

The Sacraments, Weddings and Funerals, and Finding Resources

In this lesson we will look at sacraments. Note that weddings and funerals are not sacraments, though we will look at weddings and funerals in this lesson as well. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You that You are a God who reveals Yourself, who makes Yourself known, who does not make it difficult for us to understand You and respond to You. You give us everything we need in Your Word by Your Spirit. You bring us to Yourself. You bring us from death to life. You adopt us into Your family and call us children whom You delight and sing over. Your Son, who died for us, is not ashamed of us. You give to us Your Word and means of grace and growth like prayer and song and one another and the encouragement we have as we hear of Your work in each other's lives. Father, You have given us these tangible expressions of baptisms and the Lord's Supper, these signs and seals of You being our God and us being Your people. Help us as we look at these sacraments, and also as we seek to understand how to effectively worship You in the context of weddings and funerals. Help us to finish well in this last time we have together, for it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us consider the sacraments. The Westminster Standards refer to the sacraments as sign and seals of the covenant of grace. They point to something beyond themselves. But they also, in the mystery of how God makes use of the means of grace, seal the benefits to our hearts and lives of God's covenant love and relationship with us. They cause us to grow and remember what it means to be His people. I think the sacraments are part of what God gives us to remind us that this whole unveiling, revealing, and inspiring of Scripture that He has done is a story. Scripture is the drama of redemption. The sacraments are part of that drama. God with Abraham established circumcision. Then with Moses, He established Passover. All through the rest of the Old Testament revelation these signs continue forward, though there are times when the people of God neglect them. We saw in our biblical survey how Hezekiah had to reestablish the Passover. As he was doing this they did not get everything ready in time, and yet they went ahead and held Passover the second month instead of the first. When the children of Israel who had wandered in the desert come close to Jerusalem, we see that they are a whole generation of people who have not been circumcised or have not celebrated the Passover—and we have to ask, what is going on? Before they could begin the conquest of the Promised Land they had to be circumcised and celebrate Passover. These signs and seals, if you will, of God's covenant of grace in the Old Testament, are outward signs. But simply because they are outward signs does not mean they are insignificant to God. This is demonstrated by God insisting that this generation apply these signs to themselves before the next stage of the drama—the conquest of the Promised Land.

These signs carry forward into the New Testament and then find their fulfillment in baptism and the Lord's Supper. The signs that included the shedding of blood in the Old Testament no longer require the shedding of blood. We now have water and bread and wine rather than the circumcising of the foreskin and the sacrificing of the Passover lamb, the shedding of blood. The drama remains. It intensifies, it is going somewhere. These signs go along with that story. Thus the sacraments are part of the drama of redemption. They are a means of grace and growth. They are made effectual by the work of the Holy Spirit. The way the outward and inward connect to accomplish what they are intended to accomplish (that which is associated with them) is done by the work of the Holy Spirit. Simply because you were circumcised and ate the Passover lamb did not mean that all was well in the world. There was an internal side to the sign, the circumcision of the heart. The circumcision of the heart is now paralleled by the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There was meant to be a taking hold of God by faith in the Passover meal that is meant to be there in the Lord's Supper as well. It is the Holy Spirit who causes these means of grace to be effectual to the individual believer and to the people of God.

