

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 15: Church and Sacraments

Discussion Questions:

- Would anything be lost today if our church stopped observing the sacraments? If so, what? If not, why did Christ give them?
- What are the problems with “organized religion”? What happens when Christianity isn’t organized enough?

Christ’s Presence in the Church

Ephesians 1:19–23 *and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Who has all rule and authority?

According to v. 22-23 where is the “fullness of Christ” found? What does that mean?

Ephesians 4:9–13

[9] (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

What happened at the ascension of Christ? What does this mean for the church today?

Matthew 18:17–20

[17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. [18] Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [19] Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

- What is the context of this passage?

Jesus explains that his special presence will be found where his church is gathered. Paul, then, can call the church the temple of God only because and as long as it is built upon Christ

Private (Individual) Worship

**Is private worship wrong or inferior?*

Westminster Confession of Faith 21.6.

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by his Word or providence, calleth thereunto.

The point here is not that private worship is inferior but that our individualistic culture has made Christianity an almost exclusively private and personal experience. The value and importance of public worship needs to be recovered.

Christ uniquely has promises for his covenant people tied to his instituted church and means of grace. He still blesses his people, but we don't have the same assurances of the means of grace apart from the church.

What does this vision of Christ's presence in the Church look like for our church?

What is Our Vision?

We envision Faith Presbyterian Church being a place where the people of our community encounter the living and active Christ.

Christ as Prophet: Christ encountered through Word: Romans 10:14ff

- God's inspired word in **scripture** is our only rule of faith and life. In all of its parts, the Bible points to Christ and his work of redemption (Luke 24:27)
- Through expositional **preaching**, we are confronted by Christ's grace and truth.
- Christ's **declarations**, mediated through minister
 - Assurance of Pardon
 - Benediction-receiving the blessing from God

Christ as Priest: Christ encountered through Sacramental Worship: 1 Cor. 10:16

- **Worship** is where God meets with and blesses his people
- Christ has given us **Sacraments** to nourish our faith and as signs and seals of his covenant.

Christ as King: Christ encountered through Organized Community: 1 Peter 5:2

- Christ exercises his Lordship over his people through the **government**, ordained elders. The elders admitting members into the church by baptism and communion (Matthew 16; 1 Corinthians 5)

- Christ expresses his love and care for us, as we **love, support, and encourage each other** in His Body, the church.

Is the Church Essential to Salvation?

Matthew 16:18-19

[18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

What does it mean "to bind" and "to loose" on earth as it is in heaven?

- *To Bind*—to bring someone under authority and protection of the government of God’s kingdom... (e.g. both positive sense of binding someone into the governments protection, care... negative sense of binding someone under governments censure/discipline!
- *To Loose*- to set someone outside the care/governance/protection/discipline of the kingdom ..

John 20:22-23

[22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (ESV)

In what sense exactly does this church "bind and loose"

Instrumentally: The church by its ministry of word and sacrament and pastoral care are only instruments in the hands of Christ by the Spirit, grounded in the word of God.

Declaratively: Christ ordinarily "speaks" through the church. The church’s judgments are an act of binding and loosing. The church does not do this infallibly, but these judgements are still important means of shepherding and governing the flock.

Instrumentally:

"Take for instance the activity of Christian baptism—in the action of baptism, the gates of Heaven are opened upon the a person- they are brought, through baptism, into the community of God, that community that will "bind" and "loose" in his/her live as through the exercise of the teachings/preaching of the church, the exercise of sacraments, the activities of communalism in taking care of one another, praying for one another, etc.

The sum total of being baptized is to "Bind" someone into the church—to wrap them up as to protect them and to care for them and to fight for them against Satan’s wily temptations and trails!!!" -Graham

Church Membership

How essential is church membership? Why is it commonly viewed as unimportant?

- **WCF 25.1-2** *The catholic or universal Church... gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof... is... the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. The visible Church... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.*
- **Cyprian, AD 251** *From her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated... Whoever is separated from the Church is separated from the promises to the Church. Nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ..*
- **John Calvin, Institutes 4.1.4** *Beyond the pale of the Church, no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for ... the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal?*

Visible and Invisible Church

WCF 25.4-5

4. This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

5. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.

Notice in 25.4-6, and 26.3, the ways that the confession will “qualify” its understanding of the church so as to preserve the exclusive headship and sovereignty of Christ over the church.

