

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #32, Lord's Day 25*

## Faith and the Sacraments



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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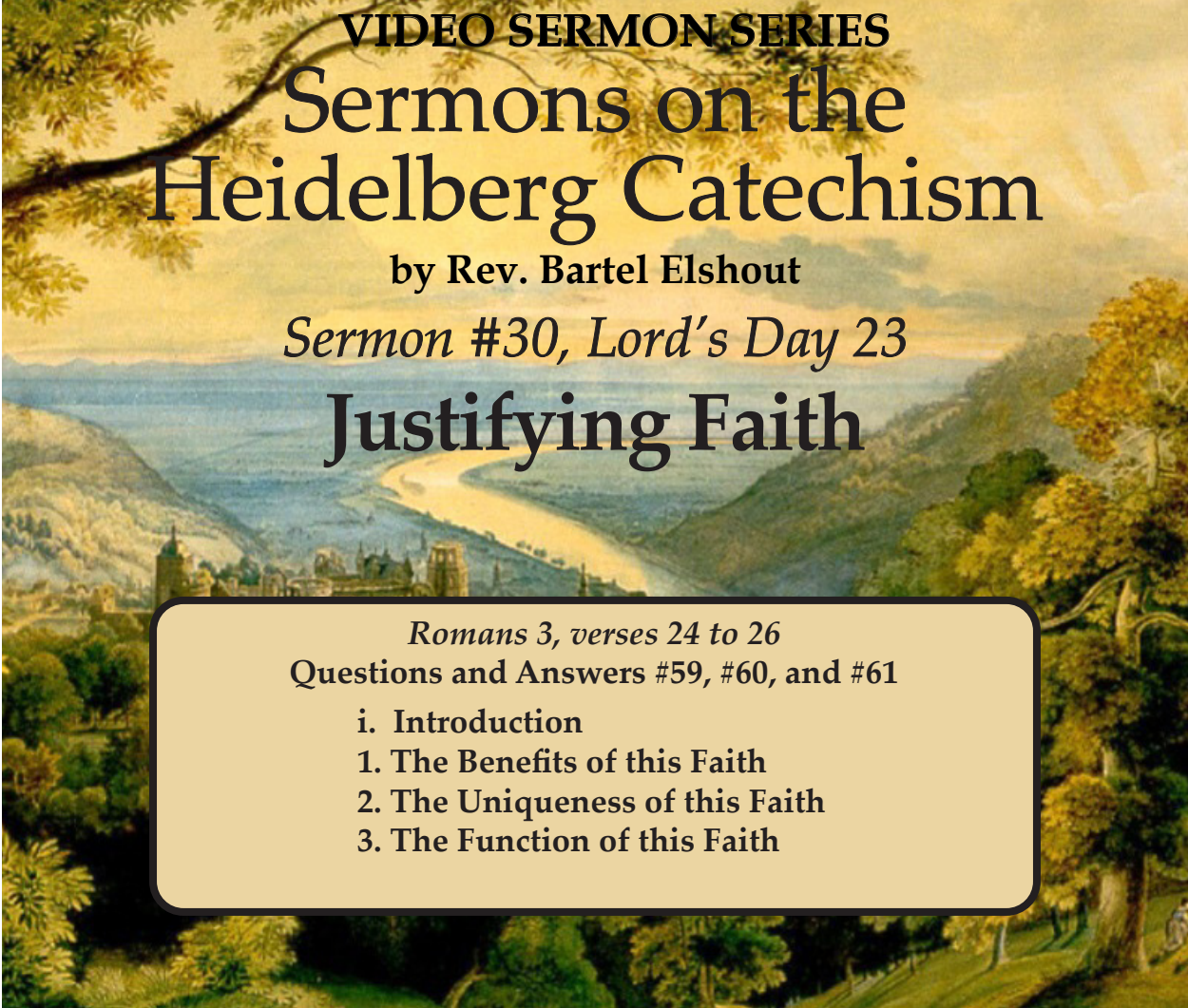
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*Sermon #32, Lord's Day 25*

**Faith and the Sacraments**

*Romans 8, verses 31 and 32*

Questions and Answers #65 thru #68

**i. Introduction and Review**

- 1. The Purpose of the Sacraments**
- 2. The Nature of the Sacraments**
- 3. The Blessedness of the Sacraments**

**Introduction and Review**

And for the last few weeks, we have addressed the vital question that was presented to us in Lord's Day 23, *How art thou righteous before God?* (Question #60). Congregation, have you reflected on that question? Boys and girls, have you thought about it? Have you asked your moms and dads to explain that Question to you? How are you, how am I righteous before God? Because, why is that such an important question? Because, congregation, if we are not righteous before God, then the journey of our life will not end well. And so, it ought to be a matter of the greatest concern for us and for our children to realize that this short journey of ours, this fragile life of ours can end at any moment. And then, the question is, if that were to happen, do you know, based on biblical grounds, do you know that you are righteous in God's sight?