I believe that the setting for these signs is to be the context of the people of God assembled and gathered together. I see this particularly in the New Testament from Jesus' words in Matthew 28 (the Great Commission), Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11, and from the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper. The Passover, you could argue, was more tied to family than the Lord's Supper is. I think that is one of the areas in which in its fulfillment there is more added to it. The context given for the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 is a worship context, as we looked at earlier. The context is not private or even just family, but it is Christ our Passover Lamb whom we celebrate. Concerning baptism Matthew 28:19 says, "As you go, make disciples of the nations and baptize them..." In some ways I think you can make a better argument for the Lord's Supper being in the context of corporate, public worship than you can for baptism—in terms of overt, direct passages of Scripture. But I think we should argue for baptism being in the context of corporate, public worship. I think there are possible exceptions in which baptism could be done outside of that context, but overall I think both baptism and the Lord's Supper should take place in the context of corporate, public worship. I also think both sacraments should be connected to the preaching and teaching of the Word. Now, the question that comes up is what about people who cannot come to church? Should you take the Lord's Supper to them? A common example of this in our churches is taking communion to shut-ins, those who cannot leave their homes or the hospital. I think we can and should do that, but in a specific way. It should not be just you, an individual preacher, going and dispensing the elements of bread and wine to the person in his or her home, hospital, or nursing home. I think you should take part of the church with you and have a mini worship service. When I would do this I would sometimes take my family with me. We would go visit "Maxine" in the nursing home. We would sing and read Scripture. I would give a summary of my sermon from that morning (we would go Sunday afternoon). And all of us would together partake of the bread and the cup, because we are the people of God worshiping God in community. The Lord's Supper is communion. It is corporate. Biblically, two or three are adequate numbers for that. Thus the sacraments should be celebrated in the context of corporate, public worship and connected to the preaching of the Word.

Also, the sacraments are to be received by faith. As we saw before, the Holy Spirit must be present. Faith must also be present. All these things are part of what we call the right administration of the sacraments. I think there is a close connection—and yet a distinction between—the sign and the thing signified in the sign. Circumcision and the covenant with Abraham are sometimes in Scripture used interchangeably; they are so closely connected (in Genesis 17, for example). But there is a distinction between the sign itself and the thing being signified. There is an external and an internal part of this that are inseparably linked but distinguishable. Part of the reason I am stressing this is because there is much discussion going on in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and beyond right now about a right understanding of the sacraments, particularly baptism. The more controversial parts of the current discussion center on what actually happens in baptism and the connection between the sign and the thing being signified. I think the sign and the thing being signified are more closely connected than some would like to say but more distinguishable than others would like to say. I will leave further discussion of that issue for another course.

Baptism is primarily covenant entrance, and the Lord's Supper is covenant renewal. Again, we see this from the carryover of circumcision to baptism and Passover to the Lord's Supper. There are many people who love the Lord and believe His Word as much as I do who are not convinced of infant baptism. I am fairly settled in my position, as are some Bible-believing, Christ-loving Baptist friends I have, but I am willing to be open on this to some degree. Much of it has to do with our basic hermeneutic as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament. We all agree there is both continuity and discontinuity. The question is, how much continuity is there and how much discontinuity is there? What would we be looking for if there were discontinuity in the sign of covenant entrance,

namely that the sign of the new covenant is only to be administered to adults who profess faith? I personally think we would see more overt teaching of discontinuity than we have. I see some discontinuity, certainly in the sign itself. Regarding the Lord's Supper as compared to Passover, I think the "discerning of the Lord's body" seems to be an additional requirement for those who would partake.

My first year in seminary, I wrote a paper on whether or not infant baptism is valid. At that time I was less convinced of infant baptism than I am now, and the study of that paper was part of what helped to convince me more. One of the things I read for that paper that stuck was when I was trying to understand the context of Acts 2:38-29. Who were the people gathered to hear Peter preach at Pentecost? They were Jewish people. They were from many different places and even speaking different languages, but they were Jews. What would have been the overall condition of their sons regarding circumcision? They would have been circumcised. For Peter to stand up in that context with that audience and say, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," he was saying there is something new. You are not fully part of the church simply by being circumcised, having the Old Testament sign. Now this generation of Jews who had come to Christ needed to be baptized because they too had to have the new sign of baptism. This is something we all agree on. But then Paul continues, speaking to these Jews with circumcised children who may be wondering, "If I have to get this new sign, then what about my children?" It seems that Peter may be anticipating this kind of question from his audience. Remember that they were very passionate about circumcision and right standing before God. Paul continues, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." I could be wrong here. But it seems to me that a Jewish parent hearing this would say, "Oh, our children should be baptized too, just as they were circumcised." They might think, "Abraham was circumcised as an adult, but Isaac was circumcised as an eight-day-old baby." Were children baptized at Pentecost? I think it is possible. I think it may even be probable. For the children not to be baptized would have caused a huge commotion, if the correlation between baptism and circumcision is right. Granted, if this were so clear in the Scripture, if there were absolute certainty, we would not still be debating this so many centuries later. I will not take the time to give you all the Baptist rebuttals to the points I have made. I hope you can access those arguments yourself.

