

Week 26, July 20 and 27, 2016: Of the Sacraments and Baptism

Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments R.C. Sproul notes: “Ritual is important to the life of God’s people ... [Jesus] attached new meaning to that ancient ritual.”⁵⁰⁵ Each sacrament is a religious ritual, “... not just an empty ritual. It has spiritual significance and reality because God assigns that to it.”⁵⁰⁶

WCF 27:1: *Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, (a) immediately instituted by God, (b) to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him; (c) as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; (d) and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word. (e)*

(a) Rom. 4:11; Gen. 17:7, 10. (b) Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23. (c) 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:25-26; Gal. 3:17. (d) Rom. 15:8; Exod. 12:48; Gen. 34:14. (e) Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21.

a. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin word that represents the Greek word, *mysterion*, and communicates a sacred, spiritual bond of a mystery, that is now revealed.⁵⁰⁷ The sacraments are signs that symbolize what they represent. They are also seals: they “confirm our interest [having a claim or share in or title to]⁵⁰⁸ in Him”. And they “engage [us] to the service of God in Christ”. Like the seal of a message with the king’s ring, the sacraments are “a confirming testimony to the believer concerning what he has received.”⁵⁰⁹ Sproul notes, “That is why we can say, as Luther did, when Satan comes after us to accuse us, ‘Get away from me; I’m baptized ... I bear the ineradicable mark and sign of God’s promise.’”⁵¹⁰ But they also express our loyalty like a soldier to his king: “The sacraments ... must be seen from a covenantal perspective. As they point to the gospel, they confirm God’s promise, ‘I will be your God.’ As they express our commitment to Christ, they indicate our response to God’s grace: ‘We are your people’ (Rev. 21:3).”⁵¹¹ They also express that we belong to the Kingdom of Heaven as our exclusive “badges of membership”, as Hodge says.

b. The sacraments are not magical, but they are effectual for true believers. Jesus spiritually feeds our faith and we grow in grace and sanctification together in Him. As signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, they are other means given by God for us to exercise godliness. They really exhibit our communion (1 Cor. 10:16, “fellowship”) with Jesus Christ and with one another gathered together in the Spirit. So, WLC 161 and WSC 91 call the sacraments “effectual means of salvation”, not initially, but ongoing. They do not create saving faith, but they strengthen saving faith: “The Word is the instrument of regeneration ... The sacraments are meant to edify [along with the Word] those who are already in grace. The Word is used to originate the communion of saints, whereas the

⁵⁰⁵ Sproul, vol. 3, 80-81.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 89.

⁵⁰⁷ Hodge, 327. Sproul, vol. 3, 78.

⁵⁰⁸ Spear, 141. Van Dixhoorn, 359.

⁵⁰⁹ Williamson, 201. He adds, “A seal is that which attests or confirms”, and thus “... the primary importance of the sacraments is to benefit believers.”

⁵¹⁰ Sproul, vol. 3, 84-85.

⁵¹¹ Spear, 141.

function of the sacraments [along with the Word] is to quicken and sustain that communion ... The Word is the gospel addressed to the ear; the sacraments are the gospel addressed to the eye.”⁵¹²

WCF 27:2: *There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.(f)*

(f)Gen. 17:10; Matt. 26:27-28; Tit. 3:5.

The sacraments themselves are not actually the things they signify, but the way Scripture refers to them figuratively sometimes sounds like it: “the effects of the one are attributed to the other”.⁵¹³ WLC 162 similarly distinguishes the two parts of a sacrament: (1) “the outward and sensible sign”; and (2) “the inward and spiritual grace thereby signified”. While the sacraments in worship truly convey spiritual blessing to our souls, the elements themselves are purely symbolic memorials: “in remembrance of me”.⁵¹⁴ The sacraments have no power to save, but they represent and affirm that true believers are in union with Christ and commune with Him. They remind us through the senses of who we are in a very helpful way to compliment (and always be accompanied by) the Word. They are “pictures of the truths they represent”⁵¹⁵. They remind us that Jesus is literally, though spiritually, with us to the end of the age. They help us experience spiritually the reality of these covenant promises. The WLC 161 says they actually “strengthen and increase [our] faith”. “Baptism (and the Lord’s Supper) simply expresses the verbal content of the gospel in non-verbal form.”⁵¹⁶ Further, what is most significant in the Sacraments are not the elements, but the actions involved.