And we saw there is only one way to be righteous in God's sight, and that is to have a righteousness that is acceptable to God; not a righteousness of our own making, because we have none. As we saw, and the Bible tells us that even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. In other words, from our side, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable in God's sight. And that's the critical issue. But the wonderful thing of the gospel is, the gospel unveils to us that that which God requires of man, that perfect, flawless righteousness, which we, as sinners, can no longer produce; that God himself has provided that righteousness in his only begotten Son; and

that God offers to us, in the gospel, the righteousness which he requires. What an amazing reality that is, and he offers it to us freely, without money and without price.

And then Lord's Day 23, gave us this extraordinary Answer, this Answer that so profoundly sets before us the essential truth of the gospel, that *Though—Though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all of God's commandments, and kept none of them, and am inclined to all evil; that notwithstanding, God—out of pure mercy, for the sake of Christ's merits—imputes to me—the sinner—the perfect satisfaction, holiness and righteousness of Christ—and that God then views me in terms of that righteousness; views me as if I had never sinned. That's the only way we can be righteous before God. And that righteousness becomes ours by the simple exercise of faith—by a true faith.*

And that brings us then to Lord's Day 25. Last week, of course, we considered the connection between faith and works, and we then emphasized that that faith, that faith that secures that complete salvation, that faith that makes me righteous in God's sight, that faith itself is not a good work which merits God's favor. Remember what we said last week, that faith is the empty beggar's hands; it's the beggar who opens his hands to receive from his benefactor the gift that the benefactor wants to bestow upon him.

Now, Lord's Day 25, please, of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question #65: *Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?*

The Answer is: *From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.*

Question #66: *What are the sacraments?*

The Answer: *The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, that is, that He grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.*

Question #67: *Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?*

The Answer is: *Yes, indeed, for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.*

Question #68: *How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant, or testament?*

The Answer is: *Two, namely, holy baptism and the holy supper.*

So, this Lord's Day addresses the vital connection between faith and the sacraments. And then, we could actually put it this way, faith and the means of grace, because it addresses those two vital means of grace—the preaching of God's Word, and the administration of the sacraments. But this is a Lord's Day that sets the stage for the next Lord's Days, in which we will do an in-depth study of the two sacraments.

So, we're going to look at *The Purpose of the Sacraments*; secondly, *The Nature of the Sacraments*; and thirdly, *The Blessedness of the Sacraments*.

First of all, *The Purpose of the Sacraments*—look at Question and Answer #65: the Holy Spirit works faith through the preaching of the Word, and he confirms it; he confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

Secondly, *The Nature of the Sacraments*; Question and Answer #66, where it says, *What are the sacraments?*—*They are holy visible signs and seals, appointed by God.*

And then thirdly, The Blessedness of the Sacraments—Question #67: *Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?* In other words, the sacraments are designed to work and to strengthen the assurance of the believer, so that we find our rest in nothing else but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

First of all, then,

### **1. The Purpose of the Sacraments**

As you know by now, the Questions that are asked in the Catechism are often very weighty. So it is with Question #65. Because by way of this Question, the authors of the Catechism are making a very profound statement. So rather than reading it as a question, let us now read it as a regular sentence. *We are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only.* That's a very important statement. This is what we call classic Reformation theology. *We are made partakers*—that was the amazing discovery of Martin Luther,<sup>1</sup> further unpacked by John Calvin,<sup>2</sup> a truth that had been so completely lost, that had been so corrupted, and so the authors of the Catechism are so determine to make sure we understand this. That the only way we can be partakers, the only way we can be the recipients of Christ and of all his benefits, of all that he has secured, is by faith only. Faith only is the divinely-ordained means whereby we become the recipients of all of those blessings.

