

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 93. What are the sacraments of the New Testament?

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are, baptism and the Lord's supper.

Scripture References: Matt. 28:19. Matt. 26:26-28. Gen. 17:24-27.
Ex. 12:22-27.

Questions:

1. What were the sacraments of the Old Testament?
There were two sacraments under the Old Testament: circumcision and the passover.
2. When was circumcision first instituted and what was the spiritual meaning?
It was instituted in the ninety-ninth year of Abraham's life. At that time he, and all the men of his house were circumcised. The spiritual meaning of circumcision is that it signified the impurity and corruption of nature, the necessity of regeneration; and of being implanted in Christ in order to partake of the benefits of His mediation, together with a solemn engagement to be the Lord's.
3. What was the passover and when was it instituted?
The passover was instituted at the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was called the passover because the angel passed over the houses of the Israelites on whose houses the blood of the passover-lamb was stricken upon the lintels and side posts of their doors.
4. What are the sacraments of the New Testament?
The sacraments of the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's Supper.
5. How do the sacraments of the New Testament take the place of those of the Old Testament?
Baptism takes the place of circumcision and the Lord's Supper takes the place of the passover.
6. What are the sacraments according to the Roman Catholic church?
The Roman Catholic church states there are seven sacraments. In addition to baptism and the Lord's supper they add confirmation, penance, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction.

BADGES OF MEMBERSHIP

There are many in the church of today who can not understand why certain believers insist on putting emphasis on Baptism and the Lord's supper. You can hear the cry of the critics over and over again: "We don't like to hear the term 'sacrament' for it sounds too much like the Roman Catholic church." Or, "We do not feel that we should attach any importance to the sacraments for Christ is the important one!" Needless to say, these critics of the sacraments are not too well advised in the Westminster Standards for the Standards put a great emphasis on the sacraments.

The true Church, which has been formed by God into outward visible communities, must have certain divinely-appointed badges of membership. These badges of membership are the sacraments. These badges serve to mark the true church, they distinguish the true church. This is one reason why we must emphasize the sacraments.

The second reason, in many ways, is more important than the one just mentioned. We are taught in the Westminster Standards that the Church and the kingdom of God rest upon a covenant (Chapter 7). We have learned that a covenant is simply a mutual understanding or agreement, and the covenant imposed by a superior upon an inferior is simply a conditional promise. This is God's way of dealing with His people. He commands them, He promises them and He threatens them. This is all accomplished in the covenant. The sacraments play an important part in all this in that the sacraments are the visible seals by which the covenant is ratified and its benefits symbolized to all who accept its terms.

What does all this mean to the believer? It means that he must be faithful in his use of these sacraments. He must recognize that they are ordained of God to be means of grace—not the only means—but divinely-appointed means. He must know that his use of these means is an obligation placed on him by God. He must perceive that the sacraments are effective testimonies of the central truths of the Gospel.

May God help us to make use of these "Badges of Membership" and wear them in a faithful way, all to the glory of God.

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