Colossians 2:11-12 speaks to this as well. This is more of a theological argument by the apostle Paul: "In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." Those two verses, I think, show us there is an ongoing new covenant recognition that baptism and circumcision are closely aligned. For the Gentile believer who was not circumcised as a Jew but baptized as a Christian, Paul was saying, "You have been circumcised." There is a connection between baptism and circumcision. This passage comes in the context of a debate over whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised in order to be fully Christian. Paul is saying to the Gentile believer who had not been circumcised as a Jew but had been baptized as a Christian, "If you have been baptized, even if you were never physically circumcised, 'in him you were also circumcised,'" from 2:11a. Some people would say that my argument for infant baptism from its connection with circumcision does not make sense because they do not understand baptism and circumcision to be connected in that way. I would say Colossians 2:11-12 is a fairly strong argument for this correlation. To say that a Gentile Christian who has been baptized but not circumcised is circumcised in Christ—that is a powerful statement that shows the connection between baptism and circumcision. Baptism is not only the sign of Christian entrance, but it is also the sign of all that was included in circumcision—all that is yours as well, as it is now fulfilled in baptism. Those who do not see this connection would say that circumcision was something uniquely given for the time period before Christ, for the Jewish people through whom Christ would

come. They would say that the fact that circumcision is no longer necessary for Gentiles to come fully into the covenant shows that it has been abdicated. They would see this as the slate being cleared, and now baptism is something completely different. And where do we see children being baptized in the New Testament? Thus their view of circumcision is more as something that is fulfilled and done away with by baptism than as something that is carried over and included in baptism.

Another controversy that comes up when we discuss this passage (Colossians 2:11-12) concerns the proper mode of baptism: sprinkling or immersion? In North America, many of those who argue for adult baptism also argue for baptism by immersion, and they refer to Colossians 2:12 as part of their argument for immersion. There it says it compares baptism to being buried and raised up to new life. They see this as a reference to baptism by immersion, where you would go under the water—be buried, covered by the water—and then be raised up out of the water. However, this argument rests on a faulty understanding of burial. In North America, when we bury someone we put him under earth, which could justify the comparison to someone being put under water in baptism by immersion. But in first-century Palestine, Hebrew people were commonly buried by being put in a cave in the side of a hill. How does this parallel baptism by immersion? It could be argued that people in the first century were also buried in catacombs, caves that were under the ground. However, the catacombs were dug mainly because there was no more room to dig caves in the sides of hills.

Let us turn now to consider the Lord's Supper as covenant renewal. I think the connection between and carryover from the Passover to the Lord's Supper is less controversial than the connection and carryover from circumcision to baptism. This is in part because Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal (Matthew 26), and in 1 Corinthians 3:5 Jesus is called our Passover Lamb.

We will return to the Lord's Supper, but let us look again at the administration of baptism. Baptism is by water. The Westminster Confession of Faith says the water should be administered by sprinkling or pouring; dipping is not necessary. By "dipping" they mean immersion. The controversy over the mode of baptism in Presbyterian circles sometimes centers around the Westminster Fathers' posture toward immersion. Are they saying that they would accept immersion, but it is irregular and should not be the practice? Or are they saying all three—sprinkling, pouring, and immersion—are valid, but immersion simply is not necessary. Water is water. It does not have to be by immersion. Thus in some presbyteries where you may go to seek ordination, if that is what you are doing, the most intense questions about baptism (in my experience) have been concerning the mode of baptism. They may be trying to make sure you would never baptize someone by immersion. There is a reason why this is such an important issue for the leaders of some presbyteries. They want to know how you will react if someone comes to you as the pastor and says, "I want to be baptized, and I want to be immersed." Fundamentally you may not have a problem with baptizing someone by immersion, but often the person who asks to be baptized by immersion is operating under the understanding that the only valid way to be baptized is by immersion. Under those circumstances, if you baptize that person by immersion, what would you be saying to all those who have been baptized by sprinkling or pouring? You would be telling them their baptism was not valid. That is more of the dynamic behind those presbyteries that make this a big issue. In Presbyterian circles, it is often more of a pastoral application issue than it is a doctrinal issue.