That's what I meant when I said before, that's what faith does. Faith in itself is such a very simple exercise. Faith is the simple act of trusting what God says. Faith is the simple act whereby we say “amen” to all that God reveals in his Word. And that simple act of faith so honors God, it so pleases him, it so delights him that when we exercise that faith, in all of its simplicity, that he promises in his Word that upon that simple exercise of faith, he makes us partakers.

And notice the order, *of Christ and all His benefits*; not the other way around. It doesn't say he'll make us partakers of all of these wonderful benefits of salvation, which is true—the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, restoration into God's favor, adoption into God's family, to be the recipients of God's favor—all those benefits become ours. But the Catechism emphasizes—and that's consistent with the Word of God—all those benefits flow out of Christ. By faith, we become partakers of Christ. Faith unites us to Christ. And by virtue of that union with Christ, all those benefits become ours.

Oh, how amazing is that simple exercise of faith, that you can see how the Father loves his Son. Because, congregation, why is it—you've heard me say this before—why is it that God showers upon a guilty sinner, showers upon that sinner all of those benefits, all of them? Because faith, in all of its simplicity, it so supremely honors his Son. And that's what delights the Father, when we honor his Son. And we honor his Son by trusting in his Son, by relying wholly and exclusively on him.

But then, the Question is, *Whence doth this faith proceed?*—this faith of which the Apostle says, without faith it is impossible to please him (Hebrews 11:6)? Is that faith, that simple act of trusting in Christ and his finished work, is that faith something that we can manufacture ourselves? Congregation, and the Answer in the Catechism is simple, but profoundly simple. It says it very simply, *From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel.* So the Catechism simply states what the Word of God teaches throughout, that the Holy Ghost, the third

1 Martin Luther (1483–1546), was a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

2 John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) – was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and well-known Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost is the author of saving faith. In other words, by nature, we are dead in trespasses and sins. By nature, we have hearts that are utterly hostile to God and hostile to his Word. And that's why a miracle has to happen. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit does. He works faith in the heart.

The language is chosen carefully here. Because true faith is not merely a matter of the mind. It's not merely saying, "One plus one equals two." I'm a sinner, Christ died for sinners, so I believe in him and I am saved. There's an element of truth to that, but it's not just a matter of the mind. When the Holy spirit works faith, that engages us in the entire person. He works in the heart. In other words, when he works saving faith, not only does he enlighten our mind, but he will engage our affections, and he will incline our will. Because, when we talk about the heart, boys and girls, I used to wonder, when I was your age, what does the Bible mean by the heart, what does it mean by a "new heart"? And of course, we're not talking about the heart that beats inside my chest. What the Bible means is, just like your body can only function with a beating heart, so our soul also has a heart. And so, our spiritual heart is that place where those three important elements of who we are—we call that *the three faculties of our soul*: our mind, our affections, and our will—where those three interact together, and make us who we are. And that's how we live. That's how we function. We have a mind; we have affections; and we have a will. With our mind, we understand. With our affections, we love. With our will, we act. And by nature, our mind is hostile to God. By nature, we have no desire after the knowledge of God's ways. By nature, our affections are entirely oriented on sinful things and sinful desires. And therefore, our will, by nature, is so deprived. Our will acts in conformity with that which we know and desire, and by nature, we desire sin. And so, we act accordingly.

So, when the Holy Spirit, however, when he regenerates us, when he makes us spiritually alive, when he makes us a new creature in Christ, he gives us, indeed, a new heart. He renews the inner man. And as a result of that amazing work of regeneration, those three faculties of our heart, of our soul, begin to function correctly again. Our mind now becomes focused on God and his Word. Our affections are now towards God. And our will begins to function again correctly. And all of this happens, you see, in regeneration.

And what happens in regeneration—that's so important in light of this language—is that the Holy Spirit transforms a spiritually-dead sinner into a believing sinner. So when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he unites us to Christ. When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, he gives us that whole new propensity, which we call "faith." In other words, he equips us with the ability to believe. And as a result, we begin to exercise that faith. And that's why we need to remember, if by grace, we cannot deny that we have been privileged again and again to put our trust in this Christ, we would have never been able to do so, had not the Holy Spirit granted you the gift of faith. And so, we need the gift of faith, in order to exercise faith. Just like you can only see when you have a properly-functioning eye. You can only hear when you can have a properly-functioning ear. And so, in order to believe in Christ, the Spirit of God has to work in us the gift of faith that enables us to exercise faith.

