

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 67-68–Signs that make Sense

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Ever seen a sign that was just confusing? I could never make sense of those parking arrows on posts. Sometimes those signs look like they are restricting parking on the other side of the road, pointing straight out. At other times, they seem to be pointing to left or right side of those signs. Those signs can be confusing. Or maybe you've seen an "Exit Only" sign between two rooms at the airport and you wonder if it allows exit from your room, or a warning that it is an exit from the other room.

With God, his signs are different. God's signs make sense. They are clear. And they bring rewards if you understand and use them properly. That is the subject of the sermon today.

Our headings are:

The Nature of the Sacraments

The Number of the Sacraments

Our goals are: **That you will be refreshed with the things signified by God's sacramental signs and be helped to love and work harder for the Savior.**

The Nature of the Sacraments

67 Q. ARE BOTH THE WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS THEN INTENDED TO FOCUS OUR FAITH ON THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS AS THE ONLY GROUND OF OUR SALVATION?

A. Right! In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and through the holy Sacraments he assures us that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

1. The whole Bible focuses on your Redeemer's work on the cross.

Jesus made this clear in Luke 24. The law, the prophets, and the Psalms spoke of his life, death, burial, and resurrection. Through his disciples proclaiming this message and men believing it, his kingdom expands. The earth will not be conquered by military might as the Jews and some of Jesus' disciples believed, but by preaching the message of the cross.

2. In order to keep focus on this Good News of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus instituted the Sacraments.

(Remember, Sacraments are holy signs and seals given by God to remember his covenant with your Covenant Keeper!) Consider how the Scriptures bring the focus of the Sacraments on Jesus' work.

a. Baptism symbolizes your unity in Christ's work on the cross.

Romans 6: 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus **were baptized into His death?**

Your sins were washed away when Christ's blood was shed on the cross. The law covered Christians with guilt, but baptism points directly to the **protection – the covering – expiation- Jesus offered.** (Adam and Eve were covered with the skin of the sacrificed animals. This pictured our covering through the Lamb of God.) The cross brought new clothes of righteousness.

Galatians 3: 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have **put on Christ.** You are marked as "property of Christ" and identified with his new clothes! That is baptism!

b. The Lord's Supper shows you have received Christ's body and blood as yours and you then proclaim Christ's death for sinners around the world. The bread pictures his body and the wine pictures his blood – the means of your covering. What a sensible sign!

1Corinthians 11: 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

c. Now see a special case where baptism and the Lord's Supper worked together to point to Christ.

1Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, **2 all were baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea, **3 all ate the same spiritual food,** **4 and all drank**

the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that **Rock was Christ**.

The Israelites traveling from Egypt to Canaan, were united (baptized) into Moses (who represented Christ). After that unity, they ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink (which represented Christ). **That food and drink stayed with them** all the way to the Promised Land. **So Jesus is inextricably linked to the Sacraments**. But **don't treat the signs too highly** or it would **insult the one who is signified by the signs**. The signs only teach of the thing (the One) they signify.

3. Properly understood, because the sacraments focus on Christ's work, they become means of grace.

Exactly how do the Sacraments become means of grace?

The Sacraments scream out to you: "Jesus loves you, and this is what he did for you." **The internalizing of the visible Gospel strengthens your faith.**

Grace makes you stand more firmly on the Rock.

4. So when you are baptized or you see someone baptized, and when you eat the Lord's Supper, or you see someone eat the Lord's Supper, let your mind be drawn back to the cross where the Lord suffered and his blood dripped down.

This will move you to love him more and serve him better. **You will tell the world** they too can be nourished by Christ. **You will support the preaching of the Gospel** so enemies of God will be conquered. **You will invite others to come to church** so they will hear the Gospel and be saved.

The Number of the Sacraments

68 Q. HOW MANY SACRAMENTS DID CHRIST INSTITUTE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

A. Two: baptism and the Lord's supper.

1. Jesus commanded only 2 Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Those who teach otherwise are wrong. Look at the 2 sacraments Christ gave.

a. Baptism.

Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."

b. Lord's Supper

1Corinthians 11: 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 **For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.**

2. What are some other "Sacraments" that cults, other religions, and even some Christians have, and why are they not properly to be called Sacraments?

a. Some churches have a sacrament call foot-washing. They believe when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said they were to do likewise, Jesus was instituting a **new sacrament call foot-washing**. But Jesus was speaking of being humble and serving each other. He was not speaking of literally washing each other's feet. **Sacraments are signs that point to the literal act of Jesus dying** – where blood was shed- for the sins of his people. So this doesn't apply. Further, no other place in the Bible teaches this.

b. Roman Catholics have 7 Sacraments: But none of these things represents what Christians believe, though there are some outward similarities and even good in some of them.

Baptism. Roman Catholics believe that **baptism saves or regenerates**. This is false.

Confirmation. Roman Catholics believe **everyone (usually in his teenage years) has to become fully equipped with the Holy Spirit,** but since this sign does not picture the work of Christ at his death, it cannot be a sacrament.

Eucharist, Thanksgiving or the Mass is an **abominable sacrament.** Roman Catholics believe Christ is not symbolized by the bread and wine (as the Bible teaches), but the bread and **the wine are transferred into the literal flesh and blood of Jesus** whom they must sacrifice daily. Ironically, “mass” comes from the Latin phrase “Ite, missa est,” which is translated: “It is finished.” Yet they continue to sacrifice Christ daily, claiming that his once-for-all-times sacrifice was not sufficient. (Hebrews 7:27, 9:28, 10:10)

Extreme Unction. Roman Catholics believe that **anointing someone with special oil anyone who is sick or possibly facing death will give him special grace.** But while it is important to pray for the sick, this does not picture the work of Christ’s payment for sins. This was a revenue maker for Roman Catholics.

Holy Orders. Roman Catholics have **special positions in the church:** bishops, priests, and deacons. Obviously these do not picture the work of Christ on the cross and no Christian needs a priest since we are all priests and Jesus is our High Priest.

1Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood,** a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Marriage. Roman Catholics believe marriage is a sacrament and **since one may never refused a sacrament, there is no possibility for divorce in Roman Catholicism.** And if Sacraments are not optional, why are priests not allowed to marry? More, marriages are not about Jesus’s death for sins!

Penance. Roman Catholics go the priest to make acts of contrition verbally. The priest then absolves them. As a punishment, they are **required to repetitiously pray certain prayers.** But prayers are the chief means of showing our thankfulness to the Lord. **How can it then be a punishment?** Furthermore, **you are to confess your sins to God. Unnecessary repetition of prayer is forbidden.** And where is the focus on Christ’s sacrifice for sins here?

c. Mormons believe baptism saves so they baptize a living person for one who died and wasn’t baptized. It is baptism by proxy. But no one can receive faith after he has died. After death is judgment.

d. There are some who recognize the Sacraments of the Lord, but they themselves do not participate in them. They may simply pass the elements of the Lord’s Supper around but not take it. They feel themselves unworthy. We’ll examine this later.

Conclusion:

The Sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, **focus like a laser on the saving work of Jesus.** The Sacraments of themselves are **not to be inappropriately elevated,** or they will become sinful, as they take away from the thing (the One) signified. The **Sacraments are not to be ignored, or the full meaning brushed aside,** or you will rob Christ of his honor and you will rob yourself the grace that comes from them.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. When you see someone baptized or when you participate in the Lord’s Supper, remember the cross and see the blood of Christ dripping to the ground...the blood that made you clean...and let that sink into your heart... Eat it as spiritual food and God will nourish you. Let the Sacraments scream out: “The Lord died for you,” so that you never forget it.

2. Look forward to the Sacraments. Don’t rob yourself of one of the greatest nourishments to serving the Lord with vigor.

3. Let the Sacraments be a witness to the world. Let the world see you well-nourished...and living well...and then let them ask: How are you so peaceful in a world of strife? You can then tell them of your nourishment.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, you can't have this nourishment because you have a greater problem. You need to understand and accept the thing symbolized by the Sacraments...the death and resurrection of Jesus. I pray this greatest need of your life will be met today. Ask God for his help!