WCF 27:3: *The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them: neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it:(g) but upon the work of the Spirit,(h) and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.(i)*

(g)Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Pet. 3:21. (h)Matt. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:13. (i)Matt. 26:27-28; Matt. 28:19-20.

Grace truly is conveyed, “exhibited”⁵¹⁷, but not automatically through the water or the bread and wine (against the Roman Catholic Church’s view of *ex opere operato*, “from the working of the

⁵¹² Green, 202-203.

⁵¹³ Dickson, 210-211: “ ... circumcision is expressly called a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith (*Rom.* 4:11) ... why ought not baptism and the Lord’s Supper ...? ... the names and properties of the things signified are given to the sacramental signs. Thus circumcision is called the covenant (*Gen.* 17:10); the bread is called the body of Christ (*Matt.* 26:26); and baptism is called the washing of regeneration (*Titus* 3:5) ... the cup of blessing in the sacrament is the communion of the blood of Christ (*I. Cor.* 10:16).”

⁵¹⁴ Dickson, 211: “ ... to signify, and to have virtue, and power to do, differ in nature and kind.”

⁵¹⁵ Spear, 330.

⁵¹⁶ Williamson, 208. As Clark puts it, “ ... the Word and the sacrament have the same content ... The blessings conferred by the Word and those conferred by the sacraments are identical” (WPB, 100).

⁵¹⁷ Provided, granted. Spear, 142.

work”⁵¹⁸), nor by the physical application or consumption, but by the Spirit feeding our faith in the act of commemoration: note, the symbolic “acts” in the Lord’s Supper are emphasized in its administration as paramount. God wisely uses all our senses to touch our soul. But the actual grace conferred is not by any power in the signs, but by the Spirit; as well, their actual effect does not depend on the person administering them (see also WLC 161 and WSC 91). This is a great comfort for anyone that later has a pastor deposed as a heretic or ungodly man. This is relevant to the early church Donatist heresy. The efficacy of the sacraments depends only on the fact that God authorized and commanded them, and that the Holy Spirit applies them with the word of institution to one’s faith. This notion will relate particularly to the question of rebaptism directly addressed in the next chapter. By the Spirit, “Worthy receivers”, that is, repentant and reverent, truly benefit. Sproul also highlights that, “The sacraments are Trinitarian. The Father gives authority to his Son; the Son institutes them; the Holy Spirit applies or empowers them.”⁵¹⁹

WCF 27:4: *There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained. (k)*
(k)Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:20,23; 1 Cor. 4:1; Heb. 5:4.

Only two sacraments are ordained “by Christ ... in the gospel”: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The RCC’s five other sacraments are invalid.⁵²⁰ The Confession here teaches that only a minister may officiate these Sacraments (demonstrating a 3-office view of church government), because “Scripture says that ‘ministers of Christ’ are to be the ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’ (1 Cor. 4:1). ‘And no man taketh this honour unto himself’ (Heb. 5:4). There is no evidence in Scripture to show that other than church officers ever administered the sacraments in the apostolic church.”⁵²¹ This also preserves their solemn sacredness.

WCF 27:5: *The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New. (l)*
(l)1 Cor. 10:1-4.

⁵¹⁸ Sproul, vol. 3, 90.

⁵¹⁹ Sproul, vol. 3, 92.

⁵²⁰ “At last the number seven was suggested during the twelfth century, and determined authoritatively by the Council of Florence, 1439, and by the Council of Trent, 1562. These are Baptism, Confirmation, the Lord’s Supper, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, Marriage.” Only Baptism and the Lord’s Supper meet the criterion of a true Sacrament: 1) instituted by Christ; 2) represents, seals, and confers Christ and the benefits of the new covenant to all in the covenant community. Hodge, 334-345.

⁵²¹ Williamson, 204. Dickson, 214-215: “... Christ gave the power of dispensing the sacraments to them only to whom he gave the power of preaching (Matt. 28:19); but the power of preaching is not given to all men (Heb. 5:4) ... all that ever did dispense the sacrament of baptism in the New Testament were either called ordinarily or extraordinarily ... it is unlawful for any man to affix the king’s seal to a charter or letters patent unless he be a person authorized and deputed by the king for that use. But the sacraments are seals of the covenant between God and his people (Rom. 4:II).” See PRPC sermons on the WLC on the lawful administration of the Word and Sacraments.

