

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	46		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	I Corinthians 10:1-22		
Date:	August 16, 2015 a.m.		

The Sacraments

25. Lord's Day

Question 66. What are the sacraments?

Answer: The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross. (a)

(a) Gen. 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. Rom. 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: Deut. 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. Lev. 6:25 Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD: it is most holy. Heb. 9:7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: Heb. 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Heb. 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Heb. 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Ezek. 20:12 Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. Isa. 6:6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: Isa. 6:7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Isa. 54:9 For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.

"It may be granted," observed G.C. Berkouwer, "that the general doctrine of the sacraments sometimes appears to be arid and dull. Concepts must be defined, and distinctions made; but a closer look reveals that none of this analysis is done for its own sake. Rather, we must remember that these concepts and distinctions occur in the concrete context of the signs and seals of God and of His covenant in Jesus

Christ, who is the focal point and the profound context of the sacraments. Thus, a general doctrine of the sacraments is not necessarily a scholastic and dull affair."¹ The English word "sacrament" comes from the Latin **sacramentum**, the root meaning of which is "to make sacred." It was used in Roman society to refer either to money deposited in a lawsuit which if forfeited went to a "sacred cause," or to a military oath of loyalty, a "sacred pledge." The Latin Vulgate (trans. by Jerome in 384 A.D.) used this word to translate the Greek word **mysterion** in Ephesians 3:9, 5:32; Colossians 1:27; I Timothy 3:16; Revelation 1:20, 17:17. It should be noted, however, that none of these texts refer to the activities which later came to be called "sacraments." The term also carries the burden of misunderstanding. It seems to imply sacred activities and that these are seen to be effective by virtue of their celebration in and by themselves.² The Reformers, therefore, while retaining the term, expressly denied that the sacraments confer grace as an **opus operatum**. Usage determines meaning, and the Reformed defined sacraments as "signs" and "seals" whereby a professing Christian publicly and openly signifies and seals his profession of faith and promise of service. For this reason, many have (like the Scotch Presbyterians) called the sacraments "sealing ordinances."³

I. THE NATURE OF A SACRAMENT

- A. The first thing required to constitute a sacrament is divine institution. Only God, who is the author of the covenant and promises of grace, can be the author of the seals of the covenant.
- B. Signs - (outward actions, cf. Romans 4:11) which are divinely appointed and have some analogy or resemblance to what they signify by external elements. They are visible signs and must be accompanied by the audible Word of God (the command and the promise).
- C. In addition to being signs commemorative of past events, they are also signs sealing and setting forth God's continuing covenant faithfulness (cf. Genesis 9 and the sign of the rainbow as illustrative of God's promise and as confirmation of our faith).
- D. There must be in the sign the thing signified (i.e. Christ in whom faith is always directed). The sign is pictured to us in our senses, while its meaning is apprehended by faith.
- E. There must be an analogy between the sign and what it signified. This union consists of three things.
 - 1. SIGNIFICATION - the resemblance between the sign and what it signifies (Acts 22:16; I Corinthians 5:7).
 - 2. SEALING - the outward symbols are intended to stimulate faith in the promises of God⁴ (Romans 6:3, 4; Galatians 3:27).
 - 3. EXHIBITION - because God in the sacraments sets before the faithful what He promises (I Corinthians 10:16, 17).

II. THE NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

They are given by God to assist our infirmity.

- A. That He might provide for our weaknesses; because we are ignorant and much influenced by sensible and visible objects.
- B. That our faith might be more and more strengthened as individuals. Faith is produced by the Word and is sustained by the Word. While the Word is addressed to people (plural), the sacraments are administered to individuals and thereby each one is reminded that the covenant of God's grace and promise belongs to the individual. Likewise, the Word is directed to our hearing only, while sacraments affect us through our other senses.

NOTE: The relation of the Word to the sacraments and how they differ is important. Both have God for their author, Christ for their foundation, and salvation for their end; but they differ as follows: The Word is absolutely necessary, the sacraments only hypothetically; the Word is heard, the sacraments seen; the Word produces faith, the sacraments confirm faith; the Word is freely extended to all in preaching, the

sacraments to believers only; the Word profits without the sacraments, the sacraments do not without the Word.⁵

III. THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNION

The mention of the Lord's Supper in this passage is incidental. Paul is addressing the serious problem of idolatry. The Corinthians lived in a heathen society that was immersed in idolatry. Animals offered in pagan temples also provided the community meat market. Could a Christian eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol? The Apostle draws two propositions: (1) An idol is nothing and meat offered to an idol and later sold in the market is to be seen as God's provision (I Corinthians 10:25, 26). (2) Any involvement, however, in idol worship is idolatry and must be avoided. It is one thing to buy meat at the market that has come from a pagan temple. It is altogether another matter to go to the temple and participate in a sacrificial feast. Paul's argument shed light on the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians clearly understood the nature and significance of a sacrificial feast.

