

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 30: Baptism and The Lord's Supper

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

A Covenantal Approach

God relates to his people through covenants (see Lesson 24). The two sacraments given by Christ signify two aspects of a person's relationship to the covenant.

- Baptism signifies entering the covenant
- Lord's Supper signifies an ongoing confirmation of one's standing in the covenant

Do they "effect" anything regarding our salvation?

- No: "grace...is not conferred by any power in them."
- Yes: "grace [is conferred in them] by the work of the Spirit, and word of institution, which contains...a promise of benefit to worthy receivers."

In other words, ***grace is given through the sacraments, BUT...***

- Not necessarily
- Not necessarily immediately
- Ordinarily

Biblical Promises to Families in the Covenant

Acts 2:39 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."

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Acts 16:31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

A covenantal approach to the family treats our children as part of the household of God and members of the church community. Our child's ultimate assurance in the gospel is always by their faith in Christ alone, predicated on God's election. We, though, have good reasons to presume that God is at work in their lives bringing them to salvation.

- We believe God providentially designed this child to be born into a believing family and into a church community.
- Presuming God's redeeming work in our child's life leads us to daily encourage them to believe and live as one who is being transformed by the gospel of Christ.
- We communicate to our children from the beginning that they belong and that the promises of God are for them, longing to "confirm" for them assurance of their salvation (at some point).

- Throughout the Bible, God ordinarily worked savingly through families of believers.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once compared children in the church to a chess club. He said, *“No chess player, no matter how passionate, would enroll a small child in a chess club...Only a community, not an organization, is able to carry children. Child baptism within an association is an internal contradiction.”*

How do the two relate to each other and frame the Christian life?

1. What is signified in Christian **Baptism**? WCF 28.1 *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.*
 - Baptism is an entry into the body of Christ (a “converting” ordinance)
 - It marks the receiver out as belonging to Christ (not necessarily, not necessarily immediately, but ordinarily)...awaiting confirmation of the salvation by a credible profession of faith.
 - The visible Christian church has always been a mixture of true believer and believers in name only. While it is important to strive for a pure church, we resist presuming that children begin outside of the church, as strangers of God.
 - This often alleviates the false pressure to “convert” parents or church put on children to make a decision for Christ prematurely.
2. What is signified in the **Lord’s Supper**? WCF 29.1 *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 Lord’s Supper is an ongoing confirmation of a believer’s assurance in Christ (a “confirming” ordinance).
 - The repeated practice works to nourish true believers in their faith and assure them of their standing with Christ.
 - The repeated nature of this can be detrimental to nominal Christians who do not have a true faith in Christ.
 - 1 Corinthians 11 warns that you can partake of the Supper in a manner that brings curse and not blessing.

Both sacraments are instituted by Christ and stewarded by Christ’s under-shepherds, the elders of the church (1 Cor. 4:1f.)

- The rite of baptism and admittance to the Lord’s Table is the responsibility of the church.
- It would be meaningless, even spiritually detrimental, to baptize apart from the church or admit yourself to the Lord’s Supper. The same could be said of parents baptizing or admitting their children to communion. It would confuse the institutions of church and family.

1 Corinthians 11:27–29¹

¹ Preston Graham “From Baptism to the Lord’s Supper”

[27] Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

- The condition of partaking worthily is the ability to “examine” him or herself.
- “Unworthy manner” refers to the purpose of the Supper and not to the presence of a particular sin in the person’s life.
- By what standard should you examine yourself?
 - 1 Cor. 10:16 tells us that the standard is not our sinlessness but our “cup is participation in the blood of Christ...bread is participation in the body of Christ”
 - Note also that this examination cannot be done privately lest Paul’s prior teaching authority of the church to demit a person from the Lord’s table presupposes that the person is admitted by the church. (See 1 Cor. 5:3-13)

What is needed to “examine themselves”?

- “A person psychologically, developmentally, existentially able to distinguish ‘self-will’ from parents and/or ‘others-will’ in order to conduct a meaningful self-examination.”
- Life experience to be able to determine in a meaningful way where you stand in relation to the gospel.

How do you partake in a worthy manner?

1. Faith in Christ: Can the receiver discern Christ?

1Cor. 10:14 *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?*

E.g. Is the recipient ready to assume the responsibilities of exclusive loyalty to Christ as Lord. Has the recipient been able to discern between faith in Christ and idolatry, at least in some meaningful way.

Has the recipient discerned the idol of moralism/legalism (which is particularly tempting for children)? In other words, can the child discern in him/herself Christ death (personal brokenness to the point where they no longer trust in their own righteousness) and Christ resurrection (person faith in Christ as to receive the ongoing newness of life in Christ..)

2. Church membership: Can the receiver understand his/her obligations to the community of believers?

1 Cor. 11:17ff *“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.*

E.g. Is the recipient ready to assume the responsibilities of communion with other believers, as to seek God's help seeking the welfare and interest of the others in the church as an expression of 1 Cor. 10:17, The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.... As per 1 Cor.11:20-21 for instance.

The sacraments frame our understanding of child discipleship and our strategy for teaching and training children.

Baptism

- It tells us that children belong in our community and that we have membership obligations to them.
- It gives the children an identity that should inform how they think about themselves (they belong, and these promises are for them).
- It encourages them to view God as Father and their connection to Christ as a lifelong relationship.

Lord's Supper

- It becomes our goal in child discipleship. We want our children to grow into assurance of salvation.
- It holds forth a church discerned confirmation rather than an individualistic, subjective understanding of their standing with Christ.
- It points them to the importance of membership obligation with other church members beyond their family.

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace that apply to us the benefits of Christ. Baptism is a converting ordinance. The Lord's Supper is a confirming ordinance.