Sproul points out that the principle set forth here “is vital to the Reformation understanding and rational for infant baptism, among other things.”⁵²² Keep this in mind for the next chapter. The OT sacraments of circumcision (Gen. 17) and the Passover Meal (Exodus 12 and 13) exhibited the same substance of these NT sacraments. Christ changed them to Baptism (Matthew 28; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 10:1-4) and the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26ff; 1 Cor. 5:7, 11:23ff) to represent the full revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Himself. With this being the case, notice that the first sacrament is a one-time act of entrance into the covenant community, and the second is an ongoing act of spiritual fellowship and sustenance: “baptism [is] a once-for-all rite of initiation (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:7), and the Lord’s Supper [is] a regular rite of remembrance (1 Cor. 11:23-26).”⁵²³ They express our Union in Christ and our communion with Him and one another. Circumcision and Baptism both represent spiritual regeneration and cleansing, and Christ is now our Passover.⁵²⁴ “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed. The bloody signs were superseded by the two bloodless signs; but the significance remains the same ...”⁵²⁵ (Similar to the Sabbath move).

Some closing thoughts by Thomas Watson, from The Ten Commandments: “[The sacraments] are visible signs of invisible grace ... It is God’s will that his church should have sacraments; and it is God’s goodness thus to condescend to weak capacities ... To strengthen our faith, God confirms the covenant of grace, not only by promises but by sacramental signs ... These two sacraments [of baptism and the Lord’s Supper] are sufficient; the one signifying our entrance into Christ, and the other, our growth and perseverance in him” (217).

Chapter 28: Of Baptism: Remember that the new covenant fulfills God’s promises to Abraham.⁵²⁶

WCF 28:1: *Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, (a) not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; (b) but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, (c) of his ingrafting into Christ, (d) of regeneration, (e) of remission of sins, (f) and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. (g) Which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world. (h)*

(a)Matt. 28:19. (b)1 Cor. 12:13. (c)Rom. 4:11 with Col. 2:11-12. (d)Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:5. (e)Tit. 3:5. (f)Mark 1:4. (g)Rom. 6:3-4. (h)Matt 28:19-20.

⁵²² Sproul, Vol. 3, 106. “There is ... discontinuity from the old to the new, but that ... is not radical.”

⁵²³ Packer, 209. He points out that, “Sacraments strengthen faith by correlating Christian beliefs with the testimony of our senses. The Heidelberg Catechism illustrates this in its answer to Question 75. The key words are *as sure as* [comparing the visible signs touching the senses with the spiritual meaning touching our faith]” (211).

⁵²⁴ Hodge, 335-336.

⁵²⁵ Williamson, 205.

⁵²⁶ Sproul, Vol. 3, 111. See Luke 1:55 and John 8:56.

Baptism was ordained by Jesus to be “continued in His Church until the end of the world”.⁵²⁷ Baptism is “admission ... into the visible Church” (see WLC 165 and Gal. 3:27).⁵²⁸ This is why it is crucial that you are baptized before you partake of the Lord’s Supper (you must first belong to the Visible Church: Ex. 12:48; Joshua 5:7-11). Baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, visibly representing for true believers their engrafting into Christ with all His benefits (Gal. 5:25). It mainly connotes our union in Christ together; 1 Cor. 10:2 says they were baptized “unto” Moses: “... baptism basically has to do with a ‘merging’ or ‘identification.’”; so in 1 Cor. 12:13, “The baptism is ... into the body of Christ.”⁵²⁹ Baptism is mainly a sign of God’s faithfulness, not our faith. Van Dixhoorn rightly notes, “The enduring importance of baptism rests in what it *always* says about God and his gospel, and not what it *sometimes* says about the person who is baptized.”⁵³⁰

WCF 28:2: *The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.(i)*
(i)Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Matt. 28:19-20.

Baptism must be by water, explicitly Trinitarian, with a proper Trinitarian understanding.⁵³¹ Notice also the 3-office emphasis of ministers only administering the sacrament.

WCF 28:3: *Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary: but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.(k)*
(k)Heb. 9:10, 19-22; Acts 2:41; Acts 16:33; Mark 7:4.

