

Chapter XXV: The Word of God and the Sacraments in General

1. The Word of God

The Word of God is the most important means of grace, though Catholics ascribe this honor to the sacraments.

a. The Word and the Spirit. While the term 'means of grace' can be used in a broader sense, it is here used as a designation of the means which the Church is directed to employ. When we speak of the 'Word' here, we do not refer to the personal Word (second person in the Trinity, John 1:1 ff.), nor to the creative word of power, Ps. 33:6; but very specially to the Word of God as it is contained in Scripture and is preached to the Church. 1Pet. 1:25. It is the word of God's grace, and therefore the most important means of grace. While the emphasis falls on the Word as it is *preached*, it may also be brought to men in other ways: in the home and in the school, by means of conversation and religious literature. The Word is made effective as a means of grace only through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Word alone is not sufficient to work faith and conversion, but is yet the necessary instrument. While the Holy Spirit can, He does not ordinarily work without the Word. The preaching of the Word is made fruitful by the operation of the Spirit.

b. Two parts of the Word as a means of grace. The Word as a means of grace consists of two parts, namely, the law and the gospel. The law as a means of grace first of all serves the purpose of bringing men under conviction of sin, Rom. 3:20, making him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of the law, and becoming his tutor to lead him to Christ, Gal. 3:24. In the second place it is also the rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation. The gospel is a clear representation of the way of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ. It exhorts the sinner to come to Christ in faith and repentance, and promises those who truly repent and believe all the blessings of salvation in the present and in the future. It is the power of God unto salvation for every one that believes.

Rom. 1:16; "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

1 Cor. 1:18. "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God."

2. The Sacraments in General

The Word of God is complete as a means of grace, but the sacraments are not complete without the Word. This must be maintained over against the Roman Catholics, who teach that the sacraments contain all that is necessary unto salvation. The Word and the sacraments differ in the following particulars: (a) the Word is absolutely necessary, while the sacraments are not; (b) the Word serves to beget and to strengthen faith, while the sacraments can only strengthen it; and (c) the Word is for all the world, but the sacraments only for believers and their seed. The following points deserve attention:

a. The parts of the sacraments. Three parts must be distinguished in the sacraments, namely, (1) The outward and visible sign. Each one of the sacraments contains an external element. This consists of water in baptism, and of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. One who receives merely this may be said to receive the sacrament, but does not receive the whole, nor the most important part of it.

(2) The inward spiritual grace signified. A sign points to something that is signified, and this is the internal matter of the sacrament. It may be called:

righteousness of faith, Rom. 4:11, "and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them;"

the forgiveness of sins; faith and repentance, Mark 1:4; "John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins." Mark 16:16, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned." or

communion with Christ in His death and resurrection, Rom. 6:3-4; “³ Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.” Col. 2:11-12. “¹¹ in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

(3) The union between the sign and the thing signified. This really constitutes the essence of the sacrament. Where the sacrament is received in faith, the grace of God accompanies it.

The following definition may be given of a sacrament. A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ is represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and they, in turn, express their faith and obedience to God.

b. The number of the sacraments. During the Old Testament there were just two sacraments, namely, circumcision and passover. The former was instituted in the days of Abraham, and the latter in the time of Moses. Both were bloody sacraments in harmony with the Old Testament dispensation. The Church of the New Testament also has two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both of which are unbloody. After Christ has brought His perfect sacrifice, no more shedding of blood is needed. The Church of Rome enlarged the number of sacraments in an unwarranted manner by adding confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction.

c. Old and New Testament sacraments compared. The Church of Rome holds that there is an essential difference between the two: the former being merely typical, affecting only the legal standing of the recipient and not his spiritual condition, and depending for their effectiveness on the faith of those who received them; and the latter working spiritual grace in the hearts of the recipients irrespective of their spiritual condition, merely in virtue of the sacramental action. As a matter of fact, however, there is no *essential* difference, Rom. 4:11; 1 Cor. 5:7; 10:1-4; Col. 2:11. There are some dispensational

differences, however: (1) The Old Testament sacraments had a national aspect in addition to their spiritual significance. (2) They pointed forward to the coming sacrifice of Christ, while those of the New Testament point back to the completed sacrifice. (3) They did not convey to the recipient as rich a measure of spiritual grace as do the sacraments of the New Testament.

To Memorize. Passages pointing to:

a. The Word as a means of grace:

Rom. 10:17. "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

1 Cor. 1:18. "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God."

b. The twofold function of the law:

Rom. 3:20. "Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin."

Rom 7:7. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

1 John 5:3. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

c. The function of the gospel:

Rom. 1:16. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

1 Cor. 1:18. Cf. above under a.

d. The spiritual significance of the sacraments:

Rom. 4:11. "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision..."

1 Cor. 5:7. "For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ."

Col. 2:12. "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

John 6:51. "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

For Further Study:

a. Is the law also a rule of life for New Testament believers?

Matt. 5:17-19; "17 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Rom. 13:10; "Love works no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law."

Eph. 6:2; "Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise),"

Jas. 2:8-11; "8 Howbeit if ye fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: 9 but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is become guilty of all. 11 For he that said, Do not

commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but kills, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”

1 John 3:4; “Every one that does sin does also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

1 John 5:3. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

b. Can you prove that the sacraments are only for believers and their seed?

Gen. 17:10; “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised.”

Ex. 12:43-45; “⁴³ And Jehovah said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: there shall no foreigner eat thereof; ⁴⁴ but every man’s servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. ⁴⁵ A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof.”

Mark 16:16; Acts 2:39; “For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, [even] as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him.”

1 Cor. 11:28-29. “²⁸ But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he that eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.”

c. What dispute arose in the early Church about circumcision? Acts 15; Gal. 2:3-9.

Questions for Review:

1. What do we mean by the term ‘means of grace’?
2. What do we mean by ‘the Word of God’ as a means of grace?
3. Why is the Word the most important means of grace?
4. What is the relation between the Word and the Spirit?

5. What is the function of the law as a means of grace?
6. What is the function of the gospel?
7. How are the sacraments related to the Word?
8. How do Word and sacraments differ as means of grace?
9. What is a sacrament?
10. What are the component parts of a sacrament?
11. What is the sign in each one of the sacraments?
12. What is the thing signified in each?
13. How are the sign and the things signified related?
14. How did the Old Testament sacraments differ from those of the New?