

Belgic Confession 33 – Sacraments (圣礼) for the Weak

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: If you are sick, do you look forward to a medium rare steak with sour cream, baked potato, grilled asparagus (芦笋), onions, a poached egg (荷包蛋) and eggnog? At times you just prefer a bowl of soup and plain crackers. They are easier to digest. Even so, the Lord considered the weakness of your souls and provided for you some things that are easily digested. You will hear about two of the easily digested things this week.

Our headings are:

What are the Sacraments?

How do Sacraments really work?

How many Sacraments are there?

Our goals are: **That you will appreciate the sacraments and be strengthened by them for better service in the kingdom.**

We believe that our gracious God, **taking account of our weakness and infirmities**, has ordained the sacraments for us, **thereby to seal unto us His promises**, and to be **pledges of the good will** and grace of God towards us, and **also to nourish** and strengthen our faith; which He has joined to the Word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses both that which He declares to us by His Word and that which He works inwardly in our hearts, thereby confirming in us the salvation which He imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the signs are not empty or meaningless, so as to deceive us. For Jesus Christ is the true object presented by them, without whom they would be of no moment.

Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments which Christ our Lord has instituted, which are two only, namely, the sacrament of baptism and the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ.

我们相信慈爱的神，为了顾念我们的软弱，为我们设立了圣礼，借此应许我们且保证神的善意与恩慈，并且培育和坚固我们的信心 1；就是他将此信心与福音真道联合的，并在我们的心中坚固他所赐给我们的救恩。因为这些圣礼是内在无形之事的有形标记与印证，神借此可以用圣灵的能力在我们心中作工。因此这些标记并非是虚空而毫无意义的，以致欺骗我们。因为这些标记所代表的真正对象乃是耶稣基督，没有基督那当然就是毫无重要可言 2。此外，我们对基督所立圣礼之数目上觉得满意，就是只有两个圣礼：圣洗礼与主耶稣基督的圣餐礼 3。（Translated by Rev. Charles Chao D.D.）

What are sacraments?

1. Sacraments, simply put, are holy signs and seals for you to more clearly see the promise of the Gospel (福音) in Jesus Christ. They are beautiful pictures. A picture does tell a thousand words. Look at one beautiful picture.

Genesis 17:10 "This is My covenant (约) which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised (接受割礼); 11 "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins (包皮), and **it shall be a sign** of the covenant between Me and you.

The Sacraments focus like a laser beam (激光束) solely on the work of Jesus Christ...particularly upon the central part of his work – his dying and his resurrection (复活).

2. All believers are required to participate in the sacraments. Why?

a. The sacraments nourish the souls. God wants you to be well equipped – rich and ready – to serve him. **So the Lord demands that those who have heard the preached word be baptized 接受洗礼 and participate in the Lord's Supper 圣餐.** Take eat, take drink – 1Corinthians 11:24-25. These were commands, not suggestions.

b. The sacraments honor Christ. When you are nourished you praise God and when others see you blessed and nourished, they praise God also.

3. Those who think they can survive outside of the church and so avoid the Sacraments are defying (不服从) the Lord of the church and should repent (悔改). They are starving themselves when there are tasty morsels (可口的食物). It is like being invited to a wedding and walking out before the ceremony and feasting.

1Corinthians 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? (我们所祝福的杯，岂不是同领基督的血吗？我们所掰开的饼，岂不是同领基督的身体吗？)

How Do Sacraments Really Work?

1. Baptism (洗礼) reminds you (it is a sign) that your sins have been washed away, just as water washes away dirt from the body. But baptism did not appear out of the blue (突然). Baptism flowed from circumcision...with the same intention. Circumcision, like baptism, reflected what was in the hearts of the receiver or in the heart of the parents of the receiver.

Every time a boy looked at his body his mind would go to the flowing of blood that caused him to be clean.

2. Baptism reminds you that you are the property of Jesus, like a seal shows ownership.

Romans 4:11 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, (并且他受了割礼的记号, 作他未受割礼的时候因信称义的印证, 叫他作一切未受割礼而信之人的父, 使他们也算为义;)

God knows man is weak and wants to reassure him, remind him, and guarantee him that he is the property of the Lord. God also assures you in baptism that your sins are in Jesus Christ.

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

You are reminded of the covering you have of your sins...so God can't see it. This is nourishment to your soul.

3. You are the subject and God is the agent in Baptism. No man baptized you. God did. God confirms your faith by marking you.

4. The Lord's Supper is a sign that Christ's body was broken and his blood was shed for you. The bread and the wine symbolized (it is a sign of) the body of Jesus Christ that was broken and his red blood that fell to the ground.

Matthew 26:27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 **"For this is My blood of the new covenant,** which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

5. The Lord's Supper is a seal that you belong to Jesus Christ and he is feeding you. For as surely as you eat the bread and drink the wine you are assured that you are receiving his grace, that you have been reconciled (使和好) to God and that you have received his forgiveness.

Hebrew 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified (使成圣) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

It is like the old seals they would put in your passport that assures you (and others) of your citizenship.

