

# Sacramental Theology Seminar

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## I. What is a sacrament?

- a) A sacrament is the Word of God enacted.
- b) *“Sacraments are ‘visible words,’ embodiments of grace, enacted as testimonies to the love of God in Jesus Christ.”* –Daniel Migliore
- c) *“Visible signs of an invisible grace.”* –St. Augustine
- d) *“A holy ordinance instituted by Christ wherein by visible signs and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed and applied to believers.”* –“Westminster Confession of Faith”
- e) *“A testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him.”* –John Calvin
- f) *“The Reformed tradition understands Baptism and the Lord’s Supper to be Sacraments, instituted by God and commended by Christ. Sacraments are signs of the real presence and the power of Christ in the Church, symbols of God’s action. Through the Sacraments, God seals believers in redemption, renews their identity as the people of God, and marks them for service.”* –Book of Order (W-1.3033)
- g) “Mysterion” (Greek for “mystery”) is the New Testament word that was later translated into Latin as “sacramentum” (sacrament).

## II. What are the sacraments?

- a) Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches have observed seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance/confession, ordination, marriage, and anointing of the sick/last rites.

- b) The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation churches reduced the sacraments to baptism and the Lord's Supper, and some of them included foot washing. The litmus test was that it be a holy ordinance clearly instituted by Christ or the Apostles: "*Do this in remembrance...*"
- c) Communion "Words of Institution": 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23
- d) Baptismal injunctions: Romans 6:3-5; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:13; John 3:5; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38

<b>All Christian worship is the child of two parents:</b>	
<b>SYNAGOGUE</b> ✍	<b>Service of the word</b>
<b>UPPER ROOM</b> ✍	<b>Service of the table</b>

**III. Foundational Reformed Sacramental Principles:**

- a) Word and sacrament are inseparable as elements of worship.
- b) Word and sacrament both witness to the activity of the Holy Spirit *and* our faith response.
- c) Implications:
  - 1) There is no hierarchy in worship elements.
  - 2) The elements are not themselves "magic" or "special."

*"The sacraments profit not a whit without the power of the Holy Spirit."* – Calvin

- 3) There is an objective and a subjective reality.
- 4) The effectiveness of the sacraments does not depend on human purity.

5) They are a means of God's grace to us and in us.

#### **IV. How is God present in the sacraments?**

##### **The Lord's Supper:**

- a) Roman Catholic view: (Transubstantiation) The eucharistic elements themselves become transformed into the literal body/flesh and blood of Jesus.
- b) Lutheran view: (Consubstantiation) The spiritual presence of Jesus is found in, around and through the communion elements.
- c) Reformed view: (Covenantal) The emphasis is not so much on Jesus' local presence in the elements as it is on his personal presence in the body of Christ.

*"The finite cannot contain the infinite."* –John Leith

- d) Baptist view: (Memorial) The Lord's Supper becomes a basis to remember and be thankful for what Jesus' sacrifice.

##### **Baptism:**

- a) God's power is present in the water through the Holy Spirit, but the effectiveness of that power depends on one's theological view of baptism (e.g. infant vs. believer's baptism).
- b) Ulrich Zwingli: Baptism is merely a dedicatory sign.
- c) John Calvin: Baptism brings cleansing, forgiveness and union with Christ.
- d) Anabaptists: Baptism is an adult faith response.
- e) Anglican: Baptism is a sign of regeneration or new birth.

#### **V. The Infant VS. Adult Debate** **Two Theological Starting Points:**

- a) **GOD’S ACTIVITY:** (Theocentric) If the primary message and power of the sacrament is God’s (redeeming, cleansing, calling or sanctifying) actions, then the human disposition or response is secondary.
- b) **HUMAN RESPONSE:** (Anthropocentric) If the primary focus of the sacrament is the human ability to cognitively respond to God, then God’s activity is responsive (not initiatory) in nature and is therefore secondary.

**Two Practical Conclusions for Baptism:**

- c) Believer’s Baptism (Acts 8:34-38): If you have a new movement of any kind you start with adults, then the generations eventually become effected.
- d) Household baptisms (Acts 16:14-15): The households of Lydia, Cornelius, Stephanas, and the Philippian jailer were all baptized.
- e) The literary device called *synecdoche* takes the whole for the part and the part for the whole. (e.g. Jesus feeding the crowd of 5000 men... plus women and children)
- f) Both sacraments, but especially baptism, invite inclusive participation in God’s universal covenant promises. (Acts 2:39b)

**VI. What is the meaning of Baptism?**

- a) Baptism is the spiritual foundation of the Christian life.
- b) We are brought into union with Jesus, being baptized into his death and resurrection. (Romans 6:3-5)
- c) We are incorporated into the church. (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:13)
- d) We are given a new birth. (John 3:5)
- e) We are washed or cleansed of and forgiven our sins. (Acts 22:16 & 39)

The miqvah bath was prominent in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It was a ritual bathing pool for Jews for the purification of sins. (Leviticus 15:5-11)

- f) We received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)
- g) As an Old Testament typology, baptism is a covenant sign given by Christ. (Colossians 2:11-14)

*“Baptism is a prophetic sign at the beginning of the Christian life the fulfillment of which continues to unfold throughout the whole of life.”* – Hughes Oliphant Old

## **VII. What is the meaning of the Lord’s Supper?**

- a) The Lord’s Supper provides spiritual sustenance for the Christian life. (John 6:48-59)
- b) *“The Lord’s Supper is the sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord... it is a participation in Christ and with one another in the expectation of the Kingdom and as a foretaste of the messianic banquet.”* –Book of Order (W-2.4002)
- c) In the Lord’s Supper the church gives thanks, remembers, and blesses God.
- d) In the Lord’s Supper the Holy Spirit seals us in God’s covenant of grace and lifts us into Christ’s presence.
- e) *“The Lord’s Supper gathers together the past, the present, and the future of God’s creative and redemptive work.”* –Migliore
- f) It is a meal shared with and by Jesus, not a sacrifice of Jesus. Thus, we are participating with God in heaven and being united to one another on earth. (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:16-17)

Sources:

*Introduction to Christian Worship* by James F. White

*Faith Seeking Understanding* by Daniel Migliore

*The Christian Theology Reader* by Alister McGrath, ed.

*Book of Order and The Book of Confessions* PC (USA)  
*Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* by John Leith  
*Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship* by Hughes Oliphant Old  
*Manners & Customs in the Bible* by Victor Matthews