

Belgic Confession 33 – Know, love, and use the Sacraments!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: If someone describes a beautiful house to you, you might say, “I like that house. That sounds good.” But what if he showed you pictures of the outside and inside of the house, won’t that be even more helpful? You get a richer view of the house!

In a similar way, you have received good instruction about Christ’s work on the cross. You believe and you are saved. But the Lord was pleased to give you 2 beautiful pictures to make his work on the cross richer and clearer. These pictures are called sacraments. You will hear about them today.

Our headings are:

What are purposes of Sacraments?

How do Sacraments really work?

How many Sacraments are there?

Our goals are: **That you will appreciate the sacraments the Lord has given to you, that you will receive them, and you will be strengthened by them for better service in the kingdom of your Savior.**

We believe that our good God, **mindful of our crudeness and weakness**, has ordained sacraments for us to **seal his promises** in us, to **pledge his good will** and grace toward us, and also **to nourish** and sustain our faith. He has added these to the Word of the gospel **to represent better to our external senses** both what he enables us to understand by his Word and what he does inwardly in our hearts, **confirming in us the salvation** he imparts to us. For they are visible **signs and seals** of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So they are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is **Jesus Christ, without whom they would be nothing.**

Moreover, **we are satisfied with the number of sacraments that Christ our Master has ordained for us.** There are **only two**: the sacrament of baptism and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

What are the purposes of sacraments?

1. Sacraments, simply put, are holy signs and seals for you to more clearly see the promise of the Gospel in Jesus Christ.

They are beautiful pictures. A picture does tell a thousand words. Look at one older beautiful picture of the work of Jesus.

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

The Sacraments focus like a laser beam solely on the work of Jesus Christ...but they

particularly focus on his work of dying and raising from the dead.

2. Sacraments nourish our souls so all believers are required to participate in them.

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 and participate in the Lord's Supper.** Take eat, take drink – 1Corinthians 11:24-25. These were commands, not suggestions.

3. Sacraments honor Christ, so all believers are required to participate in them.

When you are nourished you praise God and when others see you blessed and nourished, they praise God also.

4. Those who think they can survive outside of the church and so avoid the Sacraments are defying the Lord of the church, they are robbing themselves of God's gifts, and they should repent.

They are starving themselves when there are tasty morsels available. It is like being invited to a wedding and walking out before the meal.

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?**

How Do Sacraments Really Work?

1. Baptism reminds you (it is a sign) that your sins have been washed away, just as water washes away dirt from the body.

Baptism did not appear out of the blue. Baptism flowed from circumcision... with the same intention. Every time a boy looked at his body in the Old Testament his mind would go to the flowing of blood that caused him to be clean. Today, every time a child sees water being poured on someone's head, his mind would go to the flowing blood of Jesus that washes away his sins.

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,

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** 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 to God and that you have received his forgiveness.

Hebrew 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified 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.

They are **not a means of saving grace**, as the Roman Catholic argue. (They even baptized 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.

These means of grace are necessary to quell the doubts that rise in your minds from time to time. God knows that you can become insensitive or uncertain - doubts can creep

into your mind. 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 go back to your own baptism.

9. The Lord's Supper must be regularly used.

The Lord's Supper was done 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 commanded in the Bible: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

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..."

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 have, and why are they not properly called sacraments?

a. Some Charismatic churches have a sacrament call foot-washing. They believe that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said that they were to do likewise, that Jesus was instituting a new sacrament. No! 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. Also, it is taught no other place in the Bible.

b. Roman Catholics have 7 Sacraments:

Baptism: Their baptism is different from Christian baptism. They believe one is saved by baptism. But sacraments do not save!

Confirmation: Confirmation is the belief that one must 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.

Mass: Eucharist, Thanksgiving or the Mass, is the belief Christ is **not simply symbolized by the bread and wine,** but the bread and the wine are transferred into the **literal flesh and blood of Jesus**... whom they must sacrifice 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) Sacraments are symbolic, not literal!

Extreme Unction is the anointing with special oil anyone who is sick or possibly facing death and is supposed to give special grace. This does not picture Christ’s payment for sins.

Holy Orders are special positions in Roman Catholicism (bishops, priests, and deacons). These do not picture the work of Christ on the cross. No Christian needs a priest since we are all priests.

1Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**...

Marriage is a Roman Catholic sacrament and this is why they do not permit divorces. Two problems with this one: If sacraments are not optional for the Christian, why are priests not allowed to marry? Further, marriage doesn’t picture the work of Christ on the cross.

Penance is when a Roman Catholic goes to a priest, makes an act of contrition verbally and then the priest absolves him. As a punishment, the guilty is required to repetitiously pray certain prayers. But prayer is the chief means of showing thankfulness to the Lord, not a punishment. Also, there is no picture of the work of the Savior.

c. Mormons believe they could baptize the dead...by baptizing someone who is alive. It is lawful for them to baptize by proxy because they believe baptism is required to enter into Paradise. But no one can receive faith after death. After death is judgment.

d. There are some who recognize the Sacraments of the Lord’s Supper but corrupt it by their refusal to participate in it. They reject its nourishment because they feel sinful. But it is for the weak!

Conclusion:

Sacraments are holy **signs of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.** Sacraments are holy **seals, showing that the work of Jesus Christ has been applied to you** personally. The work of Christ becomes richer!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Focus on the cross when you participate in the Holy Sacraments. When you do, they will

strengthen your soul. When that happens, you can fight more for Jesus because you gain more courage and confidence in him.

2. 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. Talk to your parents or elders._
Parents, remind your children of this?

3. What happens when you are nourished? You will tell this story! The whole world needs this story!

Finally: Christians are nourished by the main meal, the preaching of the Word, and gentle secondary meals-the sacraments. 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 truth is encapsulated in this: Christ came to save sinners such as you by his death, burial, and resurrection. Receive this food, then eat and live.