6. You are the receiver of the nourishment from the Lord's Supper and Jesus Christ is the giver of the nourishment. The man who administers it adds nothing to it.

7. Because baptism and the Lord's Supper are nourishing to the soul they are a means of sanctifying grace (成圣之恩典).

They are **not a means of saving grace** (救赎恩典), as the Roman Catholic argue. (They will even baptize the dead). When you take the sacraments the Holy Spirit works through them to strengthen your faith.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The sacraments are a visible representation (pictures) of the Word. And what do you know about that word?

Isaiah 55:11 **So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.** (我口所出的话也必如此, 决不徒然返回, 却要成就我所喜悦的, 在我发他去成就的事上必然亨通。)

These means of grace are necessary to quell (减轻) the doubts that rise in your minds from time to time. God knows that you can become insensitive (感觉迟钝的) and uncertain. This is why it is terrible sin to avoid the sacraments. The sacraments scream out to you and the world: "Jesus loves you, and this is what he did for you."

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.**

8. Someone might argue that he isn't baptized weekly, so how can it be nourishing? Well, every time you see a baptism it is a witness to you of Christ's work. Your mind must always be drawn back to your own baptism.

9. The Lord's Supper must be regularly used. The Lord's Supper was done at least weekly. This makes sense as it is a source of nourishment. So don't be careless about these sacraments. Don't be absent from them.

How Many Sacraments are there?

1. There are only 2 sacraments in the Bible: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ only commanded 2.

a. Baptism.

Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples (门徒) of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

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..."

2. What are some other "sacraments" that other sects (宗派) have, and why are they not properly called sacraments?

a. Some Charismatic churches (灵恩派教会) have a sacrament call foot-washing (洗脚). They believe that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said that they were to do likewise, that Jesus was instituting a new sacrament. Jesus was speaking of humbly serving each other. Sacraments are signs that point to the literal act of Jesus dying – where blood was shed- for the sins of his people. It is impossible to see how this would apply. It is taught no other place in the Bible.

b. Roman Catholics have 7 Sacraments:

Baptism for the Roman Catholic is different from Christian baptism. Roman Catholics believe that one is saved by baptism – or baptismal regeneration (重生得救) .

Confirmation is the belief that one has become fully equipped with the Holy Spirit. Since this sign does not picture the work of Christ at his death, it cannot be a sacrament.

Eucharist (圣餐), Thanksgiving or the Mass (弥撒), is the most shameful doctrine of Roman Catholicism. It is an abominable (令人憎恶的) sacrament. Roman Catholics believe that Christ is not simply symbolized by the bread and wine, but the bread and the wine is transferred into the literal flesh and blood of Jesus Christ... whom they must sacrifice (献祭) daily. Ironically, the word "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 (给临终者涂油礼) is the Roman Catholic anointing with special oil anyone who is sick or possibly facing death and is supposed to give him special grace. Praying is good but this does not picture Christ's payment for sins.

Holy Orders (圣职) are special positions in Roman Catholicism (bishops主教, priests神父, and deacons执事). Obviously these do not picture the work of Christ on the cross. No Christian needs a priest since the Lord said that we are all priests.

1Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (君尊的祭司), 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 (婚礼) is a Roman Catholic sacrament and this is why they do not permit divorces. And yet, if marriage were a sacrament and a picture of Christ's pure love for his church, why would Roman Catholics permit mixed marriages – non-Roman Catholics- with only a bishop's permission? Isn't that a corruption? And if sacraments are not optional, why are priests not allowed to marry?

Penance (忏悔, 苦修) is when a Roman Catholic goes to a priest, makes an act of contrition (悔罪) verbally (口头的), and then the priest absolves (宣告...无罪) him. As a punishment, you are required to repetitiously pray certain prayers. But prayer is the chief means of showing thankfulness to the Lord. How can it then be a punishment? And you are to confess your sins to God. Only God forgives sins.

c. Mormons (摩门教徒) believe that they could baptize the dead... by baptizing someone who is alive. It is lawful for them to baptize by proxy (代理人) because they believe that baptism is required to enter into Paradise. Of course no one can receive faith after he has died. After death is the judgment.

d. There are some who recognize the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper but corrupt it by their refusal to participate in it.

Conclusion:

Sacraments are holy signs of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Sacraments are seals (印证), showing that the work of Jesus Christ has been applied to you.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Do you let you mind focus on the cross when you participate in the Holy Sacraments? When you do, they will strengthen you soul. And when that happens, you can fight more for Jesus Christ. You gain more courage and confidence in him. Young people, if you have not received the Lord's Supper yet and you believe in Jesus, you need to receive this nourishment. Don't starve your souls. Parents do you remind your children of this? And what happens when you are nourished? You want to tell this story!

Finally: We as Christians are nourished by the main meal, the preaching of the Word, and the gentle secondary meal, the sacraments. But if you are not a Christian, you have absolutely nothing for your soul. You are starving and you will die...unless you ask God to feed you the truth of his Word...that Christ came to save sinners such as you by his death, burial, and resurrection.