

Lecture 23-The Sacraments

Prayer

Grant, Almighty God, that as You have in various ways testified and daily also prove how dear and precious to You is humanity as we enjoy daily so many and so remarkable proofs of Your goodness and favor; O, grant, that we learn to rely wholly on Your goodness, so many examples of which You set before us and which You would have us continually to experience that we may not only pass through our earthly course, but also confidently aspire to the hope of that blessed and celestial life which is laid up for us in heaven through Christ alone our Lord. Amen.

The Sacraments

I. Definition

“An outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of His good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith and we in turn attest our piety toward Him in the presence of the Lord and of His angels and before men.” (4, 14, 1)

A. Outward sign

1. Because of the “weakness of our faith” (4, 14, 1)
2. Because we cannot be “welded together” unless we are “bound in some partnership of signs or visible sacraments” (4, 14, 19)

B. Seal of the promise

1. The sacrament is joined to the promise “as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself” (4, 14, 3)
2. The sacrament is secondary and supplementary
3. But the sacrament does confirm and seal the promise
4. The sacraments are “visible words” (4, 16, 6)

C. Means of grace

1. The sacraments are not merely signs of grace
2. But “aids to our faith” (4, 14, 14); God uses the sacraments “to sustain, nourish, confirm, and increase our faith” (4, 17, 7)
3. But the sacraments do not confer grace, nor do they “promote or confirm faith by themselves” (4, 14, 19)
4. The sacraments work in connection with
 - a. The word (4, 14, 3)
 - b. Faith (4, 14, 7)
 - c. The Holy Spirit (4, 14, 9)

D. Confession of faith (4, 14, 13)

II. Baptism

A. Rejection of Roman Catholic position

B. Calvin's position

1. Baptism is more than “a token or mark by which we confess our religion before men” (4, 15, 1)
2. It is a means of grace instituted by Christ to bestow blessing on believers
3. It is not dependent on the one who administers it.
4. The mode is irrelevant (4, 15, 19; *Commentary* on Acts 8:38).

C. Infant baptism

1. God established a covenant with Abraham; included children (circumcision)
2. Church is the covenant community now
 - a. Children are included (baptism)
 - b. “Infants are baptized into future repentance and faith” (4, 15, 20)

III. Lord's Supper

A. Rejection of Roman Catholic position

B. Calvin's position

1. Agreed with Zwingli that after the ascension Christ retained a real body of flesh and blood located in heaven, but rejected his memorialism
2. Agreed with Luther that there is a real reception of the body and blood of Christ, but rejected Luther's doctrine of ubiquity
3. Christ is spiritually present in the Lord's Supper
4. Different views of Lord's Supper
 - a. Roman Catholic
 - b. Zwinglian
 - c. Lutheran
 - d. Calvin's view (Reformed)

For Further Study

Wallace, Ronald S. *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953.