I also think that there is some good symbolism in pouring as a mode of baptism. By pouring the water you can more easily connect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to water baptism. I have baptized some people by pouring. I like pouring. When you pour the water the people in the back of the church are able to see that water is being used when otherwise they could not with some ways of doing baptism by sprinkling. The people in the back of the church should not be wondering if there was any water involved in that baptism. I am certainly not in favor of dipping a rose in water and sprinkling the person

being baptized that way. It might be pretty, and I would not say it is invalid, but I would not recommend that as a mode of baptism. I also recommend if you are pouring, especially if the person is an adult or teenager, that you put some towels on the floor. I think baptizing by sprinkling is fine. But when I baptize by sprinkling I kind of use a cross between sprinkling and pouring. I get enough water in my hand that when I put it on the person's head it is like Psalm 130:2: "It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes." However, the most important thing is not how you use water to baptize. The most important thing is that you use water to baptize because of the sign and the significance of water in baptism. I think the Westminster Divines' posture toward the mode of baptism is that it is rightly administered by sprinkling or pouring. There is no question that these are right ways of doing it. Then the Divines say that dipping is not necessary. To me the plain meaning of this is that dipping, or immersion, is valid, but it is not necessary. Some would say that by saying immersion is not necessary they prefer sprinkling or pouring. This is possible, and there is some biblical imagery that relates to that, such as being sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But I think they may have been responding to some who even then were going to the extreme of insisting that immersion was the only valid way of baptizing. I think they were saying that they would recognize the validity of immersion but not practice it themselves.

This is similar to the issue of how we who are not Roman Catholic should view Roman Catholic baptism. Is it a valid baptism? We have a study committee in the PCA that has looked into this. This is an important issue because there are some people coming from Roman Catholicism who do not think they were validly baptized in the Roman Catholic Church because of the baptismal regeneration (at least historically) doctrine of the church. The majority report of the PCA study committee (if I am remembering correctly) considered Roman Catholic baptism invalid. The minority report considered it valid. (This means that each PCA presbytery is allowed to decide for themselves whether they will consider Roman Catholic baptism valid or not.) Here is where I come down on this issue: I consider Roman Catholic baptism as irregular but valid. What is intended in their baptism is not, in my opinion, a fully biblical intention of baptism. But if Christian parents desiring their children to come to faith in Christ, they are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with water, and it is done with the recognition of a need for a Savior. Those fundamental elements are there and therefore it has not been my practice to re-baptize (what some consider their first "valid" baptism) Roman Catholics in the churches I have been a part of. I have had some people ask the session about this. We would give them the study report and talk to them about it. If someone was deeply convinced that they were not validly baptized, I would consider re-baptizing them out of deference to the person and their conscience regarding that. There are also many Protestant churches that have strange views of baptism, and the question that needs to be addressed is where we draw the line. Do you re-baptize a Mormon? I would, because that is not a Christian baptism, nor is baptism in a Jehovah's Witness church.

Baptism is a covenant sign of our union with Christ and our engrafting into Him. It should be done in the context of a worship service with an explanation of its meaning. I think this is important because you could have former Roman Catholics, Baptists, or people who have no idea what the sacrament means. You may have people in your church who practice the sacrament simply because their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents always have. Some people baptize their children simply because that is what their family has always done. Therefore I have made it a practice in my pastoral ministry to always take a few minutes to explain why we are doing what we are doing before we do it. I do this so that people will understand that baptism is not a guarantee of salvation or something magical, it is not that we want to alienate forever people who do not agree with us on baptism, but it is a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace. We want to explain what that means with believing parents present. There are vows of the congregation and the recipient if he or she is an adult. (We do not disagree with Baptists

