

Lord's Day 3/15/26

Adult Sunday School

Sacraments using WLC

Purpose of this brief series is a review of what the sacraments are, with a primary emphasis on our duties therein.

After spending nearly 60 questions and answers on the moral law of God, the Westminster Divines then embark on the next series of logical concerns – what then is to be done?

Question 153 sums this up nicely:

*Q. What doth God require of us that we may escape His wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the Law?*

*A. That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, He requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation.*

The next question, then, is entirely logical:

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*Q. What are the outward mean whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation?*

*A. The outward means whereby Christ communicates to His church the benefits of His mediation, are all His ordinances, especially the Word, Sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.*

A few brief observational questions:

Why the distinction about outward means? What about inward means? What might those be?

Is it possible for someone to be saved apart from these means, ordinarily?

Seeing then that this is such an important consideration, it behooves us then to think about them carefully.

We could spend a lot of time on the Word & Prayer, but our focus in these 2 weeks is on the Sacraments, but in particular the Lord's Supper – especially as we have recently increased our observance of it.

Question 161 asks a very fundamental question:

*Q. How do the Sacraments become effectual means of salvation?*

*A. The Sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.*

What errors do our Divines endeavor to deal with in this question/answer?

While I am quite confident that we all know what the sacraments are, I still think that it is helpful for us to review how they are defined. Helpfully, our next question in the WLC does that for us:

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*Q. What is a Sacrament?*

*A. A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His Church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of His mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without.*

So, fundamentally, a sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His church. The rest of this answer deals with the purposes and results of these ordinances, namely:

To – signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace all of the following:

The benefits of Christ’s mediation

Strengthen and increase our faith & all other graces

Oblige us to obedience

Testify & Cherish our love and communion one with another

Distinguish us from those that are outside the covenant of grace

So, the Lord is using His Sacraments to tremendous effect.

I want us to briefly consider the meaning of the three words *signify, seal, and exhibit*. Helpful to cross reference WSC 92

We may come back to baptism, especially if we can carve out a third week. But, for now we will focus on the Lord’s Supper.

As with the Sacraments generally, I think it is good for us to define the Lord’s Supper succinctly. And, so, again, we turn to the WLC.

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*Q. What is the Lord’s Supper?*

*A. The Lord's Supper is a Sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, His death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon His body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with Him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.*

Again, a mouthful! But, let's try and break it down as best we can.

This sacrament consists of giving & receiving bread & wine by the appointment of Jesus Christ.

The rest is tied to the word *wherein & by*, which are the following:

Christ's death is showed forth

Those who communicate worthily feed upon His body & blood for spiritual nourishment & growth in grace

Union & communion with Him confirmed

Testify & renew; thankfulness and engagement to God; mutual love and fellowship with each several members of the mystical body of Christ.

One of the keys to understanding our standards well is learning how to break down their sentences into categories so one knows what specific clauses are referring to, and to make sure we understand the right uses of certain words, as we saw above.

I skipped 163 earlier, but I think it will help us to come back to it now:

*Q. What are the parts of a sacrament?*

*A. The parts of a sacrament are two: the one an outward and sensible sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified.*

While it is true that to a very large extent the parts of the sacraments are inextricably linked, it is still important to distinguish between them. It is more than possible to participate in the sensible portion of a sacrament without ever having the spiritual portion communicate to us.

Last question for today: 170

*Q. How do they that worthily communicate in the Lord's Supper feed upon the body and blood of Christ therein?*

*A. As the body and blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses; so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really*

*while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of His death.*

What spiritual errors are being addressed in this question?

What assurance is given us in this?