

Westminster Confession of Faith Ch. 27: The Sacraments

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. They were instituted by God along with that covenant¹ to represent Christ and his benefits, to confirm our position with and in him,² to demonstrate a visible difference between those who belong to the church and the rest of the world,³ and solemnly to engage believers in the service of God in Christ according to his word.⁴

1. Rom 4.11, Gn 17.7, 9-11, Mt 28.19, 1 Cor 11.23, Ex 13.9-10, 12.3-20. 2. 1 Cor 10.16, 11.25-26, Gal 3.27. 3. Rom 15.8, Ex 12.48, Gn 34.14, 1 Cor 10.21, Heb 13.10, 1 Cor 11.27-29. 4. Rom 6.3-4, 1 Cor 10.2, 14-16, 21; see context.

2. In every sacrament there is a spiritual relationship or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. And so the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.⁵

5. Gn 17.10, Mt 26.27-28, Ti 3.5.

3. The grace revealed in or by sacraments in their right use does not come from any power in them. Neither does the effectiveness of a sacrament depend on the devoutness or the intention of whoever administers it. Rather the power and effectiveness of the sacraments are the result of the work of the Spirit and rest on God's word instituting them, since his word authorizes their use and promises benefits to worthy receivers of them.⁷

6. Rom 2.28-29, 1 Pt 3.21, Mt 3.11, 1 Cor 12.13, 3.7, 6.11, Jn 3.5, Acts 8.13-23.

7. Mt 26.27-28, 28.19-20, Jn 6.63, Lk 22.19-20, 1 Cor 11.26.

4. There are only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism and the Lord's supper.⁸ Ordinarily, neither of these may be administered by anyone but a lawfully ordained minister of the word.⁹

8. Mt 28.19, 1 Cor 11.20,23, 4.1, Heb 5.4. 9. See General Note.

5. The sacraments of the Old Testament signify and reveal in substance the same spiritual things as those of the New.¹⁰

10. 1 Cor 10.1-4, 5.7-8, Col 2.11-12.

Questions:

1. How are the sacraments signs and seals? Consider the meanings of these terms when the WCF was written. How does this meaning reflect the language of scripture. (Rom. 4:11)
2. What four purposes do the sacraments serve according to the confession? How does Scripture support each of these?
3. On what or whom does the effectiveness of the sacraments depend?
4. Why do the words of institution and teaching accompany the sacraments? Where do we see this in Scripture?
5. What does the confession say about who is eligible to administer the sacraments? Do you agree or disagree?
6. What are a few reasons to celebrate only two sacraments?
7. Describe a time when you have been ministered to by the sacraments in a profound way and share it with your family.