⁵²⁷ Here is the difference between the baptisms of John and Christ: “John did not institute New Testament baptism. He did not administer the sign of the new covenant. The ritual he performed actually belonged to the Old Testament economy, because John himself belonged to it. We read about him in the New Testament, but in redemptive history his place is at the end of the old covenant. The new covenant did not begin until Jesus instituted it at the Lord’s Supper, where he gave the Passover rite a new dimension ... Jesus said, ‘The law and the prophets were until John’ (Luke 16:16). The Greek word for ‘until’ means ‘up to and including’ ... The ritual of proselyte baptism emerged in the intertestamental period ... an ‘unclean’ Gentile ... had to go through a ritual of purification, a baptismal cleansing rite ... John the Baptist’s ritual was radical in that he called Jews to take the ritual bath ... Jesus’ rite of baptism marked people’s entrance into fellowship and community with him. John’s was a cleansing rite in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom [that came in Christ’s baptism].” Sproul, vol. 3, 112-114.

⁵²⁸ “... the predominant theme in Scripture’s references to baptism is union with Christ and the triune God which embraces and transcends all other subordinate aspects of the meaning of this sacrament ...” Williamson, 208. Therefore, over against the Baptists’ view of it being a symbol of burial with Christ, Clark explains: “If burial were to be symbolized, instead of using water it would have been more appropriate to dig a grave and use earth. Water fits in with washing.” (WPB, 103). Van Dixhoorn calls it “an emblem for entry” or a “badge of belonging”, 366.

⁵²⁹ Jay Adams, *Meaning & Mode of Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 34-35. See also Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27.

⁵³⁰ Van Dixhoorn, 367.

⁵³¹ Pastor seems to recall someone teaching that in church history, some used sand for baptism at one point. Van Dixhoorn shares that “Already in the early centuries of Christianity consecrating oil had been added to the symbol of water baptism ... By the late medieval period, the baptismal formula included multiple exorcism ...”, 369. The Reformers corrected these errors, applying “Sola Scriptura”.

Dipping (or dunking) a person is “not necessary”; this does not mean immersion is an option, but rather that the practice is only “rightly [or correctly] administered by pouring or sprinkling”.⁵³² Jay Adams explains: “... mode cannot be separated from meaning. The sacraments are symbolic. If so, then ‘mode’ and ‘symbol’ are one and the same ... Mode and symbol, and therefore mode and meaning, cannot be divorced.”⁵³³ A number of considerations are in order about baptism’s mode and meaning:

a. Christ’s baptism was related to His anointing to office as with the sprinkling or pouring of oil over the head of priests and kings (Ex. 29:7; Num. 8:6-7; 1 Sam. 10:1; Ps. 2:2: King Jesus is “my anointed”). As well, the sacrament represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which in Acts 2:17-18, 33, is said to be “poured out” on the Apostles, and later to have “fell on them” (and so they were “baptized”) in 11:15-16.⁵³⁴ Van Dixhoorn says “.. the actions of sprinkling and pouring repeatedly symbolize the divine work of salvation in the Bible in a way that immersion simply does not.”⁵³⁵

b. The Greek word for *to baptize* (**βαπτίζω**) has a broad usage, but primarily means *to dip, to purify, to wash*; it is used interchangeably with another Greek word that means “to wash” (baptism represents inner cleansing and purification by the regenerating and renewing washing of the Holy Ghost that unites us to Christ).⁵³⁶ Ward explains, “The root idea of the Greek word baptize is not total immersion but an intensive dipping which involves a transformation (cf dyeing) ...”⁵³⁷ So, in Mark 7:4, “wash” and “washing” is the Greek “baptize” and “baptizing”, including a table (not immersed). In Lk. 11:38, the Pharisees marveled that Jesus had not “washed” (“baptized”) before dinner (see Mt. 15:2 of His disciples), and they didn’t mean diving into a lake, but using a utensil.

c. Heb. 9:13, 19, 21, and 10 refer to the OT “sprinklings” of blood to ceremonially cleanse, atone, or sanctify the people and the tabernacle and its ceremonial tools as “baptisms” (translated “washings”); see the connection with 10:22, 24 related to sprinkling of Christ’s blood to cleanse consciences.)⁵³⁸

d. Moses and the OT Church were “baptized” under the cloud (Christ) and by the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-4), just as Noah and His family were “baptized” by the flood waters (1 Pet. 3:20-22); they were savingly sprinkled by merciful mist while God’s enemies were immersed with judgment.

