

# Blueprints for Belief

*Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith*

## Westminster Confession of Faith 27.1-5 – The Sacraments

- Sacraments are holy signs that show us and seal to us Christ and His benefits. God directly put the sacraments in place as part of the covenant of grace, and they confirm the relationship we have with Christ.
  - Romans 4:11 – “He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”
- As we share in the sacraments, we show one way the church is different from the world. We must use them to serve God in Christ, as His Word says.
  - 1 Corinthians 11:26 – “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
- In each sacrament there’s a spiritual relationship between the sign itself and what it stands for. This is why words and actions used to describe the sign can also describe what it stands for.
  - 1 Corinthians 11:24–25 – “This is my body... This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”
- When the sacraments are properly used, the grace they give us does not come from power in the sacraments themselves. Nor are they effective only when the person giving them has pious intentions.
  - 1 Corinthians 10:5–6 – Many in Israel “were overthrown in the wilderness” though they all passed through the Red Sea and ate the same spiritual food.
- The grace the sacraments give us depends on the work of the Holy Spirit and on the passages of Scripture that speak about them. These passages authorize us to use them and promise us many benefits as we use them respectfully.
  - Titus 3:5 – “He saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”
- There are only two sacraments put in place by Christ our Lord in the gospel: baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Not just anyone should administer them but only ministers of God’s Word who’ve been lawfully ordained.
  - Matthew 28:19–20 – Christ’s institution of baptism and the Great Commission.
  - 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 – Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper delivered to the church through the apostle.
- In terms of the spiritual things they show and stand for, the sacraments in the Old Testament are fundamentally the same as the sacraments in the New Testament.
  - 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 – Israel’s “baptism” and “spiritual food and drink” centered on Christ.
  - Colossians 2:11–12 – Connection between circumcision and baptism in Christ.

### Discussion Questions

1. If sacraments are signs and seals that God Himself appointed in the covenant of grace, how should that shape the seriousness, joy, and expectation with which we come to baptism and the Lord's Supper?
2. In what practical ways do baptism and the Lord's Supper mark the church off as different from the world, and how might our use (or neglect) of them either strengthen or weaken our witness?
3. Since the sacraments do not work by any power in the water, bread, or cup—or by the minister's piety—but by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word and our faith, what dangers do we face if we either treat them as "automatic" or, on the other hand, as "bare" reminders only?

### **Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 27**

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.
2. There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.
3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it: but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.
4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained.
5. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the new.