

# Liturgy: The Sacraments

Covenant Baptism and Communion

## Foundation: Covenant Theology

1. God relates to humanity by way of covenant.
  - a. Covenant: A covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, between two or more persons with attendant blessings and curses. – Doug Wilson
  - b. A marriage is a covenant
    - i. Solemn bond: Husband and wives take solemn vows to one another
    - ii. Sovereignly administered: Marriage was instituted by God at the creation and therefore is a perpetual ordinance.
    - iii. Between two or more persons: in marriage the two are bound in covenant with one another but the witnesses play a role.
    - iv. Blessings and curses of faithfulness to vows or breaking of vows.
2. The *organic* or *creational* nature of covenant and grace

The promise never concerns a single believer alone, but in him his house or family also. God does not actualize His covenant of grace by picking a few people out of humanity at random, and by gathering these together into some sort of assemblage alongside of the world. Rather He bears His covenant into mankind, makes it part and parcel of the world, and sees to it that in the world it is preserved from evil. As the Redeemer or Re-Creator, God follows the line which He drew as Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. *Grace is something other and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but restores it rather. Grace is not a legacy which is transferred by natural birth, but it does flow in the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race. The covenant of grace does not ramble about at random, but perpetuates itself, historically and organically, in families, generations, nations.* – Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, p. 259.

Infant baptism implies that instilling of Christ-like character runs along the tracks established in creation, for the Christian training of the child, of a *Christian* child, begins immediately upon his birth. God does not form a Christlike character by laying a second set of tracks but by restoring and transforming the “natural” tracks. From the beginning, consistent paedobaptists treat their children as Christians so that the social and cultural nurture of the child is simultaneously his or her nurture in Christian character and faith. This simultaneity recovers the condition of the original creation. If Adam had never sinned, he would have raised his children through instruction and certain forms of discipline (schedules, gradual introduction of responsibility, etc.), and the fruit of this nurture would have been mature, godly character.... Coming to physical and psychosocial maturity would have been indistinguishable from coming to “religious” maturity. Sin is responsible for the gap that now exists. Because of the sins of parents and the original and actual

sins of their children, it is possible for an infant to come to physical and a kind of psycho-social maturity without also growing in godliness. Paedobaptism implies that the gospel's solution to this gap is not to lay an entirely new set of tracks but to close the gap by redeeming the original means from sin. – Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 116

The gospel is for families (Acts 3:25), nations (Matthew 28:19), & households (Acts 16:14-15). This corporate mindset, alien to the modern individualist, is simply taken for granted in Scripture. – Doug Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, pg. 19

### 3. The nature of the church

The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error: and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to His will. – WCF 25.5

We should therefore understand the differing theological assumptions about the relationship of unbelief to the New Covenant. The baptistic assumption is that unbelief is utterly inconsistent with the New Covenant, such that the covenant cannot really be entered into by unbelievers. In other words, the sin of unbelief (to the point of apostasy) is an impossibility for members of the New Covenant. Therefore, the *elect* and the *covenant members* are the same set of people. The paedobaptistic assumption is that unbelief is utterly inconsistent with the New Covenant, such that it violates the covenant. Such a violation means that the curses of the covenant now apply to those unbelievers who are within the covenant. Therefore, the *elect* and the *covenant members* are not identical sets of people. – Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, pg. 34

The New Testament draws *parallels* where the baptist draws *contrasts*. The New Covenant warnings place Christians in the same place as the Jews *in this regard*. The Christian must "take heed lest he fall" in the same way they fell. – Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations*, pg. 36-37

### 4. Reformed Theology is historically more comfortable with sacramental language.

There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign [(Baptism and Lord's Supper)] and the thing signified [(salvation and communion with God)]: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other. – WCF 27.2

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. – WCF 27.3

Q. 161. *How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?*

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.

- a. Notice the questions is not “Are the sacraments effectual means of salvation?” but rather “How are they...”

Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance [infant baptism], yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated. – WCF 28.4-5

- b. The wording and assumption in and behind this section is that baptized persons are regenerate. Yes, we must not totalize this, there can be those who are saved without baptism and there can be those who are not saved who are baptized. But all the weight of assumption moves in the opposite direction from the way things are typically framed in modern discussions of baptism.

