

The Heidelberg Catechism

on the Sacraments

65 Q. It is through faith alone that we share in Christ and all his benefits: where then does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts¹ by the preaching of the holy gospel,² and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.³

¹ John 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; Eph. 2:8

² Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25

³ Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:16

66 Q. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them he might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and seal that promise.¹

And this is God's gospel promise: to grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal life by grace because of Christ's one sacrifice accomplished on the cross.²

¹ Gen. 17:11; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 4:11

² Matt. 26:27-28; Acts 2:38; Heb. 10:10

67 Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes! In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and by the holy sacraments confirms that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹

¹ Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 3:27

68 Q. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.¹

¹ Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Baptism

69 Q. How does holy baptism remind and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?

A. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing¹ and with it promised that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, that is, all my sins.²

¹ Acts 2:38

² Matt. 3:11; Rom. 6:3-10; 1 Pet. 3:21

70 Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins because of Christ's blood poured out for us in his sacrifice on the cross.¹

To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives.²

¹ Zech. 13:1; Eph. 1:7-8; Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:5

² Ezek. 36:25-27; John 3:5-8; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 2:11-12

71 Q. Where does Christ promise that we are washed with his blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. In the institution of baptism, where he says:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."¹

"The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned."²

This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism "the water of rebirth"³ and the washing away of sins.⁴

¹ Matt. 28:19

² Mark 16:16

³ Titus 3:5

⁴ Acts 22:16

72 Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.¹

¹ Matt. 3:11; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 John 1:7

73 Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

A. God has good reason for these words. To begin with, God wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our sins just as water removes dirt from the body.¹ But more important, God wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that we are as truly washed of our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water physically.²

¹ 1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 1:5; 7:14

² Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27

74 Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes, Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people,¹ and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.²

Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.³ This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision,⁴ which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.⁵

¹ Gen. 17:7; Matt. 19:14

² Isa. 44:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; 16:31

³ Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14

⁴ Gen. 17:9-14

⁵ Col. 2:11-13

Q. 75. How are you reminded and assured in the Holy Supper that you participate in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in all his benefits?

A. In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup in remembrance of him. He has thereby promised that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood was shed for me, as surely as I see with my eyes that the bread of the Lord is broken for me, and that the cup is shared with me. Also, he has promised that he himself as certainly feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood as I receive from the hand of the minister and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given to me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ.

Q. 76. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his shed blood?

A. It is not only to embrace with a trusting heart the whole passion and death of Christ, and by it to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In addition, it is to be so united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always living and being governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul.

Q. 77. Where has Christ promised that he will feed and nourish believers with his body and blood just as surely as they eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup?

A. In the institution of the holy Supper which reads: The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

This promise is also repeated by the apostle Paul: When we bless "the cup of blessing," is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ." When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body, for it is one loaf of which we all partake.

Q. 78. Do the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?

A. No, for as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, nor becomes the washing away of sins by itself, but is only a divine sign and confirmation of it, so also in the Lord's Supper the sacred bread does not become the body of Christ itself, although, in accordance with the nature and usage of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ.

Q. 79. Then why does Christ call the bread his body, and the cup his blood, or the New Covenant in his blood, and why does the apostle Paul call the Supper "a means of sharing" in the body and blood of Christ?

A. Christ does not speak in this way except for a strong reason. He wishes to teach us by it that as bread and wine sustain this temporal life so his crucified body and shed blood are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life. Even more, he wishes to assure us by this visible sign and pledge that we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy tokens in remembrance of him, and that all his sufferings and his death are our own as certainly as if we had ourselves suffered and rendered satisfaction in our own persons.

Q. 80. What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the papal Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which he himself has accomplished on the cross once for all; (and that through the Holy Spirit we are incorporated into Christ, who is now in heaven with his true body at the right hand of the Father and is there to be worshipped). But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have forgiveness of sins through the sufferings of Christ unless it is again offered for them daily by the priest (and that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine and is therefore to be worshipped in them). Therefore the Mass is fundamentally a complete denial of the once for all sacrifice and passion of Jesus Christ (and as such an idolatry to be condemned).

Q. 81. Who ought to come to the table of the Lord?

A. Those who are displeased with themselves for their sins, and who nevertheless trust that these sins have been forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the passion and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and improve their life. The impenitent and hypocrites, however, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Q. 82. Should those who show themselves to be unbelievers and enemies of God by their confession and life be admitted to this Supper?

A. No, for then the covenant of God would be profaned and his wrath provoked against the whole congregation. According to the ordinance of Christ and his apostles, therefore, the Christian church is under obligation, by the office of the keys, to exclude such persons until they amend their lives.