

Covenant Baptism: The Sacraments

Lecture #4: “[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe” -The Apostle Paul

OUTLINE

1. What is meant by “sacrament”?

- a. In the early Latin church, *sacramentum* is derived from the Greek *mysterion* (μυστηρίων). Meaning “mystery”.
- b. **1 Corinthians 4:1:** Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries [μυστηρίων] of God.
- c. **Presbyterian View:** They are a *means of grace*. **WSC Q.92:** A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are **represented, sealed, and applied** to believers.
- d. **Roman Catholic View:** *Ex opere operato* – “by the working of the work”. The sacraments are efficacious *in themselves*.
- e. **Zwingli, Remonstrants (Dutch Arminians), Baptists:** Called *ordinances*, Zwingli saw the sacraments like the Old Testament Memorial Stones.
- f. However, they are true *means of grace*, not simply *memorials*. **1 Corinthians 10:16:** “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

2. What is meant by “means of grace”?

- a. Ordinarily, the grace of God is communicated through three means: (1) The Word of God, (2) The Sacraments, and (3) Prayer. If you want to receive grace from God, these are the means He has promised to bless.
- b. Infant Baptism is NOT a “Wet Infant Dedication”! The baptism is a means of grace!
- c. **WLC Q. 161:** “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.”
- d. The Means of Grace may be efficacious long after the moment of reception: **WCF 28.6.** The efficacy of baptism is **not tied to that moment of time** wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (**whether of age or infants**) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in **his appointed time**.

- e. Baptism is performed once for an individual. However, baptism continues to be a means of grace to them after it the moment of administration: **WLC Q. 167**: “The needful but **much neglected duty of improving our baptism**, is to be **performed by us all our life long**, (1) especially in the time of temptation, and (2) when we are present at the administration of it to others; by (3) serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the (4) privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and (5) our solemn vow made therein; by being (6) humbled for our sinful defilement, our (7) falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by (8) growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of (9) all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by (10) drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the (11) mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by (12) endeavoring to live by faith, to have our (13) conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to (14) walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.”

3. What is meant by “sign”?

- a. A sign points to the thing signified by it, but it is not the thing itself. The Hollywood Sign is NOT the city of Hollywood. Baptism signifies the washing away of sin but is not itself the washing away of sin.
- b. **Romans 4:** ⁹ Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹ And he received the **sign of circumcision**, a **seal of the righteousness of the faith** which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.
- c. **Notice!** The sign of circumcision is a sign and seal of **faith** (Romans 4:11). Baptism is the same! Baptists argue that a sign of faith cannot be given to an infant who does not profess faith. However, contrary to this, as a **sign and seal of faith**, circumcision was administered to infants in the Old Testament!
- d. **Conclusion:** in the economy of the covenants, the children of believers must receive the sign and seal of faith.

4. What is meant by “seal”?

- a. **A.A. Hodge:** “A seal authenticates and confirms. (a) God acknowledges the salvation to be divine, and therefore perfect, and he pledges himself to bestow the blessings stated in the covenant. (b) We accept the covenant, become a party in it, engage to observe its terms, and claim its benefits.”
- b. **John 3:3:** He that hath received his testimony hath set to his **seal** that God is true.