

Understanding the Sacraments
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 4: The Sacraments

Opening Question: If we stopped observing the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) at Faith, would that change anything significant in the spiritual lives of the congregation?

Summary of Lessons 1-3

- God relates to his people through covenants in both Old and New Testaments.
- Covenants include signs and seals that convey both blessing and curse.
- Baptism like circumcision brings one into the covenant. It provides the context for our identity and relationship with God.

God is the active agent in the sacraments. We are passive.

- We receive baptism (we don't baptize ourselves; it is not our act of declaring our faith).
- We receive the Lord's Supper (we don't determine our admittance to the table).
- The church mediates God's action in administering the sacraments.

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 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."*

Sacraments Represent Christ and His Benefits

The sacraments don't dramatically represent our inner feelings. They represent the gospel. They are gospel made visible.

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.

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.

Why are children of believers included?

- 1) It enters them into the covenant relationship with God and his people (Circumcision had the same function of initiation)
- 2) The logic of household baptisms.
 - We aren’t claiming that there definitely were infants in those households (though that is likely).
 - The point is that the apostles baptized all ‘subordinate’ members of the household without an explicit reference to their faith. The only explicit reference is to the faith of the ‘head of household.’ [Acts 16:15 (Lydia and her household); Acts 16:31-33 (Philippian jailer and his family); 1 Corinthians 1:16 (the household of Stephanas); Acts 18:8 (Crispus and his household); Acts 11:14 (Cornelius and his house).]
- 3) The continuity between baptism and circumcision (see Col. 2:11-13, Acts 3:25, Gal. 3:8). They both signify the same thing. OT converts into Israel were circumcised.

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.

Isn't baptism just sign pointing to something? Does anything happen in baptism?

Read the following passages, and ask, is baptism just a sign meant to remind you? In other words, is baptism doing anything?

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.

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

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.