

11 The Sacraments

Sacraments? Really? There is a rational argument in our heads that asks why we need anything other than faith in Christianity. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were so messy and so was Jesus' death. Why couldn't God have just done a *virtual* death of His Son? Just create your password and log in. But this is a Real World and somehow it was required (here comes *mystery* again) that God Himself die for sin, and the only eternal atonement was His incarnate Son's sacrifice. In the old covenant, God required sacrifices. If you were an ancient Jew and said, "Naw, I opt just to think my way to atonement," do you think they'd kick you out of camp? More to the point, would God accept you?

The modern Christian world doesn't talk much about Hebrew sacrifices. But Jesus instituted two things bound to His sacrifice of dying our death. He appeared to John the Baptist and asked to be baptized. This was to take our sin upon Himself. When giving his Great Commission in Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*" Why did Jesus add baptism in the first phrase? It's because it was an atonement. A mathematician would say that belief is faith's *necessary condition* while baptism is an *inclusive*—includes belief by means of the Spirit. At the last supper He took bread and wine and said they were his body and blood and that this would atone for us. It is important to believe in the efficacy of this. Why else would Paul warn in I Cor. 11 that if you don't believe the body is there and truly partake in this sacrament, you eat and drink *damnation* to yourself? The sacrifices of the O.T. were not just transactional and a sign of God's doing. They had to have repentant faith. "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" Ps. 51:17. "*The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me,*" Ps. 50:23. *Broken spirit and thanksgiving* is exactly the repentance and washing away of sin, which John advertized. And so Baptism is one of these 2 sacraments—a sacred act, physical elements, ordained by God, requires faith, gives forgiveness of sin. Through the Spirit you confess your sinfulness and are washed clean of sin. Think of Jesus' baptism as yours done backwards. We came to the water for washing; He came to immerse in our sin and Romans 6:4 says, "*We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life.*" We take on the Spirit to receive faith and baptism, Jesus rec'd the Spirit to go eventually to death for us. "... *Holy Spirit of God by Whom you were sealed for the day of Redemption.*" Eph. 4:30. Right after His baptism Jesus took up John's message of Repent (Mt. 4:17) and his disciples began to Baptize (John 4:2). Once you undergo this death to sin and take on the Spirit, God doesn't let go of you. You've been sealed! Why do Lutherans baptize children? They do because children sin and can believe just as adults. Paul goes on to say that our 'old self' of sin gets crucified with Christ. (Rom 6:5-6).

Secondly, Jesus went on to declare the last supper also forgives sin and has all the hallmarks of a sacrament, which was discussed in the first section of history of early Christians. Here is a meal; God has found and adopted you into His family; He provides the spiritual food and serves you. A King honors His adopted orphan child. Lord's Supper is not a dry ritual. It's a pinch-me-this-is-too-good-to-be-real moment of faith each time you partake.

There are differences in view. Roman Catholics teach that the bread and wine change into Christ's body and blood (Transubstantiation). Lutherans hold that consecrated bread and wine contain the body and blood mysteriously through faith (Consubstantiation). Many other Protestants simply hold it is all symbolic. Concerning the practical sense of how to implement the importance of

an understanding of Lord's Supper given in I Cor. 11, Lutherans differ. Some say communion should be open; others, closed to all but church members (this was standard practice in many 19th century denominations). Our church takes a stance that someone who claims our understanding is welcome. (our church doesn't own a mind reader). If in doubt, take our classes. Luther said this quote to prove that, as the Bible says, faith is key. *If a mouse is running under the feet of people taking eucharist, eating fallen crumbs, is he eating bread or is he eating God?—Luther, challenging Roman Catholic doctrine during the Leipzig debate* (If this actually happened in a modern church my female relatives would be gone from communion in a flash!)