

## REFORMATION 500 WEEK 25: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTION 65-68

**Question 65:** SINCE, THEN, WE ARE MADE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST AND ALL HIS BENEFITS BY FAITH ONLY, WHERE DOES THIS FAITH COME FROM? **The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.**

We have learned that salvation is received by faith alone in Christ alone. Now we will learn where our faith in Christ comes from, and how it is strengthened.

We have already learned in Question 8 that we are spiritually dead, unable to believe in Christ, unless we are regenerated. Therefore, our faith in Christ is “not of ourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). “For to you it has been *granted...to believe* in Him” (Phil. 1:29). Saving faith is given to us “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Saving faith is given only to God’s elect.

Question 65 correctly teaches that, “the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Holy Gospel.” “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ...So, then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:14, 17). It pleases God “through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21); you have “been born again...through the word of God...which was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23, 25). While Paul preached to Lydia, “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14; cf. 10:44). “Justifying faith is, therefore, “not ordinarily produced in adults without the preaching of the gospel” (Ursinus, 113).

After the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts He *confirms* it, that is, *strengthens* it “by the use of the holy sacraments [i.e. baptism and the Lord’s Supper].” The Bible’s teaching concerning the sacraments is explained in Questions 66-82.

**Question 66:** WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS? **The sacraments are visible holy signs and seals appointed by God for this end, that by their use He may the more fully declare and seal to us [believers] the promise of the Gospel, namely, that of free grace He grants us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.**

The word *sacrament* (sacred or holy ceremony) is the word the Christian church has traditionally used to refer to the holy ceremonies of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the NT signs and seals of salvation for believers, replacing the OT signs and seals of salvation: circumcision and Passover. A *sign* symbolizes or points to something. A *seal* confirms or certifies something (like a seal on a diploma or a *signature* on a contract). The terms *sign* and *seal* come from Romans 4:11 where Paul spoke of Abraham receiving “the *sign* of circumcision, a *seal* of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.” God first established His covenant of grace with Abraham by saving him through faith in Christ (Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:17). Then He gave him circumcision as “a sign of the covenant” (Gen. 17:11), to *certify* Abraham’s salvation in Christ. The cutting of the foreskin *symbolized* and *certified* the removal of sin’s penalty and corruption in Christ who “was cut off” for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53:8). In this

way, Abraham’s faith in Christ was confirmed and strengthened (John 8:58). The Passover was also a sign of salvation for believers. The blood of the Passover Lamb – “the blood shall be a *sign* for you” (Ex. 12:13) – was a picture of salvation from the bondage of sin through the blood of “Christ, our Passover, sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7) – “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). “This *is* My blood of the new covenant” (Mark 14:24).

Now that the true blood has flowed, there is no longer the shedding of blood in either circumcision or Passover. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are now the signs and seals of God’s covenant of grace with believers in Christ. “Sacraments are, therefore, the signs of the everlasting covenant between God and the faithful” (Ursinus, 354).

The holy sacraments *symbolize* and *certify* what God promises all believers in the Gospel: forgiveness of sins and everlasting life for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross (Acts 10:43-48).

**Question 67:** ARE BOTH THE WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS DESIGNED TO DIRECT OUR FAITH TO THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS AS THE ONLY GROUND OF OUR SALVATION? **Yes, truly, for the Holy Spirit teaches in the Gospel and assures us by the holy sacraments, that our whole salvation stands in the one sacrifice of Christ made for us on the cross.**

The word and sacraments preach the same Gospel, only in different ways. The Holy Spirit *teaches* us believers in the Gospel that Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross is the only ground of our salvation. There is no other reason why God saves us from our sins “except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). The Holy Spirit uses the sacraments (the symbols of salvation through the cross) to *assure* us of the same Gospel. The water in baptism symbolizes and certifies that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son *cleanses* us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper symbolize and certify that we are saved only because of His broken body and shed blood on the cross. “The sacraments differ from the word in this, that they signify by actions and gestures what the word does by language” (Ursinus, 356). It is like *showing* your love with a kiss after *saying*, “I love you.” The kiss without the words is not a sign of love (Judas kissed Jesus!). Water, bread and wine without the Gospel are not signs and seals of salvation. They need *the word of the cross* to set them apart from ordinary use so they become *holy* (set apart) signs and seals of salvation for believers.

**Question 68:** HOW MANY SACRAMENTS HAS CHRIST INSTITUTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT? **Two: Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper.**

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the only two sacraments instituted by Christ. The Roman Catholic Church adds confirmation, penance, ordination, extreme unction, and marriage. But the Bible does not support this. Neither do the ancient church fathers, two of whom, Ambrose and Augustine, said the only two sacraments were baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These two sacraments are to be faithfully observed in the church until Christ returns (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:26); so “they may be marks by which the true church may be known and distinguished from all other religions” (Ursinus, 342).

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