

FIVE SMOOTH STONES

Living Stones Anchored in the Sacraments

(Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

Baptism and Communion are considered the Sacraments of the Church and a vital part of genuine spiritual life.

“But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, 6 and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. 7 And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

❖ THE SACRAMENTS OF BAPTISM AND COMMUNION ARE UNDER EMPHASIZED

- A Failure to Differentiate Between Reformation and Romanism
- A Failure to Understand the Corporate Nature of Spirituality Versus Individualism
 - The Historical Influences that Have Affected Us Without Our Knowledge

Transcendentalism was a 19th century reaction to rationalism whereby the individual became a priority.

Romanticism was a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

Gnosticism, a second-century heresy claiming that salvation could be gained through secret knowledge - a way not available to the public.

- Cultural Creation and the Cultural Lens We Look Through

❖ THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM AND COMMUNION TO FAITH AND GRACE

- The Meaning of a Sacrament

According to Calvin, Sacraments are:

An outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men....One may call it a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him....[This] does not differ from Augustine, who teaches that a sacrament is 'a visible sign of a sacred thing,' or a 'visible form of an invisible grace.'" [Calvin, Inst. IV.xiv.1]

There are two and only two Sacraments instituted by Christ, Baptism and Communion, both of which were prefigured in the Old Testament.

- Circumcision/Baptism (*Genesis 17:11; Matthew 28:19*)
- Passover/The Lord's Supper (*Exodus 12:7-13; 23:14-17; Matthew 26:26-29*)

- The Components of a Sacrament
 - An Outward or Visible Sign
 - An Inward Grace or Thing Signified and Sealed
 - The covenant of grace, including the promise of God and all spiritual blessings associated with it (*Gen. 9:12-13; Genesis 17:1-14; Romans 4:11-13*).
 - The forgiveness of sins and participation in the life that is in Christ (*Matthew 3:11; Matthew 26:28; Mark 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:2-3; 16-17; Romans 2:28-29; 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 3:21*).
 - The Sacramental Union Between the Sign and the Thing Signified

The sacramental union between the "sign" and "the thing signified" is perhaps best summarized in Article 33 of the *Belgic Confession*:

We believe that our good God, mindful of our crudeness and weakness, has ordained sacraments for us to seal his promises in us, to pledge his good will and grace toward us, and also to nourish and sustain our faith. He has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what he enables us to understand by his Word and what he does inwardly in our hearts, confirming in us the salvation he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So they are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is Jesus Christ, without whom they would be nothing.

❖ THE SUMMARY OF BAPTISM AND COMMUNION AS GOSPEL, WORSHIP AND MISSION

So what I am aiming at is to understand and hold in high esteem THE SACRAMENTS of Baptism and Communion! Not as signs and symbols only, but as sacred acts given to the church as a means of ...

- Encountering the Real and Powerful Presence of Christ
 - Receiving the Grace of God and the Fullness of the Holy Spirit
 - Embodying the Gospel by Entering the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ
 - Expressing Our Covenantal Commitment to the Body of Christ in Community
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- About Baptism
 - Baptism is ... a washing!
 - Baptism is ... a witness!

 - About Communion
 - Communion isn't only a remembrance but a reaffirmation of my faith in Christ
 - Communion isn't only about your individual faith and life in Christ but your part in the corporate body of Christ.
 - Communion isn't about feeling something or having an experience. It is about being faithfully present in Communion!

COMMUNION

The Eucharist is a meal that does several things:

- 1) First, it is an obedient act in order to REMEMBER what Christ has done for us.
- 2) Second, it is for us to literally EXPERIENCE Christ in this present time. And,
- 3) Third, it is a submissive act of RECOMMITTING our lives to Christ once more for what He has done for us on the Cross and through the resurrection.

It is God's desire that we come to the table with clear hearts and clean hands. We need to honestly repent of any sin that has broken our fellowship with God.