 10:16-18)

1. **Sacramental Union** - relation between the sign and thing signified

1. In other words, there's a reason water is chosen for baptism, and bread/wine for Lord's Supper.
2. Consider Gen. 17, the covenant of circumcision (and thus Rom. 4.11), alongside Gen. 15 (the "Old Testament Golgotha") and the ratification of the covenant with Abraham with the animal sacrifices.
 1. Circumcision (sign & seal) is to the "cutting" of the animals (thing signified) as baptism (sign & seal) is to the Cross (thing signified).

Covenant AND Temple

God works through **covenants**, and covenants always have seals or rites through which they are instituted and maintained. What we hear in preaching, we see and taste in the sacraments.

- "'**Presence**, therefore, is not a question of space; it is a relation'. . . As grace is not a question of space but of covenant ratification and assurance. It is here, at the [baptismal] font and the communion table, as well as in the pew as we hear the gospel preached, that the question is finally settled for us: God is present; he is near. And he comes in peace." - Michael Horton
- Importantly, the Spirit is the *agent* of grace, the Church (its officers) *administers* grace, and the sacraments (and preaching) are *means* of grace.

2 | **Sacraments, specifically**

Baptism

WCF 28.1 - "Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world." (Matt 28:19; 1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28; Rom 4:11; Col 2:11-12; Gal 3:27; Rom 6:5; John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; Matt 28:19-20)

- **Admission into the visible church**

- **Sign and seal of the covenant of grace**
 - **Ingrafting into Christ, regeneration, remission of sins, and walking with Christ**
- **Is it absolutely necessary or automatic? WCF 28.5** - "Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."
 - 28.6 - "VI. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time."
 - Notice that this flows out of the above understanding of sacraments being made effectual by the Holy Spirit, while also being a covenantal promise of God.
- **Just believers? WCF 28.4** - "IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized." (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12-13; Acts 16:14-15; Gen 17:7-14; Gal 3:9,14; Col 2:11-12; Acts 2:38-39; Rom 4:11-12; Matt 19:13; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17; Matt 28:19; 1Cor 7:14)
 - **Continuity with Covenant with Abraham:**
 - Acts 2:38-9 - "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*" (Referencing Gen. 17 on circumcision)
 - Gal. 3:8-9 - "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."* 9 *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*" - If we are in continuity with Abraham, why would Abraham's covenant have an entrance rite, but not the New Covenant? If children were part of the covenant in the OT, why would they not be in the New, which is even grander and wider? And why no clear indication that there would be such a change?
 - Note Rom. 4:11-12 - "*He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The*

purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

- **Household Baptisms in Acts 10, 16 (x2), 18** - not definitive, but in support
- **Jesus welcoming little children**
- Note that in Church History, as far back as we have reliable history, infant baptism is overwhelmingly the majority practice, including Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.
 - Believer's-only baptism has a "**cultural fit**" with American values and aligns more with an Arminian system because it more naturally fits with an emphasis on individualistic belief and views of the Church.

Lord's Supper

Baptism **enters** us into the covenant community (just as circumcision did); and the Lord's Supper **renews** our covenant with him (just as Passover did) and binds our communion with him and one another (1Cor. 10.16-8)

WCF 29.1 - "Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the **Lord's Supper**, to be observed in his church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body."

(See 1Cor 10:16-17,21; 11:23-26; 12:13)

Behold all these wonderful purposes!

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| - Remember | - Further engagement in duties |
| - Sealing of his benefits | - Bond and pledge of communion with Christ and each other |
| - Spiritual nourishment and growth | |

What happens in the Supper?

29.7 - "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, *really and indeed, yet not carnally*

and corporally, but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses."

- This is the famous Reformed understanding of "**real, spiritual presence**"
 - Baptists (following Zwingli) omit the "real" part, believing it's simply a memorial. But why such great promises attached to it and warnings to those unworthy?
 - Catholics (and maybe Lutherans) omit the "spiritual" part, believing in transubstantiation such that the elements change physically, thus losing the point of the sacrament and its spiritual relation (which Augustine taught!) since they collapse the two. The Supper isn't "pointing" beyond itself anymore, it simply has become the body and blood.

Those unworthy - 29.8 - "Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament; yet, they receive not the thing signified thereby; but, by their unworthy coming thereunto, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore, all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto."

Who should partake of communion? Those who have been welcomed into his covenant community and made a credible (read: judged credible by the church's officers) profession of faith.

- The Church is meant to be the kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven", so the church make's that profession and declaration, and confirms it at the Lord's Table.
- If excommunication is merely declaring to someone they should not partake of the Lord's Supper, can you excommunicate yourself? Why is that important?
- Note the *wrong* interpretation of Matt. 5.23ff, "*So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,...*" - is about the OT altar, not the Lord's Supper.