



## Understanding the Sacraments

### Key idea:

A sacrament is a special symbol given by God to His people that, when received in faith, serves as a sign and seal of His promises to us, functions as a means of grace to strengthen us, and through which we testify of our faith in Him and His promises.

### Key text:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.  
Romans 4:11

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?  
<sup>17</sup>Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Romans 6:3-4

### Key points:

1. Sacraments are special symbols that unite us to the reality they represent.
2. Sacraments are given by God to His people, the Church.

3. The sacraments are signs and seals of God's promises - he is the primary actor in the sacraments.
4. Sacraments must be received in faith by the believer - apart from faith they accomplish nothing.
5. Sacraments are a means of grace to strengthen us in our walk with God and struggle against sin.
6. Sacraments allow us to respond to God and His promises and testify of our faith.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Before this teaching, how would you have explained what happens during baptism or communion? Has your understanding changed?
2. Bret used the illustration of a credit card and dollar bill—things that connect to something beyond themselves and are effective because of the promise of an authority behind them. How does this help you understand sacraments differently than just "symbols"?
3. The teaching emphasizes that sacraments are given by God to His people, not created by the church, and therefore the primary actor is God, not us. How does this truth protect us from viewing baptism or communion as mere rituals dependent on our performance?
4. How does understanding baptism as more than just a symbol—as a 'special symbol' that actually connects us to Christ's death and resurrection—change the way you view your own baptism?
5. Paul emphasizes that the sacraments must be received in faith to be effective, comparing them to the Israelites who experienced the Red Sea, and manna but died in the desert due to lack of faith. What role does faith play in your ongoing experience of God's grace through practices like communion?
6. The teaching describes sacraments as 'means of grace' that strengthen believers in their walk with God. In what practical ways have you experienced communion or baptism as a source of spiritual strength during seasons of struggle or doubt?
7. Martin Luther would remind himself 'I am a baptized believer' when facing temptation from Satan. How might regularly remembering your baptism help you resist sin and live as a new creation in Christ?
8. Bret explains that at the Lord's Table, God's promise to us is primary, not our promise to God. How does shifting focus from our commitment to God's commitment change your approach to communion?
9. Bret said, "When you are struggling with sin, it is good to come to the table." Why might someone feel they should avoid communion when struggling with sin? Why is the opposite actually true?

10. Bret mentioned there are times he powerfully senses the Holy Spirit at communion, and times he just feels like he ate bread and drank a bit of juice. Does this resonate with you? Why doesn't our feeling change the reality of what God is doing? How can this truth comfort you during spiritually dry seasons?
11. Considering that Maretta was baptized at age 91 after reading a book left behind by accident, how does her story challenge our assumptions about God's timing and methods in drawing people to salvation?
12. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that partaking of one loaf works unity among believers, making us one body. How should this understanding of communion shape the way we relate to other Christians, especially those we find difficult?
13. Reflecting on the six baptisms witnessed in the service—people of different ages, backgrounds, and stories—what does this diversity reveal about the universal nature of the gospel and the body of Christ?

### **For Further Study:**

#### **On Sacraments:**

[What Is A Sacrament?](#) - teaching on Sacraments (March 7, 2010)

For all teachings giving an in-depth look at Sacraments, see the Teaching by Topic page for [Sacraments](#)

Sacraments are covered in the [BRCC Catechism](#) in questions 72, 73, and 74.

#### **On Water Baptism:**

For an in-depth look at water baptism, see the series "[Water Baptism](#)"

Water baptism is covered in the [BRCC Catechism](#) in questions 75, 76, and 77.

#### **On the Lord's Supper**

[What Is the Lord's Supper?](#) - teaching on the Lord's Supper (July 23, 2023)

For all teachings giving an in-depth look at the Lord's Supper, see the Teaching by Topic page for [Lord's Supper](#)

The Lord's Supper is covered in the [BRCC Catechism](#) in questions 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, and 83.