

The Doctrine of the Sacraments

- I. Sacraments are Means of Grace.
 - A. We need means of grace to connect us to the salvation that Christ brings.
 - B. We need means of grace to be connected to our Savior Jesus.
 - C. Think of means of grace as a connector or bridge to God's salvation in Christ.
 - D. It is only Christ who saves us, but the mean of grace is the way of receiving this salvation.
 - E. Think of it this way: if you were dying of thirst, only the water will save you, but if you need someone to carry the water to you, then in a way that person who carries the water to you saves you as well. In this sense the means of grace save you.
 - F. There are five (5) means of grace identified in the Lutheran Confessions based on the Word of God:
 1. Holy Baptism
 2. Holy Absolution
 3. Preaching and Teaching
 4. Holy Communion
 5. The Mutual Conversation and Consolation of the Saints
 - G. Now among the means of grace are the Sacraments. Every Sacrament is a means of grace, but not every means of grace is a Sacrament. The Sacraments are very special means of grace to say the least.
- II. The Sacraments In General:
 - A. "Sacraments": Not a biblical term, but a biblical concept and teaching like "Holy Trinity" and "Original Sin." The Latin *sacramentum* relates to the Greek *mysterion* which relates to the salvation we have in Christ. The Sacraments are therefore associated with the communication of this salvation in Christ to people.
 - B. Basic definition: "Visible means of spiritual blessings, religious rites instituted by Christ." These, however, are not man-made, but come from Scripture.
 - C. Big difference between sacrifice and sacrament. After the atoning work of Christ, sacrifice is the work of man; sacrament is the work of God (thus, when a person

falsely claims that a sacrament is a “work” that contradicts salvation apart from works that person is making a logical category mistake). A sacrament is the work of God in and through which God gives Jesus Christ to the person receiving the sacrament.

D. Distinct aspects:

1. Commanded by Christ (Gospel, not Law context).
2. Attached to the forgiveness of sins in Christ.
3. Word of God attached to a visible element or to visible elements.

E. The validity of the sacraments: The Word of Christ.

F. The power of the sacraments: The Holy Spirit working through the Word that always accompanies the sacraments.

G. The benefit: Received through faith in Christ.

H. Number of sacraments: While the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions list seven (7), only two (2) actually fit into the aspects above at “D,” namely, 1) Holy Baptism and 2) Holy Communion (the Lutheran Confessions while emphasizing these two, also mention Absolution and Ordination but only in respect to these bestowing the Word of Christ through the tangible office of the ministry which pastors are called to serve in).

III. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism:

- A. Instituted by Christ: Matthew 28:18-20.
- B. The external element: Water.
- C. The mode: *baptizein* = 1) cleansing/washing with water; 2) dip in or under water.
- D. The formula: Matthew 28: “*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts: “In the Name of Jesus” is not contradictory).
- E. WHO is to be baptized? Matthew 28: All nations (i.e. all people). The book of Acts does present instruction before baptism for adults (e.g. Acts 8:26-40).

IV. Infant Baptism: Answering The Major, Popular Objections:

Objection #1: Babies don’t need baptism, since they are not sinful.

Answer: The Word of God reveals that even babies are sinful and so are in need of Christ’s salvation.

- A. Psalm 51:5: “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*”
- B. John 3:6a: “*That which is born of flesh is flesh...*”
- C. Romans 3:23: “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

- D. The reason many people find this unreasonable is because they limit their concept of sin to actions, but sin is an inherited spiritual disease; a condition of the heart (remember the HIV and drug exposure illustrations impacting innocent babies).
- E. Thus, it is irresponsible to say, “We will wait until the child is old enough to decide.” Good parents would never apply this philosophy to immunizations, nutrition or education, etc. God expects Christian parents to bring their children to Him!

Objection #2: Babies ought not to be baptized because they cannot believe (have faith), and baptism is only beneficial in connection to faith in Christ.

Answer: The Word of God reveals that infants can indeed have faith and the Christian Church confesses that the Holy Spirit working through the Word itself (baptism) creates faith.

- A. Psalm 22:9: The Psalmist trusted in God even at his mother’s breast.
- B. Luke 1:41: John the Baptist responds to Christ in faith even *before* being born.
- C. Matthew 21:14-16: *pie-dion* is the word Jesus uses and it means a suckling, an infant, a completely helpless baby...this one is already giving God praise!
- D. Faith ought therefore never be reduced to a rationalistic or intellectual exercise; at its core, faith is trust in the heart towards a gracious Lord (and there is only One, the Lord Jesus Christ).

Objection #3: Babies ought not to be baptized because the Bible does not instruct us to baptize them.

Answer: The Word of God reveals that all people are to be baptized and in many contexts uses language that does not exclude, but includes the young and very young.