But now, very wisely, the Catechism, continuing, says that he works that faith. How? He *works that faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments*. So what's very important here is that the Holy Spirit always accomplishes this amazing work in the hearts of sinners by the use of means. So not only has God determined who will be saved, but God has determined how we will be saved. And so, the Catechism, here, correctly emphasizes that the normal way in which the Holy Spirit accomplishes that is through the preaching of the Word and the use of the sacraments. Those are the two means of grace. And it doesn't mean that those

means of grace, in and of themselves, give us grace; but they are the means ordained by God. To use a very simple example, we cannot live without God sustaining our health. And so, our health is a gift of God. But God has appointed means whereby we maintain our health. So, in order to be healthy, we need to use the means God has given us. We need to nourish our bodies, we need to drink, we need to have proper rest. And when we use those means correctly, with God's blessing, it will yield health. And so it is also spiritually.

So, what the Answer here emphasizes is that the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to work faith, and he uses the sacraments to confirm faith. And we will see in a moment, of course, he uses the Word itself to strengthen the faith that he works in our hearts. So we could say that he uses the preaching of the gospel to work faith and to strengthen faith, and the unique purpose of the sacraments is to confirm faith, to confirm faith that already exists.

And the importance—let me just give you a couple of biblical examples—how important it is for us to understand the important role of the preaching of the gospel. That's why we have to so highly value the preaching of the gospel. That's why, whenever the gospel is preached, our place should never be empty. Because, when the gospel is preached, that is the unique moment when the Spirit of God is pleased to use that preaching to work and strengthen faith.

So, think, for instance of the story of Philip and the eunuch (Acts chapter 8). Here's this man who comes from Ethiopia, comes to Jerusalem, obtains the scroll of Isaiah; obviously came moved by God. And yet, he came away empty. He came away with a scroll he could not read and he couldn't understand. Now, God could have supernaturally enlightened the mind of that man, but he didn't. Instead, he takes his servant from a thriving congregation, Philip, and he brings him to the wilderness to meet this man. Because that's God's ordained way. And then God uses the preaching of Philip, who preached unto him Jesus, to grant to this man what he needed to believe the gospel that he had in his hands. But God sent one of his servants to explain his Word to him.

Then, there's Cornelius, the Roman centurion, a man who was devout and who feared God, a man who prayed faithfully, who longed for instruction (Acts chapter 10). And again, even though God appeared and sent an angel, yet that did not help the man. That angel did not explain the gospel to Cornelius. But then, God sovereignly allows Peter to have a vision, and inclines Peter, who was so very devoutly a Jew, by means of that vision, told Peter that the time had come that the distinction between Jew and Gentile had fallen away, and what God had called "clean," he had no right to call "unclean." And then the servants of Cornelius come. And so, God directs his servant to go to Cornelius and to proclaim his Word to him. There's Lydia, and Lydia, who, together with women, gathered at the river side, and yet, even though they gathered there, they didn't truly grasp the truth of God's Word (Acts 16:13–15). And so, God sovereignly sends his servant to explain that Word to them.

And so, that's just to highlight the very important connection between faith and the preaching of the gospel. God has ordained the preaching of the gospel to accomplish and to work faith in the hearts of sinners. Romans 10, verse 14: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" First Corinthians 1, verse 21: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And of course, God taught that lesson to Ezekiel, because Ezekiel appeared to have a calling that was foolish (Ezekiel 37:1–14). God told him to prophesy to a valley of dead bones. You would say, "What a foolish exercise." But remarkably, as he begin to preach, the bones begin to move. The Spirit of God comes and brings life where there was deadness. And that's the important point here that is made. That's why we have to highly value the proclamation of God's Word.

That's why, when we come to the house of God, when we gather here for public worship, when

God's Word is preached, this is the special arena of the Holy Spirit's activity; when his Word is preached faithfully, when Christ is preached, it is the Spirit of God who uses that preaching to quicken sinners dead in trespasses and sins. He uses that preaching to draw sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal and the living Word. But then, he also confirms that faith which he works through the preaching of the Word. He strengthens that faith, by means of the sacraments.

