

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 29: The Sacraments

Last time: *God has called us to worship Him as our main duty in life. Worship should be given according to God's word. Because worship not just doxological, edifying and missional, worship should be in the vernacular of the people.*

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."*

Connection Between Word and Sacrament

"signs and seals of the covenant of grace": Throughout the Bible, God made covenants with his people through his Word. These verbal pronouncements were enacted, sealed, and ratified by public and visible rituals.

- The OT language of covenant making is "to cut" a covenant. This commonly refers to an animal sacrifice made at the time of the covenant. The promises of the covenant are not official apart from the act.

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).*"*

Sacraments Represent Christ and His Benefits

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 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 1 Peter 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)

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.

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 makes something a sacrament? Why are there only two?

Sacraments must:

- Be instituted by Christ
- Be for all God’s people
- Represent Christ and his benefits symbolically (beyond words)
- Performed by officers in the church

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God has instituted sacraments to represent, seal, and apply Christ and his benefits to believers.