

## COVENANT PRES NEWCOMERS' CLASS

### #6 -- Sacraments (*highlights*)

Opening Question: What's the big deal about the sacraments?

I. A definition: WCF 27.1 defines a sacrament as "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."

So, they are "signs and seals" of God's covenant promise. A *sign* signifies something; a *seal* actively does something. The effect of the sacraments is both real and supernatural; touches us through our senses; speaks of the grace of God in Christ.

All biblical covenants are accompanied by signs.

- Adamic: tree of life (Gen. 2:9)
- Noahic: rainbow (Ge. 9:12-16)
- Abrahamic: circumcision (Gen. 17:11)
- Mosaic: the Sabbath day (Ex. 31:16-17)
- Davidic: throne of David (Ps. 89:29)
- New Covenant: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 10:16)

II. Generally all believers accept the sign aspect of the Sacraments. Def: a "seal" confirms, authenticates, or validates a promise or covenant. The nature of the "seal" is more disputed but it is scriptural:

- A. Abraham "received the *sign* of circumcision as a *seal* of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised (Rom 4:11). Notice that circumcision was the *seal* "of the righteousness" that had been imputed to Abraham through faith. Circumcision pointed to the objective covenant and sealed the promises of the covenant—the external righteousness received by faith alone.
- B. "this cup *is* the new covenant in my blood..." (1 Cor 11:25); cup and bread *are* participation in the blood and body of Christ (I Cor 10:14ff); "Unless

you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53); also important - Rom 6:3-4.

- C. Very difficult to separate the "sign" from the thing itself -- Scripture certainly pairs them, hence Acts 2:38, repentance, baptism, the name of Christ and forgiveness all in the same breath.
- D. There is mystery in this because we cannot yet see the seamlessness of the physical and spiritual worlds as God does. For this very reason the sayings of John 6 drove many people away from Christ (Jn 6:60ff).

*At the very least this: the sacraments are spoken of as participation in the death (Rom 6:1-4) and life (Jn 6:52-59), the body and blood, of Jesus Christ. This is a mystery worked by God, clearly for our benefit. Hence the phrase "Means of Grace".*

### III. The Lord's Supper

- A. The idea (John 6) and the institution (Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11) belong to the Lord. So it is not our coming to the Lord, but the Lord coming to us. The movement is from God to mankind.
- B. Continuity in the covenants: The Lord's Supper functions in similar ways to the Passover in the old covenant.
  - 1. "this is the blood of my covenant" (Matt. 26:27-29) recalls the ratification of the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 24:8). → Interestingly, Matthew uses the same words as the LXX translation of Ex. 24:8 (except for "my")
  - 2. "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28) echoes the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:34 "For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more."
  - 3. "poured out for many" (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24) is a possible echo of the suffering servant: "he poured out his soul to death" (Isaiah 53:12).
  - 4. Both covenants are celebrated with a meal: "they beheld God and ate and drank" (Ex. 24:11)
  - 5. The Supper is instituted at Passover (Matt. 26:17)
  - 6. Jesus is identified as the Passover lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7)
- C. The idea of our "remembrance" being central is inadequate, taking into consideration that it is the Lord's will, not ours, that brings the Supper to

pass. So Paul's words "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup...", following as they do on the Lord's words of institution, speak not of our initiative, but of the Lord's initiative and grace.

#### IV. Baptism

A. Receiving the name of our Lord (Matt 28 & Acts 2)

B. No mode is taught in the NT

C. Infant Baptism: continuity with circumcision in old covenant

1. The issue is whether we can say God's disposition toward the children of his people has changed since the institution of the Covenant in Gen. 17 and its reaffirmation in Acts 2:38 & Rom. 4:18ff (Abe + offspring — intentional continuity is crucial!).
2. No 1st cen. Jewish convert to Christianity could have imagined he was populating hell by having children. Since children were included in the old covenant, there is no reason to think that they would be excluded from the new covenant (burden of proof is on those who argue otherwise). How can the new covenant be better if our children are born pagans?
3. Scripture agrees with him. Every administration of God's covenant included children (why should the new be different?)
  - Adamic: "as in Adam all die (1 Cor. 15:22)
  - Noahic: "I will establish my covenant with you and your offspring" (Gen. 9:9)
  - Abrahamic: "To your offspring I give this land" (Gen. 15:18)
  - Mosaic: "You are standing today...all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives...so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God" (Deut. 29: 10-12).
  - Davidic: "I will raise up your offspring after you" (2 Sam 7:12)
  - New: "For the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2: 39)
4. Other Passages to Consider
  - above + Isa 59:21 ("you and offspring")
  - 1 Cor 7:14 (one parent believing)
  - Acts 2:38-39 (Covenant lang. for baptism)
  - Acts 16:31 (Philippian jailer - grace to *family*)
  - Acts 10:24, 46 (Cornelius & relatives)

5. Believers' baptism cannot guarantee the fix for infant baptism's "weakness": potential non-believers being baptized.
  - my own baptisms and room for doubt
  
6. Believers' baptism pits a doctrinal view against all scriptural images of family and fatherhood. Throughout OT and NT, "households" are not seen as half in the family of God, half out. They are seen as one, just as Abraham circumcises all, Moses, and later the Philippian jailer, Lydia and Cornelius.
  - OF COURSE this is the Bible's idea of family, in light of Deut. 6. No Jew, our Lord included, saw otherwise.

**MORE TEXTS:** Gen 17; Mal 2:15; Deut 4:37ff; Deut 7:7-9; Ps 100:5, 102:28, 103:17-18; Ex 20:6; Isa 44:3, 54:13, 59:21, 65:23; Jer 32:38-39, 35:19; Ezek 37:25; Zech 10:6-7; Acts 2:38; 16:14-15, 31.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Where are you struggling with respect to the sacraments?
2. How does our tribe and tradition differ from others, even your own past?
3. In what ways do the sacraments point to Christ, the gospel?
4. The WLC Q. 167 speaks of "improving our baptism." What does this mean? How can we do that?
5. How does the Supper go beyond mere "remembrance"?