

Sacraments of the Reformed Faith

Teacher's Manual

A Study 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 This explains why references are made to the Westminster Confession, not as grounds of authority but for historical reference and clarity.

The texts in red are instruction notes to the teacher and are not found in the student's manual. This is the only difference between the teacher's manual and the student's manual.

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Lesson One: Rules of interpretation in the study of sacraments

Explain why the study of sacraments is problematic. The Bible contains no apostolic dissertation on sacraments and therefore comes within the domain of inferential logic. We infer correct doctrine from a variety of clues within other subjects.

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.

Use elements of the first chapter of the Westminster Confession to establish the following principles of interpretation.

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

Contrary to dispensationalism, reformed theology views the Bible as a unit. Though we are not under the law, we are heirs of a covenant established in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New.

The apostolic practices of sacraments are therefore fulfillments of Old Testament rites. A full understanding of the sacraments is impossible without a review of their Old Testament precedents.

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

Explain the difference between direct observation and inferential logic.

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.

In most domains of study, including science and jurisprudence, most evidence is inferential. It is considered just as valid as a direct observation. Both forms of evidence are valid for establishing facts.

So it is in theology. All the evidence for the Trinity is inferential. Most of the evidence for the deity of Christ is also inferential. Theologians consider these doctrines more than adequately established by the inferential evidence.

In the study of sacraments, all of the evidence is inferential. Examples of the practice of a sacrament are therefore unnecessary to establish sound doctrine, if the truth is founded on "good and necessary" deductions.

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

No epistle exists to explain the details of baptism or the Lord's Supper. All of the evidence is found within the context of other subjects. Therefore we need to accumulate these bits of data throughout the whole Bible to get a clearer picture.

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

Even taking into account the need for inferential logic, the Bible is sufficiently clear that the average person can find out the truth on this subject, using the common sense principles of interpretation. In theology, this is called the *perspicuity* of scripture. ¹

The singularity of interpretation

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

Our confessional standards assert that there exists only one correct interpretation of any scripture passage. If two Christians disagree about the meaning of a text, at least one is wrong, possibly both. It is inappropriate to ask each person in a group what the verse means to them. It doesn't matter what it means to them. It matters only what the writer intended, period. That meaning can be deduced by applying the above rules of hermeneutics. This view is supported by such texts as 2Cor.1:12-13 and 2Pet.2:10.

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?
_____ ²

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

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

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

Lesson Two: The Covenant of Grace

Gen.17&Gal.3

- Elements of a covenant

Describe here what must be involved in a contract for it to be rationally legal. These elements are: Identification of the parties; statement of benefits; statement of responsibilities; how long the contract lasts; how it can be terminated; how it is ratified. In modern times, ratification is by signing documents. In Abraham's time, by verbal oaths. You may elaborate on this point if you wish, by referring to this in the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 6.

A good exercise is to have the students find these elements in Gen.17 and after discussing where the verses are that show these, and then do the same exercise with Gal.3. This powerfully roots in their minds that the Abrahamic covenant is in fact the Christian covenant.

- The meaning of *Sacraments*

From the Latin *Sacra*=holy and *Mentus*=mind. Meaning something holy presented to the mind for contemplation. Reformed teachers prefer this term to *ordinances* or *memorial* because those terms do not convey the idea of a communication of grace. In reformed theology, the Lord's Supper is three things: Ordinance, memorial and communion. In non-reformed circles, it is only the first two. We feel the term *sacrament* helps us make that distinction.

Lesson Three: Baptism, meaning and mode

For teaching this section, you need only follow certain portions in Smalling's thesis on baptism. See <http://smallings.com/english/Essays/Baptism.html>

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 _____⁶

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

_____⁷

After establishing the point, mention that immersion is not sinful, just unnecessary. It is a valid baptism. However, show the students that immersion is a reflection of how some people think about salvation.

If salvation were the product of human action, it would seem logical to go to a baptistery and offer oneself to be applied to the water.

If we believe salvation is sovereignly applied through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit while we were dead in sin, then sprinkling or pouring is an appropriate celebration of that.

Therefore, the mode of baptism has a certain importance because it reflects what we really believe about salvation. See Titus 3:4-8 for a presentation as to which is correct.