- “Invisible vs. visible”: Is not “primary vs. secondary,” nor is it “not organized” vs. “organized”! Rather, it is the “church as God sees it” vs. the “Church as we see it”— both seen, both organized, both gathered.
- So what is the point? What was the confession seeking to protect? Notice then how this is explained in the rest of paragraph 4.

Parable of the wheat and tares: Matthew 13:24-30, explained in Mt. 13:36-43

What is the problem with the church that seeks to purge members who are not genuine Christians? How is this different from healthy church discipline?

Sacraments

The church’s assembling for Lord’s Day worship should be a re-enactment of the covenantal relationship between God and his people. We rediscover who God is, we confess our unworthiness and sin, we are renewed by his grace, we reaffirm our commitment to Christ as Lord, and we offer back thanks and praise.

What is role do the sacraments play?

WCF 27.1-2

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."

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."

To be clear, the "things signified" refer to the saving benefits of partaking in the life of Christ. These graces are described in phrases like

- "engrafting into Christ" "remission of sins" (Baptism, WCF 28.1),
- "spiritual nourishment and growth" and "members of the mystical body of Christ" (Lord's Supper, WCF 29.1)
- The "signs" "effect" the "things signified" and vice-versa.

John Calvin in *Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, explained,

All the benefit which we should seek in the Supper is annihilated if Jesus Christ be not there given to us as the substance and foundation of all... Thus it is with the communion, which we have in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It is a spiritual mystery that can neither be seen by the eye nor comprehended by the human understanding.

Where is Jesus? Is he transformed into the bread and wine? Is he far away from us and the sacraments just bring him to mind?

Calvin answering the critics who complain that the Protestant view of the Lord's Supper means Jesus is absent and there is no real communion with him. Calvin says, "We, on the contrary, maintain that no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ."

"Where is Jesus?" is really the question "Where is the heaven and how do heaven and earth relate?"

The Spirit uses means of grace (channels of grace?) to connect Christ and his saving benefits to his people, received by faith. Therefore, taking communion without faith in Christ is meaningless (or worse, 1 Cor. 11). These aren't magic tokens of spiritual power! But, communion works with God's word and prayer as yet another way we receive Christ.

Participation vs. Proclamation Only

We need to receive Christ! We receive him by the proclamation and participation.

1 Corinthians 10:16

*[16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

Baptism, an initiating sacrament. Baptism in the context of participation in worship is given to those who are brought into the presence of Christ in order to be saved and under his Lordship. This is expressed in the counsel of Peter for instance in Acts 2:38 and 1Peter 3:21.

Lord Supper, a renewing sacrament. Communion in the context of participation in worship is given to believers for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. It confirms their union with Christ. It testifies to their thankfulness and commitment to God and fellowship with other believers. (WLC Q&A 168)

Michael Horton writes:

“In a covenantal context, signs do not merely represent or bring to mind an absent signified. Nor do they become fused in essence. Rather, **words and signs** together **create a covenant**. It is significant that the Hebrew idiom for making a covenant is *cutting* a covenant. The ritual is inseparable from the treaty itself, establishing and not merely symbolizing a new relationship between two parties. *The question, then, is not the abstract nature of signs-and-signified but whether the agent effectively executes a speech-act through signs (both words and ceremonies).*”

Does this mean that getting baptized makes you a Christian, and participation in the Lord's Supper renews us as Christians?

WCF 27.3. *The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it: **but upon the work of the Spirit**, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.*

- NO: grace is “*not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it.*”
 - The elements themselves are not in any way transformed as to have any power in themselves (no “holy water” or “holy bread/wine” if by this it is meant they are anything other than they are naturally)
- YES: grace is conferred... *upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.*
 - “holy water” and “holy bread/wine” in so far as they are instruments used by the Holy Spirit to confer grace and salvation “to the elect” as received and confirmed by faith alone.

Key Qualifications!

1. Not necessarily:

WCF 28.5 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.

2. Not necessarily immediately:

WCF 28.6 The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered

3. But Ordinarily:

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

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Read the following passages, and ask, does it not seem to “affect” salvation in some sense?

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit

1 Peter 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “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.

Romans 6:3–4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

How do Baptism and the Lord’s Supper each relate to the “keys” (Mat. 16) mentioned above?

Can you partake of the Lord’s Supper at home? Can you be baptized apart from the church?

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.

Why does WCF call neglecting baptism a great sin?

What are your questions regarding infant baptism?

What does it mean to become a communicate member? What should a Session look for when examining a covenant child for communicate membership?