- A. Participation in a Sacrificial Feast. The Apostle is drawing a *parallel* with the sacrificial feasts of Israel and the Gentile world. All those who partake of the victim offered in sacrifice were by that act made sharers in the act of sacrifice itself. "If," says Warfield, "we wish to know what the Lord's Supper is, there is our proper starting point."⁶
- B. Symbols of Sacrifice. The heathen sacrificial feasts and the Jewish sacrificial feasts were symbolical and typical. They *pictured* something; they pointed to that which the sacrifice illustrated and anticipated. Symbolism captured the concept of surrender to God, atonement for sin against God, and cleansing from defilement, so that those who offer would be acceptable to God.⁷ Paul's point is that in the symbols of bread and wine, Christians partake of the victim, and in this participation, they are sharers in the altar and receive its benefits.

IV. WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

A host of answers are given to this question. One says it is the bloodless sacrifice that is continually offered up by Church appointed priests to make propitiation for sins. Another says it is the badge of a Christian profession and serves only as a memorial (if so, then why not, like Christmas or Easter, observe it once a year?). The Apostle Paul declares that it is the Christian Passover.

- A. The Upper Room. (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). Jesus desires to observe the Passover before His death. All the disciples knew that by partaking in the Lamb at Passover, they were claiming their part in the sacrifice – and now Jesus declares that the typical sacrifice will cease. The fulfillment has come. No longer is the lamb a symbol, for the Lamb has come. Now the symbols for the Lamb are bread and wine. This bread is the symbol of the Lord's body, which is broken. This cup is the New Covenant in His blood. The Lord's Supper is the continuation of the Passover feast. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us (I Corinthians 5:7). Eating the bread and drinking the wine means exactly what partaking of the lamb in the Passover meant.

SUMMARY: There are three lessons here:

- (1) The primary lesson is that in partaking of the Lord's Supper, we claim a share in the sacrifice, which Christ wrought in His redemptive work on the cross.⁸
- (2) We also note by partaking of the Lord's Supper we affirm our union with Him and His body. Communion is the symbol of the oneness of believers.
- (3) The root of our communion as Christians is found in our common relation to the Lord. The root of Christian union is our relationship to Christ. All who share in Christ are related one to each other because they are all one in Him.

CONCLUSION: The end of the sacraments is the confirmation of the covenant of grace, and the sealing on God's part of our union with Christ, promised in that covenant, and of all His benefits; and at the same time on our part a solemn expression of our gratitude to God. They are also public badges declaring openly our confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacraments are, in the words of Calvin, "messengers of glad tidings." They do not bestow any grace of themselves, but announce and tell us, and (as they are guarantees and tokens) ratify among us, those things given us by divine bounty.⁹

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Sacraments* (Eerdmans, 1969), p. 10.

² Cf. Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics II* (Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 586-94.

³ Cf. A.A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: Lectures on Doctrine* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 314.

⁴ They confirm faith, according to Calvin, not of themselves (*ex opera operato*) but as agencies of the Holy Spirit and always in association with the Word of God. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Box IV, Ch. 14, sec. 7-13.

⁵ Cf. the remarks of the 17th century Reformed theologian Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans. F. Reyroux (Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), pp. 402-403.

⁶ B.B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (Banner of Truth Trust, rpt. 1974), p. 227.

⁷ In Hindu and Chinese cultures of the day, the blood of horses was the means of divine human inter-union. Much the same was practiced in ancient Egypt and Assyria. Cf. H.C. Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearing on Scripture* (James Family, rpt. 1978), pp. 169-170.

⁸ "Holy Communion does not bring the congregation in contact with Christ, for the Church is Christ's body, but Holy Communion signifies the connection with Christ's suffering and death. Paul implies that the Christian, because he partakes of the Lord's Supper is in connection with the death of Christ." F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1953), p. 232.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book IV, ch. 14, sec. 17.