And congregation, *What are then the sacraments?* That brings us to the next point, namely,

## 2. The Nature of the Sacraments

The word "sacrament" comes from a Latin word, "sacramentum". And basically, there are two possible meanings of that word. It could refer to an oath that the Romans would swear when they would join the army. They would swear an oath that they would be loyal to the emperor and to his army. But it could also be a translation of a word that we would call "mystery". And so, somehow, all of that is incorporated in our use of it, because, the sacraments, in all of its simplicity, when we have the Lord's Supper, very simple, we have bread and wine. And yet, something remarkable happens in the Lord's Supper as it is administered. And that Christ is pleased to use those simple, visible means to strengthen the faith of his children. And it is also a time, when God, as it were, confirms an oath to his people, where God, by means of those visible signs, declares to his people, "As surely as you see those signs; as surely as you see the water of baptism; as surely as you eat the bread, and as surely as you drink the wine, so sure it is that I will be true you, my people; I will be true to my Word; I will be true to my promises; I will be true to my covenant. I will be your God, and you shall be my people. So that, in terms of the meaning of the word.

So, *What are the sacraments?* (Question #66). That's the important thing.

The Answer is: *The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end,—for this purpose—that by the use thereof He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.* Puritans were fond of saying that in the sacraments, we do not get a different Christ. Let that be understood. But, they said, we get him better. It's the same Christ that's preached to us in the gospel, but in the sacraments, we get him better. And so, we can say that *the sacraments are God's visual aids*. So, God, in his condescending love and mercy, has purposed that he would affirm his own Word by means of these visible holy signs, his visual aids.

Just like, boys and girls, just like your teacher, in the classroom, will often use visual aids—will use pictures, will use PowerPoint presentations to help you understand what he or she is teaching you. And that's what God does. He is so gracious, he so desires that his people grasp the gospel. He so desires that his people benefit from the gospel, benefit from all that Christ has done and accomplished, that he gives us those visible aids, those visible signs and seals to affirm, in a very powerful way, the essential truths of the gospel.

And what are they? It says, to *declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel*. And what is it?—*that He grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross*. And we know that, especially in the Lord's Supper, but in baptism as well, the focus is always Christ and his accomplished work. That's what we have to realize. And especially in the Lord Supper, although, implied in baptism, the focus is on what Christ accomplished by his sacrifice. And so, what the Catechism beautifully underscores here is that God wants his children to know that he freely grants them the remission of sins. And so, God does not want his children to live in doubt. Now, as you know, doubt is a painful reality in the life of every believer. There is not a single believer who does not occasionally struggle with doubt; sometimes more, and sometimes less. To be a believer means that your whole life you will be struggling against unbelief.

But now, you see, God, as our heavenly Father, comes so near to us in the sacraments, and he gives us visual aid. He gives us a visual demonstration of who he is. That's why it says "the more fully declare." So by means of those signs of water in baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, by means of those signs, God teaches us something. But he also seals something to us. In other words, he wants us to better understand what the gospel is all about, but he also wants to seal it. As if to say, "My dear people, not only do I declare to you who I am; not only do I want you to know who I am in Christ, and what Christ has accomplished for you; but I want to make sure that you actually understand that this is true for you. I want to seal it. I want to seal it to your heart." And that tells you that it is God's delight for his people to live in the joy of his salvation; that he wants us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and he wants us to arrive at an assured knowledge of who Christ is and what he has accomplished. And he grants us freely the remission of sins.

On numerous occasions, I've tried to reinforce this truth, and it comes to the foreground here again. Congregation, to know that your sins are forgiven belongs to the basic privileges of a child of God. God wants his children to know that. He wants his children to understand that. He wants his children to believe it. He wants them to rest in that blessed reality confirmed by the sacraments, that when we put our trust in Christ, that God always responds by granting us the full and free pardon of our sins. And so, when we doubt that—and sometimes we do; sometimes our faith is weak—when we doubt that, we are living below our privileges. And so, that's why God has ordained that the sacraments be administered regularly. He knows how weak, he knows how easily we stumble, he knows how easily we lose sight of Christ. And so, not only through the preaching of his Word, but by the sacraments, he wants to redirect our attention. He wants us, as it were, he wants us to refocus, to refocus on Christ and on his finished work, to assure us that our sins are forgiven.

And didn't Jesus say that when he instituted the Lord's Supper? "For this is my blood of the new testament," he says, in Matthew 26:28, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Jesus was saying to his disciples, "I am going to shed my blood on Calvary's cross to secure the remission of your sins." And God is grieved when we doubt the sincerity of that essential element of the gospel. That's why it is so harmful when it is suggested that the knowledge of the forgiveness of your sins is almost unattainable, it's only something that a very privileged few rarely experience. Nothing is further from the truth. Nothing is more contrary to the gospel. Nothing is more contrary to the very purpose of the sacraments. And so, the purpose of the sacraments is to strengthen the faith that man has lost.