Catholic Baptism

Some claim Catholic baptism is valid and that converts from Catholicism must not be baptized again.

They base this view on the doctrine of the Trinity. The Catholic Church indeed holds to a correct doctrine of God. So if the church baptizes in the name of the biblical God, then the baptism must be valid.

Others deny the validity of Catholic baptism. Though they agree the Trinity is a necessary doctrine, they contend it is not the only one. They insist baptism must also represent the biblical gospel, justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Rome openly rejects justification by faith alone.

Those who reject Catholic baptism base their thinking largely on Gal.1: 8-9 in which Paul argues that any who teach another gospel than that which he proclaims, is cursed of God. Such a person or entity must not be viewed as Christian. Those who invalidate Catholic baptism, argue it is inconceivable a baptism could be valid if performed by an entity cursed of God and cannot be recognized as Christian.

They also argue that the Larger Catechism says only duly ordained ministers of the gospel may administer the sacraments.⁸ They question if a Catholic priest can be called a minister of the gospel.

The issue revolves around whether the Catholic Church should be considered Christian. The validity of Catholic baptism continues to be debated in reformed circles.

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.

Ex opera operato: Operates by its own power. Once the prayer of institution takes place, grace is inherent in the elements themselves so that any who partake, receive grace by the mere act of swallowing, whether they have faith or not.

ZWINGLIAN VIEW (Held by Baptists and many other evangelicals) ⁹

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.

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

Paul is bringing out his strongest argument as to why Christians should not partake of food offered to idols.

The argument is based on these premises:

- A connection exists between idolatry and demonic spirits.
- Participation in pagan festivals, where food is offered to idols, is to enter into spiritual communion with demons.
- It is impossible to be in communion with Christ and communion with demons at the same time.

From these premises we draw the inference that Paul considered the Lord's Supper to be a communion with the spirit of Christ.

The use of the term *communion*

This term means *fellowship* (gr.- *koinonia*). It is a relational word and refers to something shared between persons. Therefore, reformed theologians say the Zwinglian view is correct to assert the Lord's Supper is an ordinance and memorial. This, however, does not go far enough. We affirm it is three things, not just two: An ordinance, a memorial and a communion with Christ. If this is not correct, then it leaves the question as to why three words are used to describe it and not just two.

This is why reformed theologians call the Lord's Supper a means of grace because Christ communicates grace when we are in fellowship with him, just as he does through the Word of God and prayer.

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

Every view of the Lord's Supper, except the Zwinglian, argues it is inconceivable that God would threaten his own people with sickness or death for misuse of the rite if it were nothing more than a symbol. It would seem there must be a connection between the symbol and the thing symbolized for a desecration of the rite to be taken that seriously.

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? _____¹⁰

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 _____¹¹

Serving the elements to people absent

This delicate question is not clearly addressed in scripture. Traditionally, an ordained elder may go to the house of a shut-in and hold a communion service. This is not the same as taking the bread and wine previously consecrated in a worship service and distributing them privately. The minister performs a separate and distinct consecration of elements at that location.

Group Exercise, optional

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

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

_____ 12

2. Who instituted the sacraments?

_____ 13

3. Who or what do the sacraments represent?

_____ 14

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

_____ 15

5. Who has the authority to administer the sacraments?

_____ 16

6. What relationship do the Old Testament sacraments have with those of the New Testament? _____ 17

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¹ The reformers, especially Luther, elaborated this doctrine because the Catholic Church forbade laymen to possess the scriptures on the grounds that the word of God was too obscure for them to interpret. All interpretations, they said, must therefore be through the priest alone.

² Find other texts in scripture that are clearer.

³ Take into account the totality of biblical teaching as it may relate to the subject at hand.

⁴ The Bible itself.

⁵ There is only one correct interpretation of any verse. It can be deduced from the ordinary rules of interpretation.

⁶ The Holy Spirit and cleansing.

⁷ Outpouring

⁸ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q:179.

⁹ Zwingli was a Swiss reformer during the time of Luther. He and Luther had a dispute this point.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² The covenant of grace

¹³ Jesus

¹⁴ Christ and his benefits

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit

¹⁶ Ministers of the gospel duly ordained.

¹⁷ The same thing, in that it represents the same spiritual aspects.