about adult baptism, but we believe in addition to the baptism of adult converts the children of believers should be baptized.) Prayer should be a part of baptism. In the PCA we have elders present and officiating. And we also want to encourage the congregation to remember their baptism. There is a line in the Shorter Catechism that says, "How can we improve our baptism?" We can improve our baptism by living out the Christian life. This is similar to when in a wedding the pastor asks those married in the audience to remember and renew their vows as they watch this new couple taking their vows. At a baptism the pastor can say, "As Eric is baptized, I encourage you to remember the significance of your baptism, even if you cannot remember the actual event, and what it meant for you to enter into the covenant community by God's grace." I think that can be helpful. And I think the singing of praise of God's grace should be a part of the sacrament of baptism.

The sacraments produce much controversy in the church, even in denominations like the PCA that have very carefully worded descriptions of them in their confession of faith. One controversy that is big right now in the PCA is whether baptized children should be admitted to the Lord's Table when they are capable of eating the bread and drinking from the cup. Or should they wait to be admitted to the Lord's Table until after they have made a personal profession of faith? Admitting baptized children to the Lord's Table as soon as they are able to eat the bread and drink from the cup is called paedocommunion. Those who argue for this say if you have been baptized you have the right to come to the Lord's Table. Admitting baptized children to the Table only after they have made a personal profession of faith is called credo-communion. I agree with credo-communion. This is largely because of the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11, which says that we should be able to discern the Lord's body. The question there is what does "discern" mean? Does that mean to be able to make an articulation of one's faith and understanding of the sacraments like a Master of Divinity seminary graduate? I do not think so. I think it means being able to say something like "God is holy, and I am a sinner. God sent His Son to save sinners like me. I am trusting in Him for that salvation and want to live a life in which I grow to be more like Christ. I understand the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to partake of these signs and symbols, the bread and the cup that are to remind us of what Jesus did in dying on the cross for us." I think children as young as four or five could do this.

What I usually do when I ask a child for his or her profession of faith is different from the way I do that with an adult. With an adult I might say, "Tripp, tell me your testimony of how you came to saving faith in Jesus Christ." But I would not ask that to a child. I normally ask children many questions like, "Who is Jesus?" I try to ask them questions in a conversational way, usually in their home with their parents or a parent present. I would also bring an elder along, but I would give the parents the choice of which elder so that they could choose the one they thought their child had the best relationship with. The child would not even necessarily know that they were being pre-examined to meet with the elders. Depending on how the interview goes we might tell the parents, "We are very encouraged, but we do not think it is quite the time yet," or we might say, "I think we should take the next step and have your child meet with the elders." Then when we met with the elders the parents would be there again, and I would ask them similar questions to our first conversation. I cannot remember a time when this did not go well, with understanding all around. I would push for a consideration that children younger than the age of 12 can have genuine faith in Christ and ought to be encouraged to meet with the elders to profess their faith and be admitted to the Lord's Table. I would also argue that just because you are 12 and go through some communicants' PCA doctrine class does not mean that you have saving faith. You may only have knowledge of how to answer the questions correctly. We as elders need to discern as best we can with the judgment of charity. This means not coming with the attitude that the person you are interviewing must prove to you beyond a shadow of a doubt that he or she is a Christian. Rather, we should come to them saying, "We are pretty sure you are a Christian expressing saving faith." We want to err on the side of charity rather than deeper examination.

Let us return now to consider the Lord's Supper. In terms of its administration, it is communion with Christ through bread and wine, although I think grape juice is acceptable. This is different than some in North American churches who would say that it is bread and grape juice, though wine is acceptable. Throughout the history of the church what has ordinarily been the element for the cup has been wine. It was really not until the Christian temperance movement (primarily in North America) in the 1920s that it began to be thought that having something other than wine was preferable. This is in part because of a concern for those who struggle with addiction to alcohol, and I do not want to diminish that concern. In a place in which that was a concern, I would like to serve wine but have the option of grape juice. Now, I have never been in a church where we have used wine simply because that has not been the traditional practice of any of my churches. I would not say that the Lord's Supper without wine is invalid, that we have not really had the Lord's Supper unless we have had wine. But if I were starting a church where it was really up to me to decide, I would want to have wine with the Lord's Supper. I think this is consistent with the practice of Jesus and the disciples. In the Lord's Supper we are feeding upon Christ to be strengthened in our faith. There are past, present, and future dynamics involved in the Lord's Supper. We are looking back to Passover. I agree with Dr. Collins, a professor here at the seminary, that we are also looking back to the peace offerings—sometimes called fellowship offerings—of the Old Testament (Collins has an article about this in *Westminster Theological Journal* from a year or two ago). But I think we are looking back primarily to the Passover. And we are looking forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The Lord's Supper that we celebrate here is like appetizers to the great banquet we will share with the Lord.