So that means, of course, that only true believers benefit from the sacraments. Just because I sit at the Lord's table, does not necessarily mean that I am a recipient of those blessings. It's possible to sit at the Lord's table and not be a true believer. And so, the person who sits at the Lord's table without being a true believer will not receive that blessing. But those who are true believers, who are united to Christ, they will be strengthened by that sacrament; same with baptism. One of the reasons why we are preaching about the meaning of baptism, also as the biblical truth of baptism, as set forth so powerfully in the *form for baptism*, is for you to grasp what it is that God is communicating in baptism. But again, only by faith do we benefit from what the sacrament of baptism sets before us. In other words, it's only in the life of the believer that that which is signified, that which is revealed, that which is set before us, will also be sealed to our soul.

So then, we go on—we go on to Question #67. Let me just back up a minute—how could I overlook. So, he grants us freely the remission of sin, *and life eternal*. You see, the two belong together. God remits the sins of his people, so that they would enjoy eternal life. And that begins

here, that begins here. And what is *eternal life* again? It is to live in union and communion with God. That's why we call the Lord's table, *the Communion Table*. Because on the basis of what God sets before us, on the basis of the sacrifice of his Son, God desires communion with his people. He desires fellowship on the basis of that perfect sacrifice accomplished on the cross.

Question #67: *Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?* It's almost, we would say, it seems like they are repeating themselves. But they are purposely repeating themselves. And again, in the context, the historical context in which this was written, it was very important that this truth would be repeated over and over again. And again, when you come home, you can look at this Lord's Day again, and you will see that that statement, "the sacrifice of Christ," it appears three times: once in the Answer to Question #66, and twice in the Answer to Question #67.

And again, let's read Question #67 as a declarative statement rather than a question. So, *both word and sacraments, then, are ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation.* And so you probably noticed that the word "only" occurs several times in this Answer. As you know, that word was so important to the Reformers. You could almost say that the word "only," that word "only" represents the core of what the Reformation was all about. And so, God wants to get this truth across to his people, this fundamental truth that Christ and him crucified can be the only ground of our salvation. First Corinthians 3, verse 11, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I don't think there's anybody here that would argue about that.

But now, the next question is, do we grasp it experientially? Are you resting only in Jesus Christ and him crucified? Why do I ask that question? Because I know from my own experience how easily we are diverted, how inclined we are to rest in something other than Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's why it's so important, with the Lord's Supper, especially with the Lord's Supper, that sacrament that is ordained to strengthen and to nourish the believer, is that we come there not to celebrate our conversion, that we come there not because we happened to be moved emotionally; but that we come there to do all of this in remembrance of him. And so, Christ, when he instituted the Lord's Supper, he is saying that the purpose of this sacrament, and that's true for baptism as well, "The purpose of it is to direct your focus entirely to me, to direct your focus entirely to my finished work as the only ground of your salvation."

And that's why God, in causing his people to grow spiritually, will take away from us all that which we lean on outside of Christ. So if, secretly, we delight in our tears, and we delight in our emotions, and we delight in our feelings, he will take it away from us. He will take it away from us. Not that God doesn't want us to experience the joy of salvation, but if that becomes our secret grounds, if that becomes more precious to us than Christ, God will take it away, because he is jealous of the honor of his Son, and in his Fatherly love, he is determined to teach his children this lesson, to trust nothing else except Christ and him crucified, as the only grounds of our hope. So, if secretly, we trust in our experiences, as sweet as they may be—I do not want in any way to diminish that; it is so sweet when we have a fresh sense, But if those experiences become more valuable than Christ and him crucified, God will take it away from us, to make us rest in Christ and Christ alone.

So, the Answer is: *Yes, indeed*—it certainly is so—for *the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.* The third time that the authors of the Catechism, the third time that they highlight the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

And so, God wants his people to realize how fully sufficient that sacrifice is for their salvation. He wants them to grasp, also by means of this visual aid, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; and he wants God's children to be assured of how steadfast that foundation is; that that is a foundation that will not fail us. It will not fail us in life, it will not fail us when we die. And so many of God's children, at the end of their journey, end it by confessing that that was their only hope. They're only hope was in Christ and him crucified. And if that's the resting place of our soul, congregation, then we have everything.