## Baptism

### 1. Scripture to Consider

- a. **1 Peter 3:18–22:** <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>because they formerly did not obey, *when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.* <sup>21</sup>*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.
- b. **1 Corinthians 12:13:** <sup>13</sup>For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
- c. **Galatians 3:26–27:** <sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
- d. **Titus 3:5:** <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,
- e. **Ephesians 5:26:** <sup>26</sup>that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
- f. **Romans 6:4–5:** <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we

too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Our faith receives from baptism the advantage of its sure testimony to us that we are not only engrafted into the death and life of Christ, but so united to Christ himself that we become sharers in all his blessings. – John Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xv.4

## 2. Baptism of Infants

- a. **Genesis 17:7, 9:** <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. | <sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.
- b. **Galatians 3:9, 14:** <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. | <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.
- c. **Colossians 2:11–12:** <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
- d. **Acts 2:38–39:** <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “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. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

They [anabaptists] object that baptism is given for forgiveness of sins. When this is conceded, it abundantly supports our view. For since we are born sinners, we need forgiveness and pardon even from the time in our mother’s womb. Now, since God does not cut off from childhood the hope of mercy, but rather makes it sure, why should we take away the sign, much inferior to the thing itself? Consequently, we hurl back upon them what they try to cast against us: infants receive forgiveness of sins; therefore, they must not be deprived of the sign. – Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xvi.22

- e. **1 Corinthians 7:14:** <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Specifically the children are regarded in their connection with them. There is a kind of communion of parents and children in sin and misery. But over against this, God has also established a communion of parents and children in grace and blessing. Children are a blessing and heritage from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). They are always counted along with their parents and included with them. Together they prosper (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 1:36, 39; 4:40; 5:29; 12:25, 28). Together they serve the Lord (Deut. 6:2; 30:2; 31:12–13; Josh. 24:15; Jer. 32:39; Ezek. 37:25; Zech. 10:9). The parents must pass on to the children the acts and ordinances of God (Exod.

10:2; 12:24, 26; Deut. 4:9–10, 40; 6:7; 11:19; 29:29; Josh. 4:6, 21; 22:24–27). The covenant of God with its benefits and blessings perpetuates itself from child to child and from generation to generation (Gen. 9:12; 17:7, 9; Exod. 3:15; 12:17; 16:32; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 105:8; and so forth). While grace is not automatically inherited, as a rule it is bestowed along the line of generations. “For the infants of believers their first and foremost access of salvation is the very fact of their being born of believing parents.” – Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 4:527-528

- f. **Luke 18:15–16:** <sup>15</sup> Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

If it is right for infants to be brought to Christ, why not also to be received into baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them, why is the sign denied which, so to speak, opens to them a door into the church, that, adopted into it, they may be enrolled among the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven? How unjust of us to drive away those whom Christ calls to himself! To deprive those whom he adorns with gifts! To shut out those whom he willingly receives! But if we wish to make an issue of the great difference between baptism and this act of Christ, how much more precious shall we regard baptism, by which we attest that infants are contained within God’s covenant, than the receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer, by which Christ himself present declares both that they are his and are sanctified by him? – Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xvi.7

- g. **Romans 11:16:** <sup>16</sup> If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

### 3. How should we view “covenant children”?

- a. They are Christians and they should be treated as such!

Too often, Reformed paedobaptists have not “counted and treated” baptized children as Christians. This not only undermines the theological credibility of the paedobaptist position, but has the serious practical effect of making the baptized uncertain of his status in the church and in Christ. To baptize a child and then to say that he or she cannot really be a member of the covenant people until he does X or Y, until he has a certain kind of experience or a certain level of knowledge that he can articulate to the satisfaction of church authorities, is to undermine everything baptism communicated. – Peter Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 129