I think celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly is preferable, though we should be sensitive to the history of the local church and what their practice has been. This is not a hill to die on in your first month as a pastor at a new church. The church may ask you about your preference of the frequency of communion when they interview you for the pastorate. But you should seek to implement weekly communion (or not) with sensitivity to where the local church is on this issue. I prefer weekly communion because if the Lord's Supper is a means of grace for our growth in Christ-likeness (like preaching, praying, and singing), then why would we not have it every week? Why would we deny ourselves this means of grace? The argument for not having it every week is often something like it takes too much time. The Lord's Day is the Lord's Day. If our service has to go for an hour and 15 minutes in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week, then let us go for an hour and 15 minutes. Or perhaps we could shorten our sermons by five minutes every week. I would hope to be able to help people see the benefit of having the Lord's Supper every week as well as more preaching, praying, and singing—simply being in the Lord's presence with His people longer. People also argue that communion would become too commonplace if we have it every week, that it will lose its special meaning. To this I would respond, should we only sing once a month for fear that singing would become too commonplace? I do not hear anyone arguing in our circles that we should only have a sermon once a month, or better yet once a quarter. Why does the sermon or singing not become commonplace from having it every week? Because we believe they are a vital part of weekly worship and are meant for God's glory and our edification. Well, so is the Lord's Supper. And there are a variety of ways in which you can administer the Lord's Supper that can keep it fresh and engaging, which we talked about earlier. But if you are convinced of weekly communion and are seeking to convince others, have sensitivity.

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated in the context of the worship service with an explanation of its meaning. We should read Scripture. We should "fence the table" (we have talked about this in a previous lesson), making sure people know they should be a member in good standing of an evangelical church to come to the Table. The *Book of Church Order* (58:4) says, "We come in repentance and confession of sin and profession of faith." Now, we may have confessed our sins earlier

in the service or sometimes can confess our sins right before we come to the Lord's Table. I think it is good to have the profession of faith right before communion, introducing it as "This is who we are and what we believe as we come to the Lord's Table." We should have a prayer of thanksgiving, the "Eucharistic Prayer," as it is sometimes called. This often includes praying to set apart the elements for their covenantal, God-ordained purposes, to nourish our faith as we feed upon Christ spiritually. I think singing before, during, or after are all options with the Lord's Supper. I think elders should be present and serving. And there are options in how we serve the Lord's Supper. We could be seated in rows, we could come forward to the front, or we could be around tables up front with tablecloths like the Scottish Covenanters.

There is also a horizontal side to the Lord's Supper, as we have talked about before. We need to be in right relationship with the people around us. We are to come to worship in unity, and we are particularly to come to the Lord's Supper in unity. How is Christ present in the Lord's Supper? This is another hotly debated, historical controversy in worship among Protestants and between Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians. The view of transubstantiation holds that the bread and the cup in their essence become the body and blood of Christ while remaining in their physical part bread and wine. Consubstantiation is what the Lutherans teach, where Christ is physically present in relationship to the elements. The Lutherans have a doctrine called the "ubiquity of Christ," which basically means that He is able to be physically present in more than one place at one time. The Zwinglian view is sometimes called the memorial view. There are four main views on Christ's presence in communion: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, the memorial view, and "real or spiritual presence"—Calvin's view. Zwingli's view is that communion is a "bare" sacrament. It is simply remembering. It is a memorial, and thus is not even viewed as fully sacramental.

