

Christ-Centered Worship

Session 3: Sacraments

Opening Question: Would anything be lost today if our church stopped observing the sacraments? If so, what? If not, why did Christ give them?

Covenantal Worship

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.

Frequency of the Lord's Supper

- We read about the church in Troas in Acts 20:7-12. There it is said that "*On the first day of the week, the disciples came together in order to break bread*"
 - (*Note the "breaking of bread—a clear reference to the Lord's Supper" (1Cor.10:16, 11:23-24)*)
- The apostle Paul's instructions to the church of Corinth imply a frequent communion as the basis for his instructions (See 1Cor 10, esp. v.15-18, and 1 Cor. 11, esp. 17ff)
 - Notice especially 1Cor.11:17-20, when Paul reprimands the Corinthians, he says
 - V. 17 "when you come together"
 - V. 18 *For first of all when you come together as a church...*
 - V. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat."
 - They are doing it every time they get together. They are doing it incorrectly, but the solution is not to do it or to do it less frequently, but to do it rightly.
 - The instructions in 1Cor.11:23-26 seem to imply that the Lord's Supper is an essential element of worship, along with prayers, word, fellowship/ collection.
 - *[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*
- Against the idea that more frequent communion would diminish the effect—notice
 - First how this implies that Christ is not present to bless (as if there is not real presence of Christ to strengthen and confirm our faith and union with Christ).
 - Second, notice that this same logic could be applied to all the other elements in worship, and yet we wouldn't think of meeting together without, say, the ministry of word or prayers
- We must not let the word of God or the gospel become rote. The solution is not to preach the gospel less frequently, but to address the ways we make it rote. If it is a means of grace, then taking a break from it would seem to be detrimental.
- Christ says, "Take, eat, drink: this is my body, which is given for you; this is my blood, which is shed for forgiveness of sins." Calvin notes, "By bidding us take, he

indicates that it is ours; by bidding us eat, that it is made one substance with us; by declaring that his body is given for us and his blood shed for us, he teaches that both are not so much his as ours”

What if I am Unworthy to Come to the Table?

What makes you a worthy receiver of the gospel? The only thing we bring to Christ is our sin. Our faith in Christ is the only thing that qualifies us for admission to the table.

Thankfully, we aren't left on our own to determine if our faith is credible or not. We are admitted within the church by officers appointed to recognize credible profession of faith (Matthew 16:19, 18:18).

What if we have doubts?

Q. 172. May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's supper?

A. One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and **ought to come to the Lord's supper, that he may be further strengthened.**

Horon writes, *“In the Supper, we are not testifying to the strength of our faith or maturity, but are receiving the Gift that strengthens the weak.”*

Doesn't scripture say we shouldn't partake if we are not reconciled to our brother?

Matthew 5:23-24 *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

1. Context is not Lord's Supper
2. Jesus is pointing out religious hypocrisy, expecting clear yourself with an offering without addressing the person wronged.
3. In communion we aren't bringing a gift, we are receiving grace.

Don't excommunicate yourself

1. You are your own worst judge: you think you are more righteous than you are apart from Christ, and in Christ you don't realize how completely forgiven you are.
2. Christ appointed elders to mediate grace and discipline (1 Cor. 5). We are never encouraged to remove ourselves.
3. If you are aware of your sin, it is all the more reason to come.

If this is all true, then how would you respond to the following objections over weekly communion?

- It makes the service longer
- It will require more volunteers to set up and distribute
- It will seem weird or offensive to visitors
- It will lose its meaning
- It's new and we've never done it that way