Now I think no sober person will be in doubt how rashly they stir up Christ’s church with their altercations and contentions over infant baptism. But it behooves us to note what Satan is attempting with this great subtlety of his. He is trying to take away from us the singular fruit of assurance and spiritual joy which is to be gathered from it, and also to diminish somewhat the glory of the divine goodness. For how sweet is it to godly minds to be assured, not only by word, but by sight, that they obtain so much favor with the Heavenly Father that their offspring are within his care? For here we can see how he takes on toward us the role of a most provident Father, who even after our death maintains his care for us, providing for and looking after our children. Should we not, following David’s example, rejoice with all our heart in thanksgiving, that his name may be hallowed by such an example of his goodness [Ps. 48:10]? It is precisely this

which Satan is attempting in assailing infant baptism with such an army: that, once this testimony of God's grace is taken away from us, the promise which, through it, is put before our eyes may eventually vanish little by little. From this would grow up not only an impious ungratefulness toward God's mercy but a certain negligence about instructing our children in piety. For when we consider that immediately from birth God takes and acknowledges them as his children, we feel a strong stimulus to instruct them in an earnest fear of God and observance of the law. Accordingly, unless we wish spitefully to obscure God's goodness, let us offer our infants to him, for he gives them a place among those of his family and household, that is, the members of the church. – Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xvi.32

#### 4. Underlying problems:

##### a. Assumption about the “real me”

- i. Modern Christians have created a sharp dichotomy between the “inner man” and the “outward man”.
- ii. This leads us to think that the “inner person” is the “real me” and that someone's actual embodied existence is “accidental” to who they are.
- iii. This has lead Christians to overemphasize the subjective and undervalue (or not value at all) the objective aspects of our faith (Baptism, Lord's Supper, confession, absolution).
- iv. Humans do have “interior lives” but that isn't “who you are”.

Catholics, of course, believe that baptism injects supernatural power, Protestants don't. But this difference pales in comparison into the more basic agreement between the two, and this fundamental agreement explains why debates between the Protestant and Catholics are so frustratingly inconclusive: how can you begin a debate, much less win it, when your opponent already more than halfway agrees with you? Behind both views of baptism is the notion that the “real me,” what makes me uniquely me, is some internal ghostly me that remains unaffected but what happens outside and is unchanged by what happens to my body. Neither the Protestant or Catholic considers the third option, the possibility that baptism, precisely as an *external* and *physical* ritual, might actually affect who I am. – Peter Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 5

##### b. Bad understanding of symbolism

- i. Modern Christians' understanding of symbolism is heavily truncated and inconsistent.
- ii. “It's just a symbol” » It has no intrinsic meaning
- iii. Outrage at symbolic actions
  1. Burning an American flag, throwing a wedding band away, etc.

If sacraments are signs and symbols...then they are (with the Word and through the Spirit) the matrix of personal communion with the Triune God. The symbolism involved in sacraments is the symbolism of action, less like the symbolism of a painting or a metaphor than the symbolism of a handshake or a wave or a kiss. They are symbols by and through and in which personal, covenantal relationships are forged and maintained. God Himself is invisible, and there are also invisible aspects to our relationship with God. Of course, God is not locked out from a comatose human being who cannot sense or respond to any external signs or words. In all normal circumstances, however, the invisible features of our relation with God occur within the

framework of visible signs, rites, and seals that constitute the covenant. Sacraments are not "signs of an invisible relationship with Christ," as if a relationship with Christ might occur without them. Rather, the intricate fabric of exchanged language, gesture, symbol, and action *is* our personal relationship with God. This is the fabric of "favors" that expresses God's personal "favor." These are the graces that exhibit God's grace, the gifts that connect us again and again with the God who gives. Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 21

#### 5. Communal aspect of Baptism

To speak of sacraments as rites emphasizes that they are performed by community and are embedded in the life of the community. From this angle, baptism may be seen as a "rite of entry" that expresses the character of the church—that it is a community where racial, economic, and sexual divisions are dissolved. When we all partake of one loaf, the church is publicly and ritually expressing that she is one body in Christ, her many members working together for the edification of the whole. The ritual becomes a standard against which we measure the quality of our life together. – Peter Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 22

### The Lord's Supper

Family dinner as we know it, with parents and children at a single table, was a Christian invention, not some "natural" form of family life. The family dinner is a reflection of the Eucharistic meal, the meal that welcomed all members of Christ to the table. Opposition to communion of children is pagan and seeks to reverse the revolutionary table fellowship established by the Church. It is an attempt to return to Egypt. – Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity*, p. 103