Dr. Calhoun, a professor here, calls Calvin's view the true presence of Christ—He is truly present with His people when we worship Him. In his *Harmony of the Gospels* (3:136) Calvin says, "It is a mistake to imagine any other kind of eating than that which draws into us the life of Christ by the secret power of the Spirit and which we attain by faith alone." Christ is physically present as the glorified God-man at the right hand of the Father. But, in the mystery of the incarnation and the Trinity, He is also truly present with us when we come around the Table He invites us to. How does that happen? Calvin explains, "The Holy Spirit unites things separated in space through the vehicle of the Lord's Supper, and by His descent affects communion with the whole person of Christ in lifting us to heaven." It is like the Holy Spirit comes down to minister Christ to us and lifts us up to heaven to be where the person of Christ is. That is mysterious language, but it is trying to capture, to press as far as we can, the reality of the true presence of Christ. We are truly communing with Christ. We are not in heaven with Him physically yet. He is not everywhere physically at the same time as the Lutherans say. But there is His true spiritual presence, the agency of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, uniting things in heaven and on earth so that we can be where Christ is and He can be where we are. This is why we sometimes say in Reformed liturgy, "Lift up your hearts! We lift them up to the Lord." The Holy Spirit is in some way transporting us to heaven. It says in Ephesians 4:2, "We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places." Thus this view is not some imposition onto the Scripture. It is trying to pull together the scriptural evidence in this way. I would say that in many Presbyterian circles our practice of the Lord's Supper is less like Calvin and more like Zwingli. We are mostly just remembering. I think this language of Christ's true presence helps us take it beyond a mere remembering without going into physical presence in or with the elements as we have with the Roman Catholic and Lutheran views. To briefly summarize the "true presence" view of communion, we are truly communing with Christ. He is truly present when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. I think He is truly present when we preach, sing, and pray as well. But I think there is a sort of sacramental presence that is missing if we do not celebrate the Lord's Supper. That does not invalidate the rest of our worship, but I think the Lord's Supper should

ordinarily be celebrated. Again, Lutherans say that Christ is present with the elements. Lutherans do not say the elements are changed into the actual body and blood of Christ, but they say He comes to be in and around and among the elements themselves. Calvin's view holds that Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is a true, spiritual presence in contrast to a physical presence. But it is a true spiritual presence of the person of Christ, who still in the hypostatic union is fully God and fully man. But He is not physically present with us because He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore we have to be lifted up spiritually to where He is to be present with Him.

Let us turn now to weddings and funerals. There are some practical issues to talk about concerning weddings. If a couple asks if you will officiate their wedding—maybe you do not know them or maybe you do, maybe they are not a believer or maybe they are—I think it is important to sit down with them and have a meeting. In this meeting you try to find out more about them and why they want to get married in order to get a sense of their heart before the Lord and their love for each other, to see what they are anticipating regarding the wedding, and to talk about pre-marital counseling. This could also be an opportunity to see if there are any major concerns such as whether either has been divorced. If so, are they biblically divorced? There are many issues to be aware of. You do not want to marry a Christian to a non-Christian or marry to someone else a person who is divorced for unbiblical reasons. These are issues to look for, but strive to do it in a tone that says, “I want to get to know them better. There are some things I routinely ask anyone who comes to me to be married.” If you establish that as your policy even with people whom you know well then you can truthfully say, “Before I agree to do a wedding I always meet with the couple at least once to discern whether or not there are any obstacles to the two of you being married or to me being able to perform the ceremony.” It is good to have a wedding policy that the session has approved so that if you have a situation that is difficult (such as one is a member of the church and one is not) you can say, “I will have to consult the session on this and get back to you.” This is one of the times when you can let the session be a sort of cover for you, when you are feeling uncomfortable. This is a safeguard against a member of your church getting angry at you because you have refused to officiate the wedding of his or her friend or relative. Those are some of the realities of life and ministry that you need to be aware of. I would not want you to walk blindly into a situation like that. At the same time I do not want to scare you with that because in my experience that was unusual. Usually the more difficult situations were when people who were not a part of any church wanted to be married in your church by you because they think it would be neat to be married in a church.

