

# HRA Reformation Voice

The Voice of the Heidelberg Reformation Association  
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## THIS ISSUE:

# THE SACRAMENTS

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# THE BEAUTY OF THE SACRAMENTS

by Howard Sloan

I love the sacraments. I love to serve communion. I love baptisms. They are some of the most beautiful times in the life of the church. I love them especially because they serve a perpetual reminders of God's covenant faithfulness. I did not always feel this way about the sacraments. I grew up in a sacrament heavy tradition, where they often felt like ritual rather than reminder. They were just something you did, not something you participated in. But that has changed since I discovered the wonders of what the sacraments are supposed to be, should be, and can be if we approach them Biblically.

Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 66 provides for us the reason we celebrate the sacraments.

*The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use of them, he may more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, in other words, 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.*

Put this into practice is what makes the sacraments so rich and significant.

## THEY ARE PARTICIPATORY

Most times people focus on the "signs and seals" aspect of the sacraments, and rightly so. But they are not passive, they are active. They are meant to engage our senses. Look at the language of Heidelberg answer 75.

*Thus: That Christ has commanded me and all believers, to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup, in remembrance of him, adding these promises: first, that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes, the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to*

*me; and further, that he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ.*

Did you see the use of our senses? "See with my eyes." "Receive from the hands." "Taste with my mouth." God's engages us as He made us. We are people who see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. He has ordained these sacraments built around our senses so that in experiencing them, He made point us to the greater things. Sadly, even in Reformed circles, some treat the sacraments are rote ritual. Just something

we are supposed to do every so often. They are bored by it. If we are bored by the sacraments, then we are bored by the gospel.

## THEY ARE DECLARATIONS

Of course it not just the use of our senses that make the sacraments so wonderful. It is what they declare to us. Just

a circumcision was to Israel, so to the sacraments declare to us our covenant relationship to God. *And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. (Genesis 17:9-11)*

The same covenant language is found in the Lord's Supper.

*Luke 22:20 (ESV)*

*And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

**Most times people focus on the "signs and seals" aspect of the sacraments, and rightly so. But they are not passive, they are active. They are meant to engage our senses.**

God is in covenant relationship to us. He will be faithful to all of His covenant promises toward us. Chief among them are the promises of the gospel. The sacraments speak to us each and every time that we are His people, and He is our God.

### THEY ARE REMINDERS

In their declaration about us, they are also reminders of what God has done for us in that covenant relationship. We are reminded of this in Jesus' words as He instituted the Lord's Supper.

*1 Cor. 11:25 (ESV)*

*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

"In remembrance of me."

Do we take the time to be reminded by the bread and cup of communion, or by the waters of baptism? When a child is present before the congregation and the water is dispensed, are you reminded of the remission of your sins? When the bread and cup come into your hands and are taken into your mouth, are you thinking about "that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross."

(HC 66) Are we mindful that God has accomplished these things in order to give us life eternal? All of these things ought to flood our mind as we participate.

To me part of the beauty is the repetition. Of course, baptism is not done as often as the Lord's Supper, but it still occurs at various times through out the life the church. You see, God knows we need to be reminded. I think that is why God's people were so often building monuments in the Old Testament times. They needed reminders. Let them serve as markers to our souls of what God has done for us, and what He still has planned for us.

### THEY ARE MOMENTS OF RENEWAL AND REFRESHMENT

Other traditions have created occasions for renewal.

Christ already instituted them. The sacraments are times where are to re-examine our hearts and lives, committing ourselves afresh to His purposes and will. We receive strength and grace. John Calvin said in his "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper"

*Seeing, then, it is a remedy which God has given us to help our weakness, to strengthen our faith, increase our charity, and advance us in all holiness of life, the use becomes the more necessary the more we feel pressed by the disease; so far ought that to be from making us abstain. For if we allege as an excuse for not coming to the Supper, that we are still weak in faith or integrity of life, it is as if a man were to excuse himself from taking medicine because he was sick. See then how the weakness of faith which we feel in our heart, and the imperfections which are in our life, should admonish us to come to the Supper;*

*as a special remedy to correct them.* (28. The Imperfections Of Believers Should Rather Incline Them To Use The Supper)

Do we approach the sacraments as a remedy? Do we feel the sacraments are necessary to our spiritual growth and life? Heidelberg 66 says we are nourished and fed at the Lord's Supper. As Calvin has said, has the use

of the sacraments become more necessary because we are more pressed by the disease? We need a place to come to receive the medicine our sin-sick souls need. The sacraments are medicine to us, because the sacraments point us to the great physician.

The sacraments are a beautiful thing. Not just to me, or to Calvin, or the writers of the Heidelberg. They are a beautiful thing to God who ordained them for us because of the even more beautiful things He had done for us. I pray that the sacraments will be beautiful to you as well.