And so, God, so graciously and so lovingly, not only feeds us with his Word, but he uses the sacraments. Zacharias Ursinus,<sup>3</sup> one of the authors of the Catechism, he puts it this way, when he talks about the connection between God's Word and the sacraments. He said, "In God's Word, God has given us a letter, if you will, a letter in which he reveals himself to us." But just like a king would do in olden days, especially in former days, when they would write a letter, they would add their royal seal to that letter, so that whoever received that letter would know, by virtue of that seal, that they could trust everything that was in that letter, to know that that letter came from the king himself. That's precisely what God does. So he gives us his Word, and that by means of the sacraments, he teaches us visually what he says in his Word—in other words, the sacraments do not reveal something other than the Word—but he adds his seal to it, as if to say to his people, "My dear people, it is really, really true, that I am your God for Christ's sake; that for Christ's sake, I am your Father; that for Christ's sake, I will never forsake you; that for Christ's sake, I am your God; that because of the finished work of Christ—that's why we read Romans 8, that nothing "shall [ever] be able to separate us from the love of God, which in Christ Jesus" (verses 38–39).

And so, congregation, how are we doing? How are we doing spiritually? Are you learning that Christ and him crucified is the only real reliable salvation and your hope? Do you desire nothing else but Christ and him crucified?

And the last Question is, *How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant, or testament?* (Question #68). And the Answer is: *Two*. And I will not weary you with the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism. That's why this Question was asked. You can research that yourself. But there were two sacraments in the Old Testament, two in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we have circumcision and Passover, and even our students, our children, have learned this in school and catechism. Those were bloody sacraments. Why? Because Christ had not come. And then, those bloody sacraments are replaced with unbloody sacraments. So baptism takes the place of circumcision, and the Lord's Supper takes the place of the Passover. Because the Old Testament sacraments, they looked forward to the coming of Christ, and the New Testament sacraments, they look back upon the Christ who has come, and who has brought this perfect sacrifice.

### **3. The Blessedness of the Sacraments**

And so, finally, and with that, we need to conclude this message. The question is, of what benefit, of what benefit, congregation, are the ministry of the Word and sacraments to us? Of what benefit are the means of grace to us? Do we value, do we truly value those means for what they are? Because they are so very, very precious. That's why we have to be so thankful that we were born and raised in an environment where those means were available; those means that God has blessed the lives of so many of us; those means, the means of his Word, and God has used that Word to do what he did to Lydia, opening our hearts to receive that Word, to receive the gospel,

3 Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), was a German Reformed theologian and Protestant Reformer who became the leading theologian of the Reformed Protestant movement of the Palatinate, serving both at the University of Heidelberg and the College of Wisdom.

to be led to a saving faith in Christ, to value the sacraments, also, the sacrament of baptism, the sacrament that often gets undervalued.

So the next few Lord's Days we're going to look at the sacrament of baptism, to see how also that sacrament is designed to sign—to signify—and seal all that Christ has done; Christ, and all of his benefits. And woe unto us if we live and die without having benefited from the means of grace. Because those very means of grace, they will testify against us.

Someone has said—not original with me—you can also drown in the water of your baptism. You can also, not only eat and drink judgment to yourself, you can also sit in church and bring judgment upon yourself. Because in the day of judgment, it will testify against you that you were literally surrounded by the means of grace, and yet that you did not respond to what God communicates in his Word, even though—and let me emphasize, faith is a gift of God, and that's true from one perspective. The other perspective, however, we need to preach just as well, that when God comes to us with the means of grace, he demands of us that we respond to those means. And so, may God continue to use the ministry of Word and sacrament also among us to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ. Amen.

### **Let's pray.**

Lord, we give thee thanks that we could gather here again today, that we could be instructed about the significance of the means of grace, ordained by thee to make sinners partakers of Christ and all his benefits. We pray that thou wouldst continue to bless those means in our congregation, that we would highly value the preaching of thy Word, and we would highly value the administration of the sacraments; that we would always prayerfully come to this house of worship, beseeching thee that thou wouldst render those means fruitful in our own hearts, and also in the hearts of our children. We pray for thy blessing, Lord, as we will return to our daily calling. We ask for thy blessing upon the labor of our hands. We ask for thy blessing upon our children. Bless us tonight as we meet at youth group, as we continue our study of the Book of Daniel. Be with our consistory as we hope to meet this Wednesday. And bless also the meetings on Saturday and Sunday, when young people will receive some significant and important instruction. And gather with us again this coming Lord's Day, and pardon our sins, for Christ's sake alone. Amen.