

Words We Can See: The Sacraments



Chapters:

Sacraments (Ch. 27)

Baptism (Ch. 28)

The Lord's Supper (Ch. 29)

Outline:

Considering the Word “Sacrament”

What is a “Sacrament?”

Some of the “Less Difficult” Issues

Some of the More Difficult Issues

Some Final Thoughts

Considering the Word “Sacrament”

- The Word “Sacrament” is not used in the Bible.
- It is a Form of the Latin word “Sacramentum”
- In Roman Law Sacramentum was
 - (1) An Oath of allegiance taken by soldiers – promising to be true to their superiors and their country; or
 - (2) A Pledge, secured by a deposit of money, made by each party to a civil action, attesting that the party’s position is true and right. The litigant that lost forfeited the deposit to the state.
- The Idea of Oath/Promise/Surety is at the Core of its common use.

What is a “Sacrament?”

WCF 27.1. 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.

What is a “Sacrament?”

WLC #162. A sacrament is an holy ordinance **instituted by Christ** in his church, to signify, seal, **and exhibit** unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to **strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces**; to oblige them to obedience; **to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another**; and to distinguish them from those that are without.

What is a “Sacrament?”

1. Holy sign (points to), seal (authenticating mark), and exhibition (public display) of the Covenant of Grace – the substance is Christ as he is presented in the Gospel..
2. Immediately Instituted by Christ.
3. Given to Represent Christ and the Benefits of His Mediation.
4. For the Following Purposes:
 - a. To confirm to us our interest in Christ
 - b. To strengthen and increase our faith and other evangelical graces
 - c. To incline us more to obedience
 - d. To testify and to cherish our love with one another
 - e. To put a visible difference between the church and the world.

What is a “Sacrament?”

The Principal Accent: Sacraments are signs, seals, and visible exhibitions of God’s free offer to sinners of life and salvation in Jesus Christ. (WCF 7.3). They are visible Oaths/Pledges of the Triune God.

The Sacraments are NOT to be understood primarily as Oaths taken by a Christian to display the sincerity of his/her faith. They are NOT primarily about our faithfulness. They are about God’s faithfulness.

Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

1. Efficacy. Whatever benefits (grace) that Sacraments confer (“the efficacy of a sacrament”) are NOT the result of

- Any essential power in the elements used in the sacrament
- The past, present or future piety of the one who administers the sacrament
- The past, present, future intentions of the one who administers the sacrament

Instead, the benefits from the Sacrament flow from the Holy Spirit and the word of institution which contains “a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.”

Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

2. Multiple Sacraments - One Covenant of Grace. God provided “Sacraments” for His people before the coming of Christ:

(1) Rainbow - Noah;

(2) Circumcision - Abraham;

(3) Cloud - Pillar, Tabernacle/Ark of the Covenant – Moses;

(4) Throne – David.

Those sacraments conveyed in substance the same as the two sacraments of the New Testament because they signified and sealed to those OT believers the Covenant of Grace as it was then administered. **(WCF 27.5)**

Sacraments – The Less Difficult Matters

3. Two Sacraments. For those believers who live after the coming of Christ, there are only TWO sacraments (1) baptism and (2) the Lord's Supper. **(WCF 27.4)**

These are the only two signs/seals that Christ immediately instituted:

Baptism – Matthew 28:19

The Lord's Supper – Luke 22:16-20, I Cor. 11:23

Note the consistency with Chapter 1 of the Confession

More Difficult Matters

Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

Two Questions:

1. We know what the signs are (water or bread and wine), but exactly what do they signify? – a particularly critical question in Baptism.
2. How are the signs and the things signified related? When I receive the sign, do I also receive the thing signified? – a particularly critical question in the Lord's Supper.

Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

Sacrament	What does the Sign Signify?	What does the one receive when he/she receives the Sign?
Baptism (WCF 28)	Solemn admission into the visible church; Ingrafting into Christ; Regeneration; Remission of sins; Giving up unto God, through Christ, to walk in newness of life. WCF 28.1	All those evangelical graces signified (left) are offered, exhibited and conferred, by the Holy Spirit in time, to all whom God has appointed according to His will. WCF 28.6

Sacraments – The Sign and the Thing Signified

Sacrament	What does the Sign Signify?	What does the one receive when he/she receives the Sign?
Lord's Supper (WCF 29)	The Body and the Blood of Christ (WCF 29.5)	“Worthy receivers. . . inwardly by faith, really. . . spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then [just as]. . . spiritually present to the faith of the believer. . . as the elements themselves are to [the believer's] outward senses.” WCF 29.7

Sacraments: Receiving, Administration, & Repetition

	Who is to receive the sign?	How may the Sign be Administered?	Is the sign to be repeated?
Baptism	Those who profess faith in Christ and their children – 28.4	Sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. 28.2	Not if it was by administered in the Trinitarian formula.
Lord's Supper	“Worthy receivers” 29.7 The “ignorant and wicked” should not. 29.8	By words of institution to set apart to a holy use for only those who are present in the congregation. 29.3-4	Yes. The WLC # 177: “. . . to be administered often . . . to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment.”

Sacraments – Final Comments

1. Remember again: The Sacraments are principally visible declarations, to the people of God, of Christ and all His benefits. They are NEVER to be turned into works designed to display the sincerity of our faith and to secure God's favor.
2. The Sacraments, in and of themselves, have NO saving power. Therefore, we should be charitable toward our brothers and sisters in Christ who do not share our views regarding them.
3. The grace communicated in Christ, by the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, is the same grace communicated in Christ, by the Holy Spirit in the Word. It's not a different grace, but a different means of communicating the same grace.

Sacraments – Final Comments

4. But, by recognizing these facts, don't think that the Sacraments are unimportant. They are purposefully ordained by the Father, instituted by Christ, and executed by the power of the Holy Spirit as a means of our common union, our sanctification, and our perseverance.
5. For further study: The Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 161 – 177.