There are many other practical issues related to weddings such as whether or not you and your church will allow candles, photography, clergy from other churches (potentially liberal) to officiate, etc. If the marriage is between two Christians then the wedding is in essence the people of God coming together to worship God, and in the midst of that worship service two people are getting married. Then it is appropriate to have prayers, Scripture readings, sermons, songs, and vows—you worship God. It is a particular kind of worship service. Some people may want to have the Lord's Supper at their wedding. If you do this, though, it should be that all believers present partake of and celebrate the Lord's presence and blessing at the Table. In our circles the people who ask for the Lord's Supper at their wedding are more often coming from a Roman Catholic background where the bride and groom only are served the Lord's Supper after exchanging vows and rings. Often when I say, “The Lord's Supper at the wedding would be okay, but it would need to be the elders of the church serving the whole body of believers present,” they most often decide not to do it because that is not what they had envisioned. It is important to do pre-marital counseling, to go over some basic things. Part of the purpose is to give them some information, particularly if they are younger and have not thought through marriage things before like the managing of finances, the sexual relationship, the importance of communication, children, etc. These and other issues that they are hopefully thinking about are good to bring up in pre-marital counseling. I also find that pre-marital counseling is a good opportunity to pastor, shepherd, and in a sense disciple a

husband and wife-to-be at this important time in their life. Many younger people when you say, “Would you like to get together for two hours a week for the next eight weeks?” they respond, “Why would we want to do that?” But if you say, “If you want to get married you will need to meet with me for two hours every week for the next eight weeks,” they are more likely to do it. You can meet with them to look to God together and seek to understand marriage together. You could bring your wife and maybe sometimes have the groom meet with you and the bride meet with your wife. These hours of counseling can end up being a good time of bonding with a new couple in the church.

Concerning the message at a wedding, Dr. Chapell says, “Be brief, be personal, be redemptive, be encouraging. Make clear the applications of the cross to marriage—this is absolutely essential.” This is an opportunity to use the occasion of marriage to preach the Gospel, to the couple first and to the people there. I say at every wedding in my meditation, “In this marriage you will experience tribulation. But be of good cheer. Christ is in this marriage and He will take you through it.” I also say, “This is a wonderful day, but this is only a beginning. Marriage is not a goal. It is a means toward a greater goal of glorifying God and advancing His kingdom.” I say that in every wedding in one way or another to try to emphasize that.

Let us turn now to funerals. What do you do when someone calls to tell you someone close to them has died? Well, that is not the time to guard your time with your wife. We sometimes say yes to things we should not and do not guard time with our wives well. But this is an occasion on which you should at least offer to be with them. The general rule should be to go be with them as soon as it is reasonably possible to go and be with them. They might need your encouragement in making the arrangements for the burial and funeral. If there is a viewing of the body, it could be helpful to be there with the family when they first see the body, before others arrive, as this can be a very emotional time. Customs vary from place to place, but sometimes right before the service there is a final viewing of the body before they close the casket, and this can also be a very emotional time. One time I had to do a funeral with an open casket behind me with a woman who had committed suicide in it. And the man who had broken off his engagement with the woman the day before she died was wailing and crying throughout the whole service. I did not know them, and neither the man nor the woman believed in the Lord. I just tried to care for the people there and proclaim the hope of the Gospel, which was all I could do. As a pastor you will likely be asked to do many different things, depending on the size of your community. In smaller communities you as the pastor may be expected to do funerals and weddings more often. I do not think you should only do funerals of believers. Let me close in prayer.

Lord, thank You for our time together. We pray that the fellowship we have shared around desiring to worship You well and prepare and plan and learn to do that—that the fellowship we have had together would come across to those who were not able to be here. May they be blessed and feel a part of what we have done here this week. We pray Your blessing on them as well as us as we close this time. We look to You and thank You. As we understood from the beginning, there is one true worshiper—Jesus Christ. As we come to Him in repentance and faith and hold on to Him, He takes our feeble efforts at worship and perfects them and presents them to You. And You delight in us and rejoice in us and receive our worship because of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.