e. Paul was baptized standing up by a bedside (Acts. 9:18, 22:16), and, “In the case of Saul’s baptism, the baptism of the household of Cornelius, and that of the household of the Philippian jailer, since each of these acts of baptism was carried out within a home (Acts 9:11; 10:25; 16:32), and in the last case sometime after midnight (Acts 16:33) but before dawn (v. 35), it is virtually certain that

⁵³² While not directly addressing the WCF here, John Murray’s comments seem to reflect this interpretation, if not of the Confession, of the Scriptural doctrine on mode: “... there are numerous instances in which the action denoted does not imply immersion and which prove that baptism does not *mean* immersion (cf. Lev. 14:6, 51; Matt. 15:2 Mark 7:2-5; Luke 11:38; 1 Cor. 10:2; Heb. 9:10-23) ... the ordinance is properly [correctly] administered by sprinkling or affusion.” “Baptism” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 373.

⁵³³ Adams, vi.

⁵³⁴ Adams, 23.

⁵³⁵ Van Dixhoorn, 371.

⁵³⁶ Hodge, 341.

⁵³⁷ Ward, 176.

⁵³⁸ Reymond, 933.

these baptisms would not have been by immersion, since few homes in those times would have had facilities for such an act ...”⁵³⁹

f. When it is said of outdoor baptism events that they were “coming out of or up from the water” (Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:36-39), note that Luke says such of Philip and the eunuch, but Philip was not baptized—he did the baptizing; and, the Eunuch had just read Isaiah 53, which is preceded by 52:15: “So shall he sprinkle many nations ...” (see also Ezek. 36:25)⁵⁴⁰ They came up from out of the water location (not out from under the water). So when Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the priests stepped their feet into water, but then the waters were blocked up and they crossed over on dry land, of which they then were said to “come up out of” (Josh. 3:13; 4:16-19). R.C. Sproul points out that with where the Ethiopian and Philip were (Acts 8:26), “It is doubtful that in that ‘desert’ between Jerusalem and Gaza ... there was enough water for an immersion.”⁵⁴¹

g. Van Dixhoorn cites these other considerations: “... there were times when too many people were baptized to permit immersion. Acts 2:41 tells us that 3,000 people were baptized on one day in Jerusalem. It is hardly possible ...” Also, “... there were times when baptism happened too quickly ... at once ... (*Acts* 16:33). The language of immediate baptism [with the Philippian jailer and his family] does not suggest that they went through the city and were baptized at the river, or a pool. Paul probably reached for a jug or a bowl and, after explaining baptism, poured or sprinkled water on these new converts.” As well, “The only plausible picture of immersion in baptism is that of Romans 6 or Colossians 2, but arguably it is plausible to us because we think of burials vertically, six feet under the ground, whereas in hard Palestinian soil burials were often effected horizontally, behind a rock in a cave.”⁵⁴² More importantly, Rom. 6 and Col. 2 are figures of speech for union with Christ.

h. “Total immersion lacks Old Testament precedent or clear New Testament justification.”⁵⁴³

WCF 28:4: *Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, (l) but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized. (m)*

(l)Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:37-38. (m)Gen. 17:7, 9-10 with Gal. 3:9,14 and Col. 2:11-12 and Acts 2:38-39 and Rom. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:14; Matt. 28:19; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15.

Packer says the ongoing debate over infant baptism is about God’s way of defining church.⁵⁴⁴

a. Covenant children should be baptized due to their privilege of being born into covenant family representation (WLC 166 says “infants” of Christian parents are to be baptized because they are “within the covenant”). Spear explains, “The case for infant baptism does not rest on a few proof

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) , 932.

⁵⁴¹ Sproul, vol. 3, 119. Dickson, 219-220: “... we read of three thousand baptized in one day, in the streets of Jerusalem, by twelve apostles at the most, where there was no river to dip them into (*Acts* 2:41). And was not Jerusalem and all Judea and the region round about Jordan baptized by John the Baptist alone, which could not be done to all and every one by dipping (*Matt.* 3:5-6)?”

⁵⁴² Van Dixhoorn, 371, 372.

⁵⁴³ Ward, 176.

⁵⁴⁴ Packer, 216.