- A. Nowhere in the Bible does it say not to baptize infants.
- B. Matthew 28:18-20 uses the word *ethnos* (“nations”) which to the Hebrew ear meant unbelievers or pagans, those people outside the nation of God (Israel), and the Israelites understood a “person” to include even the unborn (Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 139).
- C. 1st Corinthians 10:1-2: Israel was baptized into Moses as they crossed the Red Sea, and we know that Israel included the children and infants of Israel.
- D. Colossians 2:11-13: Baptism is compared to circumcision. Hebrew, male babies received this sign of the covenant at 8 days old!
- E. Acts (e.g. chap. 16) speaks of “household” baptisms and this word allows for any combination of persons comprising a family, just as we would use the word today. Nobody says, “I have four members in my family, not counting our 2-week old infant.”
- F. The Early Church testifies to the regular practice of infant baptism.
- G. Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18: “*Do not hinder the little children!*” The Lord desires they be brought to Him to be blessed.

- V. But are we suggesting a contradiction? If Christ is our only salvation (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12), why baptize?
- A. Christ IS the only salvation.
 - B. The Biblical distinction is that Christ won or achieved or accomplished our salvation via His life, death and resurrection, and that the sacraments distribute or apply the salvation that Christ won.
 - C. Thus it is Biblically correct to say, “Jesus saved me” in the sense of how our salvation was WON AND it is also correct to say, “Baptism saved me” in respect to how Christ’s salvation was applied to me.
 - D. Baptism is therefore seen as a means/bridge/connection (as we discussed above) between Christ’s A.D. 30 crucifixion outside the city of Jerusalem and our 20th or 21st century reception. Thus baptism serves in uniting us to our sole salvation that is Christ! In this sense, baptism saves us (see 1st Peter 3:20b-21).
 - E. Baptism unites us to Christ: Romans 6:3-5 and Galatians 3:27.
 - F. Baptism is God’s work (a sacrament) not ours (a sacrifice) and unites us to the only Savior Jesus Christ, so that His death and resurrection is personally beneficial to the one who receives baptism (Eph. 4:5, only need it ONCE).
- VI. Holy Communion: Also known as “The Lord’s Supper,” “The Sacrament of the Altar,” “The Holy Eucharist,” “The Lord’s Table,” and “The Breaking of Bread”:
- A. What is it? Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and 1st Corinthians 11 (also 10:16) and probably John 6: It is the body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine.
 - B. That is we acknowledge that the bread and wine is still bread and wine, but that the actual body and blood is given to us as we receive the bread and wine *at the same time and in inextricable union with the bread and wine, so that when the bread enters your mouth, the body of Christ enters your mouth...yes, this is obviously a great mystery, but we do not change the words of Christ and believe without doubt that we receive what He says we receive.*
 - C. So again to answer what The Lord’s Supper is, it is the body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with and under the bread and the wine.
 - D. We explain the real presence in, with and under the bread and wine through the two natures of Christ. Consider John chapter 20. Jesus was not limited or contained by the locked doors and windows and yet at the same time, the apostles could touch Him! In the same way, Jesus is not confined to bread and wine, and yet He gives you His real presence when you received Holy Communion.
 - E. What does it do? It gives the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and sanctifies (makes holy). Discuss: if you are already forgiven as a Christian, why do you need to keep receiving forgiveness through the Lord’s Supper?
 - F. Who is it for? For the one who believes “given and shed for YOU” and who recognizes that which they are receiving (1st Corinthians 11:27ff).

G. The Four Major Views Within Christendom:

1. Protestant #1: body and blood symbolized, represented or memorialized (you only get bread and wine).
2. Protestant #2: body and blood spiritually present through the faith of the Christian receiving it. That is the Christian – while taking Holy Communion – has their spirit ascend to Christ who is in heaven. So we receive the bread and wine on earth and at the same time have our spirits commune with Christ in heaven. Unbelievers in this view (if they receive Holy Communion) do not commune with Christ, but only receive bread and wine.
3. Roman Catholic: bread and wine become/are transformed into body and blood (this is called “transubstantiation”; the bread and wine departs, only the “accidents” of bread and wine remain). This teaching is crucial in Roman Catholic doctrine as the body and blood of the Son must be represented to the Father in order to cover the sins of those who come forward. Whereas you only get bread and wine in the above two Protestant views, you only get body and blood in the Roman Catholic view (there is no bread and wine).
4. Lutheran: body and blood is actually given in, with and under the bread and wine. Bread and wine do NOT transform -- we have often been falsely characterized as teaching consubstantiation, which means that there is a transformation within the bread -- but Christ is truly and actually present at the same time, so that when you receive the bread you receive the body of Christ.

H. How do we receive Holy Communion? Know “the face” of the one who receives communion. To avoid unworthy reception is to:

1. Confess your sin (the “worthy” know they are not worthy).
2. Confess Christ and that He gave His body and that He shed His blood FOR YOU to forgive you all your sins.
3. Recognize the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine.
4. To resolve to and to actually follow Christ.
5. Know that your reception unites you to the rest of the body receiving Holy Communion...this is why a common confession of the Christian faith is so important to recognize.

Catechism: pages 202-245