

Practical Issues with the Sacraments

I. Baptism

- How is baptism different from a baby dedication?
 - Divine ordinance vs. human invention
 - God's statement to us vs. our statement to God
 - Means of grace vs. our pledge of faithfulness
- What mode is biblical for baptism? (sprinkling, pouring, immersion)
 - Each mode is consonant with different aspects of baptism. As such, each mode is legitimate.
 - Sprinkling:
 - Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (Heb 10:22)
 - Sprinkled blood of the new covenant upon us (1 Pet 1:2; Heb 9:19; 12:24; Isa 52:15)
 - Pouring:
 - Outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17, 18, 33)
 - Washing of our bodies with pure water (Heb 10:22)
 - Immersion:
 - Buried with Christ in baptism (Rom 6:3–6)
 - Note: “to baptize” in Greek means “to dip”; immersion is not necessary. (see Lev 4:4; 9:9)
 - Note: when Jesus was baptized and it says he came up out of the water, it is unclear whether he came out from under the water, or that he came out from wading in the water.
 - Practical considerations: likely to be impossible that 3,000 were baptized by immersion on a single day in a dry climate; see also Acts 8:36; 16:33.
- Should we regard baptisms done in other churches as legitimate?
 - Again, what is baptism? WCF 28.2 “The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.”
 - Even if the minister has very erroneous theology, or later apostatizes, or the like, none of these things undoes the sign: God in baptism still sets his seal on this person.
 - Calvin: “Roman Catholic priests did not baptize us into their ignorance or sacrilege, but into faith in Christ; it was God's name they invoked.”
 - Calvin: ““if a letter is sent, provided the handwriting and seal are sufficiently recognized, it makes no difference who or of what sort the carrier is.”
 - Turretin points out that the same dynamic applies to preaching in Phil 1:16–17, whether from contention or not
 - Some cults today deny the Trinity and baptize only in the name of Jesus, and Matt 28:19 makes clear that these baptisms are not legitimate.

II. Lord's Supper

- Should we partake of the Lord's Supper in a Lutheran, Catholic, or evangelical church?
 - First, Lutherans and Catholics practice closed communion: that is, unless you are a member of their denomination, you must not partake.
 - Since they have authority over who should partake at their table, we should not go against their stipulations.
 - But even if they did permit it, there is this problem: by partaking of the Supper at their tables, we indicate that we condone their errors.
 - What about broad evangelicalism, which often does not believe in the real presence of Christ at the table, considering it to be a mere memorial?
 - Seems permissible: there is a difference between failing to see the full significance of the Supper (evangelicalism) and actively propagating dangerous falsehood (Lutheran and Catholic)
- Should we use wine in the Supper?
 - The word "wine" in Greek can refer to both unfermented and fermented grape juice.
 - The church always served wine until the temperance movement in America, which is why most American churches still serve grape juice
 - But this is rooted in legalism, as though wine is inherently bad. But it is not: Gen 14:18; Ps 104:15; Prov 3:10; John 2:1-11; etc.
 - Regarding the biblical symbolism, fermented wine is preferable:
 - At the wedding feast of the lamb, they will not be serving grape juice: Isa 25:6: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."
 - Wine is the drink of kings; of those at rest from their labors (Gen 14:18; John 2:4).
 - We provide grape juice only for those whose conscience or health prevent them from drinking wine. The Lord's Supper is not a buffet ("I feel like grape juice today"). Rather, we all should be striving to partake of one cup, for we are one body.
- How often should we have the Lord's Supper?
 - There is no explicit biblical command, which means there is liberty of conscience.
 - But there is the example of the early church:
 - The early disciples dedicating themselves to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42); The church at Troas gathering on the first day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7); The church at Corinth regularly having the Supper (1 Cor 11:18ff)
 - Calvin: "If we have careful regard to the end for which our Lord intended [the LS], we should realise that the use of it ought to be more frequent than many make it."
 - In other words, if the purpose of the Supper is to deepen our union and communion with Christ, why wouldn't we want to celebrate it as often as we can?
 - In Calvin's words: "as frequently as the capacity of the people will allow."
 - Which would you prefer: the king's message without the king's seal, or with it?