

19. The sacraments

WCF chapters 27 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They were directly instituted by God to represent Christ and his benefits and to confirm our relationship to him. They are also intended to make a visible distinction between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world, and solemnly to bind Christians to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.

2. In every sacrament there is a spiritual relationship, or sacramental union, between the visible sign and the reality signified by it, and so it happens that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

Q: How should we think and feel about baptism and the Lord's Supper?

Basics: WHAT are the sacraments?

Given by God – Gen. 17:7, Matt. 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:23
(Therefore, he determines what they mean and how we use them)

A “sign” ... and a “seal” ... of the covenant promises
– Genesis 17:7, Romans 4:11

Sign: points to something else

Seal: confirms that a promise is true

What is signed and sealed?

Christ! – 1 Cor. 11:26

Our relationship with Christ – 1 Cor. 10:16

The world is not our home – e.g. Ex. 12:48

Our commitment to Christ – e.g. Rom. 6:3-4

What is the connection between the sign and the reality?

There *is* a spiritual relation between Christ and the sacraments

E.g. scripture sometimes calls the reality by the name of the sign

Circumcision
= “my covenant”, Gen. 17:10

Wine
= “the blood of the covenant”, Matt 26:26-27

= important that we understand the Bible's language properly vs. inventing a false sacramental system...

3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them. Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend on the piety or intention of him who administers it, but rather on the work of the Spirit and on the word of institution, which contains (together with a precept authorizing its use) a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

4. There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism and the Lord's supper. Neither sacrament may be administered by any person except a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.

5. With regard to the spiritual realities signified and exhibited, the sacraments of the old testament were essentially the same as those of the new testament.

How do the sacraments "work"?

Danger! That we *wrongly* use the sacraments, because we misunderstand them...

Not: "They possess intrinsic power"
(E.g. water does not make Christians,
1 Pet. 3:21, Rom 2:28-29)

Not: "The minister makes them work"

But: by the work of the Holy Spirit...

Note: sacraments repeatedly linked to the power of the Spirit

Baptism of the Spirit, Matt. 3:11

In one Spirit we were baptised and we drink, 1 Cor. 12:13

Circumcision is by the Spirit, Rom. 2:29

... who uses His Word

Note: Word and sacraments go together
e.g. "teaching... baptising", Matt 28:19-20

In the Scriptures the Spirit not only tells us *how* to use the Sacraments...

... But powerfully promises the Gospel, to all who believe

What is the church to do?

Only two sacraments given by Christ – not just by example, but precept, repeatedly

For all the church everywhere
("all nations", Matt. 28:19)

Not free to invent other symbols for themselves or administer other than according to Scripture's commands

Decently & in order (cp. "self-service" communion in 1 Cor. 11:20... appropriate to be administered by teachers/elders

And the O.T. sacraments?

Outwardly different... same substance = the Gospel,
e.g. 1 Cor. 10:1-4

Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?

Next week: Baptism