

Sacraments of the Reformed Faith

Student's Guide

Introduction

This study guide is intended for small groups and short seminars to introduce the view of sacraments as held by Presbyterians and other branches of the reformed movement. This explains why references are made to the Westminster Confession, not as grounds of authority but for historical reference and clarity.

Ample blank spaces exist for the students to take notes.

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Lesson One: Rules of interpretation in the study of sacraments

Certain rules of interpretation become especially important in the study of the sacraments. The reason is the biblical data is often a part of a discourse on other subjects.

1. Unity of scripture
2. Validity of inferential logic
3. Cross-referencing is necessary
4. The principle of clarity.
5. The singularity of interpretation.

Westminster Confession of Faith

Extracts from Chapter 1- Of the Holy Scriptures
Rules of Interpretation (Hermeneutics)

The unity of scripture

Validity of inferential logic

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture:” Chapter 1, Article 6

Example: Seeing a man walking down the beach is a direct observation and counts as eye witness evidence. Seeing the footprints in the sand of a man is an indirect observation from which we *infer* that a man was walking on the beach.

Example: We do not need an example of women taking communion. We only need to ask if the whole congregation participates and if women are members. This establishes the fact, with no need of examples.

The necessity of cross-referencing

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." Chapter 1, Article 7: Westminster Confession, 1648

The clarity of scripture

"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. Chapter 1, Article 10 Westminster Confession, 1648

The singularity of interpretation

"...full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one)" WCF Chapter 1 Article 11

Questions

1. When a theology question is not “clearly propounded” in the Bible, what recourse do we have for knowing what is the correct doctrine?

_____ ¹

3. What should we do when a biblical text does not seem to deal fully with a doctrinal question? _____ ²

4. The infallible rule for interpreting the Bible is _____ ³

5. What is the view of the Westminster Confession with regard to various interpretations of a text? _____ ⁴

¹ Find other texts in scripture that are clearer.

² Take into account the totality of biblical teaching as it may relate to the subject at hand.

³ The Bible itself.

⁴ There is only one correct interpretation of any verse. It can be deduced from the ordinary rules of interpretation.

Lesson Two: The Covenant of Grace

Gen.17&Gal.3

- Elements of a covenant

- The meaning of *Sacraments*

Lesson Three: Baptism, meaning and mode

For teaching this section, you need only follow certain portions in Smalling's thesis on baptism.

The meaning

Three factors must be established in the mind of the students before they can fully grasp the full picture of the meaning and mode of baptism:

1. The continuity of the covenant of Abraham as the Christian covenant. Compare Gen.17 with Gal.3. Show that the Christian's covenant is the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled.
2. Circumcision as the sign and seal of that covenant. A good text for this is Rom.4:11
3. The replacement of circumcision by baptism. Use Col. 2:11-12 for this.

The mode

A very effective way to establish sprinkling or pouring as the biblical mode of baptism is the following group exercise. Let the students come to their own conclusions.

1. ¿What does water symbolize in the Bible?

Mt.3:11; Jn.1:13; 7:38-39; Acts 1:5; 11:15-16 _____⁵

Ez.36:25; Mt.27:24; Jn.13:5; Ef.5:26; Heb.10:22 _____

2. By what mode does God apply the person or thing that the water symbolizes?

Ez. 36:25-28; Tit.3:5-7; Acts 1:5,8; Acts 10:44,47; Acts 11:15-16

_____⁶

Catholic Baptism

Lesson Four: The Lord's Supper

Two questions to answer in the Lord's Supper

- Where is Christ in it? The doctrine of the *Real Presence*.
- How is grace communicated through it, if at all?

Four viewpoints

CATHOLIC

The grace operating in the Lord's Supper is saving grace. The rite operates by its own power. Christ is present because the elements are changed into the very flesh and blood of Christ. This doctrine is called Transubstantiation. It means the elements are transformed into the substance of Christ.

ZWINGLIAN VIEW (Held by Baptists and many other evangelicals)⁷

No grace is operating at all. It is a symbolic and instructive rite only. It is just an ordinance and memorial. Christ is not present in any sense whatsoever.

LUTHERAN

Grace is in Christ, who is in, around and through the elements. Grace is automatically operative in believers who do not resist it.

⁵ The Holy Spirit and cleansing.

⁶ Outpouring

⁷ Zwingli was a Swiss reformer during the time of Luther. He and Luther had a dispute this point.

PRESBITERIAN AND REFORMED

An encouraging and preserving grace is operative but not a saving grace in the sense of provoking regeneration. It operates through the faith of the believer by the Holy Spirit. No power or grace is found in the elements themselves. Christ is present in the believer, not in the elements presented. It is three things: An ordinance, a memorial and communion. By *communion* it is meant that there is a real spiritual connection with the spirit of Christ through act of believing participation.

Evidence for the reformed view

The table of demons parallel: 1Cor.10:16-22

The use of the term *communion*

God's discipline for offenders: 1Cor.11:27-34

Lesson Five: Secondary issues

Paedo-Communion

Some hold that small children should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. They base this view on the old Passover feast in which the whole family participated, children included.

The historical reformed view rejects paedo-communion on the grounds of 1Cor. 11:29. What in this text would suggest that small children should not partake? _____⁸

Auto-communion

Some people think it is permissible to serve themselves the Lord's Supper in the privacy of their own home. What in 1Cor.11:17-22 suggests this to be inappropriate? See also 1Cor.10:17 _____⁹

Serving the elements to people absent

⁸ The person partaking must be able to discern the Lord's body in it. This means able to understand what the elements represent, namely the sacrifice of Christ and his atonement for sin. This requires a degree of mental conceptions beyond the level of small children. Furthermore, the old Passover was celebrated in private homes, not in congregational worship as in the New Testament. Therefore, that argument is invalid.

⁹ The Lord's Supper is also a celebration of the unity we have among believers in Christ, as one body. In this we see a play on the word "body." The bread not only represents the physical body of Christ, it also represents the corpus of believers in him. Therefore it is illogical, indeed contradictory, to partake of the Lord's Supper alone.

Group Exercise, optional

Based on the Westminster Confession, Chapter 27, answer the following questions:

1. Of what are the sacraments the sign and seals?

_____ 10

2. Who instituted the sacraments?

_____ 11

3. Who or what do the sacraments represent?

_____ 12

4. On what does the efficacy of the sacraments depend?

_____ 13

5. Who has the authority to administer the sacraments?

_____ 14

6. What relationship do the Old Testament sacraments have with those of the New Testament? _____ 15

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_____ 10 The covenant of grace

11 Jesus

12 Christ and his benefits

13 The Holy Spirit

14 Ministers of the gospel duly ordained.

15 The same thing, in that it represents the same spiritual aspects.