Too often the Reformed tradition has degenerated into a morbid form of self-analysis that is actually much closer to medieval piety than to the first Reformers. We are trained to stand outside ourselves and adopt a stance of objectivity in order to examine our performance, the strength of our faith, the consistency of our obedience. If our life matches our profession, then we are assured of our standing in Christ. Then we "know that we know" (1 Jn. 2:3). This is not, I think, what the New Testament means when it talks about assurance. "Knowing that we know" means experiencing the assurance that we are in a relationship of love—a "knowing" relationship—with God in Christ through the Spirit. We come to this experience of assurance in the midst of our abiding in Christ, not by standing outside our relationship with Christ and evaluating it as outsiders. We come to that experience as we trustingly, believingly remember and improve our baptisms, hear the Word of our beloved Husband, and feast as His Bride at His table. – Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, pg. 106

1. ~~Paedocommunion~~ Covenant Communion
  - a. All baptized persons are admitted to the Table
  - b. No further requirement is needed of any baptized person to come to the Table
  - c. Not based on our conviction/evidence that children are expressing some kind of faith (although the Bible teaches that children can express age-appropriate faith).
2. Communion as about all the feasts of the Old Covenant in which kids participated

- a. Many opposed to covenant communion argue that it is unclear whether children participated in the Passover. They tend to draw a 1-1 correlation between Passover & the Lord's supper. This is misguided as the Lord's Supper takes up a number of OT types into itself (not just Passover).
- b. **Deuteronomy 16:10–17:** <sup>10</sup> Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. <sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. <sup>12</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. <sup>13</sup> "You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. <sup>14</sup> You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. <sup>15</sup> For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful. <sup>16</sup> "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. <sup>17</sup> Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.
- c. **Deuteronomy 12:10–12:** <sup>10</sup> But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, <sup>11</sup> then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices (peace offering that offeror got to partake in), your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the LORD. <sup>12</sup> And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, *you and your sons and your daughters*, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.
- d. **Leviticus 22:10–14:** <sup>10</sup> "A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing; no foreign guest of the priest or hired worker shall eat of a holy thing, <sup>11</sup> but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food. <sup>12</sup> If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the contribution of the holy things. <sup>13</sup> But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no lay person shall eat of it. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone eats of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest.



- i. Reoccurring theme – circumcised persons can partake of sacramental food.
  - e. **1 Samuel 1:1–5:** There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. <sup>2</sup> He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. <sup>3</sup> Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb.
    - i. Likely the Feast of Tabernacles but we don't know.
3. The issue of 1 Corinthians
- a. **1 Corinthians 11:27–29:** <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.
    - i. The argument is that because young children are unable to “examine” themselves and unable to “discern the body” they will eat and drink judgement upon themselves if they are permitted to the table.
  - b. Exegetical irony!
    - i. What is the context of 1 Cor. 11:27-29?
    - ii. 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 – a passage entirely about factions & disunity in the church.
      - 1. <sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.
      - 2. It is exegetically difficult (if not impossibly) to create an argument for making divisions in the church (adults come the table and children don't) in a passage where Paul is criticizing division in the church.
  - c. Broader context of 1 Corinthians 11.

- i. In 1 Cor. 10 Paul uses Israel's OT history as an example for why the Corinthians should heed what he is saying and what happened to Israel so that they don't fall into the same pattern (idolatry + unrepentance = falling under God's judgement)
  - 1. **1 Corinthians 10:1–6**: For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.
- ii. Paul draws a parallel between the baptism and Lord's Supper of the Corinthians and the baptism of the Hebrews into Moses and their eating and drinking of Christ in the wilderness.
  - 1. Who was baptized? » Men, women, and children
  - 2. Who partook of the "spiritual food and drink"? » Men, women, and children.
- iii. One chapter before 1 Cor. 11:27-29 Paul has given an example of baptism and "spiritual food/drink" from the OT and said this is an example for the Corinthians.
  - 1. In the sake of the "spiritual food/drink" children participated.
  - 2. How is it possible to not incorporate this into one's understanding of 1 Cor. 11?