

GCC Understanding of Sacraments

A Sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.ⁱ

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace (Rom 4:11), immediately instituted by God (Mat 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23), to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him (1 Cor 10:16; 11:25, 26; Gal 3:17, 27)ⁱⁱ

Sacraments put a visible difference between those that belong to the Church and the rest of the world (Rom 15:8; Exo 12:48); and solemnly engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His word (Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 10:16, 21).

There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental (mysterious) union between the sign (water or bread & cup) and the thing signified (Spirit baptism or body & blood of Christ): so that the names and effects of the one (Spirit baptism or body & blood of Christ) are attributed to the other (water or bread & cup).

For example, to speak of salvation in baptism (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 3:21) is not to say the plunging in water justifies but rather that the Spirit who regenerates, cleanses, and seals us so closely identifies with the sign of water baptism that to speak of the one is to refer to the other. And again, the bread and cup do not physically become the DNA of Jesus' flesh and blood but he so closely identifies his body and blood with the rite it can be said the elements not only represent his presence but because of a spiritual presence to partake of the bread and cup are to take in his flesh and blood (John 6:51-63).

Sacraments are a true means of sanctifying grace, yet not so as to bestow regeneration on any partaker. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments is not conferred by any power in them (not merely by participation in the ordinance); neither does the effectiveness of a sacrament depend on the righteousness or intention of him who administers it (Rom 2:28-29; 1 Pet 3:21), but upon the work of the Spirit (Mat 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13) and the word of institution, which contains a promise of benefit to those who receive (Mat 26:27; 28:19). The benefits are conveyed only where true faith is present.

There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These two are not to be dispensed by any but by an ordained minister of the Word, or a duly appointed representative of the church (Mat 28:19; 1 Cor 11:20, 23; 4:1; Heb 5:4).ⁱⁱⁱ

By partaking of the Sacraments the believer obeys Christ and from Him receives grace & His promise of fulfillment. In Baptism the participant gains visible entry into the covenant community of saints and faith is affirmed. In the Lord's Supper there is real sustaining nourishment from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and there is fellowship one with another. These "increase our faith and confirm God's covenant promises."^{iv}

These are not private acts, but personal & corporate acts with benefit to the community of faith. Sacraments are to continue in the Lord's Church to the end of the world.

ⁱ Courtesy Augustine

ⁱⁱ Courtesy Westminster Confession of Faith

See GCC whitepaper for explanation of “signs & seals.”

ⁱⁱⁱ DeYoung, Kevin, “Who Can Baptize?”

<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2014/02/20/who-can-baptize/>, accessed 2/18/2016.

We recognize only male members of GCC in good standing endorsed by the elders may be representative of the Church at GCC.

^{iv} <http://www.christreformed.org/vision>;

“In the gospel, God promises to save us from our sins, and in the sacraments he swears on his sovereign oath, ‘I am your God and you are my people!’ This is why weak and struggling sinners should not be directed to look within to see whether or not our faith is of sufficient intensity, or if we have achieved sufficient personal holiness in order to participate. Rather, we need to look outside of ourselves and turn our gaze toward God’s gracious covenant promise. This is God’s way of comforting the downcast, strengthening faith, and conquering doubt. This is why word and sacrament are together essential elements when God’s people assemble for worship.”

<https://www.wscal.edu/blog/basics-of-the-reformed-faith-the-sacraments>