*Rev. Howard Sloan is the pastor of St. Paul's Reformed Church. He is also the coordinating secretary for the Heidelberg Reformation Association. All scripture references are from the Holy Bible: English Standard Version © 2001 Crossway.*

# WHAT ABOUT THE PROMISE

by R. Scott Clark

Jason wrote to the Heidelblog to ask (re-phrased for clarity):

In your [paper on baptism](#) you wrote:

“It is sometimes said, ‘I was baptized as an infant but did not come to faith until much later, so I was re-baptized.’ Might it not be the case that if one is baptized in infancy and later comes to faith, God has been faithful to his promise in the sign. The sign is like a seed which God through his sovereign, gracious Holy Spirit, brought to fruition. We should rejoice that we believe and all that baptism promises is true for us. So I wondered what might be the case if one never came to faith. In short is this the answer? The promise is salvation to those who believe (therefore it’s conditional, i.e. not a promise of election, which is to say it is not a promise to grant saving faith).”

There’s a distinction between the administration of the covenant of grace (i.e. the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline) and the eternal decree. When we talk about “the promise” we’re talking about the administration. When we talk about outcomes, we’re talking about the decree. We don’t know what the decree, in any given case, is so we look at the promises. God said, “I will be a God to you and to your children....” That’s a promise. It’s not a promise that means, however, that every child of every believer will necessarily come to faith. Why not? I can’t say. Ask God. Ask Paul in Rom 9 and he says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated” (Read Rom 2:28; 9:6 – read all of Rom 9!). When one comes to faith, we see that as a fulfillment of the promise—because this is how Scripture speaks. If one doesn’t come to faith we continue to pray and to trust in the promise and leave the outcome to God. We never know as God knows. We don’t judge the heart. That’s God’s business. We judge profession of

faith and, when necessary, the church judges a life that grossly contradicts one’s profession of faith in church discipline (Matt 16; Matt 18). We employ a “judgment of charity” as to profession. We don’t look across the congregation to try to guess the elect. Nor do we ask, “Am I elect?” We ask, “Do I believe?” If one believes it is because of God’s unconditional electing grace.

Thus, there can be a delay between the administration of the *sign* (per divine command) and the *realization* of the benefits of the covenant or “the promise” (Acts 2:39). It’s always been thus. Not every circumcised child came immediately to faith and some (e.g. Esau) never came to faith. Who knows about Ishmael (Gen 17) but that doesn’t prevent God from commanding

infant initiation into the covenant of grace and making the promise, “I will be your God and your children’s God.”

So we obey God and trust the promise. In my case, there was a chronological delay but God was faithful to the promise even though there was a considerable delay between the administration of the sign and the realization of the promises in my experience (i.e., the

application of the benefits in the *ordo salutis*). That delay doesn’t change the meaning of my baptism. I’m thankful for all that baptism promises to those who believe. I’m thankful that God graciously brought me to life, to faith, and through faith, into union with Christ whereby I understand that my baptism is a sign of the union with Christ enjoyed by believers (Rom 6). Baptism itself doesn’t confer or create that union nor does it confer or create any of the benefits of Christ. That’s why we speak of the sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. WCF 37.2 says:

There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

**There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.**

Baptism doesn't create that union but because of the close relation between the sign (baptism) and the thing signified (union) it sometimes sounds as if baptism creates union or confers benefits. This is why it's important to bear in mind that, ultimately, God sovereignly elects whom he will and that it is election that determines the outcome of the administration of the covenant. It is not, as some have said, that the administration of the covenant of grace determines election.

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## MISSION WORK AND THE CATECHISM

by Bill Bruinsma

I am a Reformed pastor who is called by the church to preach and teach the Reformed faith on the mission field. Quite naturally then the question arises: do the Reformed confessions teach us anything about the task of missions? The Canons of Dortrecht most certainly do in several different articles. In fact, the instruction given in the Canons is indispensable, in my estimation, for a proper understanding of mission work and the call of the gospel.

The intent of this article, however, is not to examine the teaching of the Canons of Dortrecht. I wish to focus attention on the Heidelberg Catechism. Does the Heidelberg Catechism teach us anything about mission work? The question comes to mind: how often have I heard a sermon preached out of the Heidelberg Catechism on the subject of missions? I certainly cannot remember one. Neither have I preached one. Is this true because the Catechism teaches us nothing about this important work of the church? Or is there instruction in the Catechism that is overlooked because the Catechism is most often preached in the setting of the established church? Now that I have put on the spectacles of a home missionary, I admit that I have a tendency to examine questions of this sort more closely. I look for Scriptural and confessional warrant for the work that I do, as well as a proper understanding of what is involved in missions.

Does the Catechism teach us anything about mission work?

### Lord's Day 21; Question and Answer 54

Question 54 of Lord's Day 21 asks, "What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church'

of Christ?" The answer to this question in is indeed pertinent to the task of missions: "That the Son of God, from the beginning of time to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves unto Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life. . ." There are two important truths in this answer that touch upon missions. First, the Son of God gathers unto Himself *by His Spirit and Word*, a church. Second, Christ gathers this church *out of the whole human race*. Both of these truths address the subject of missions.

From this question and answer of the Catechism it is clear that the objective means Christ employs to gather His church in this world is the Word. By the term "Word", however, is not simply meant the Bible. What is meant here is the *preaching* of the Word. After all, the preaching of the Word is the power of God unto salvation (I Corinthians 1:18 ff.; Romans 10:13-15). Christ has chosen to gather His church by means of the preaching of the Word.

That is significant in light of so much that goes under the name of mission work today. Mission work is not some great humanitarian enterprise in which the church involves herself. This enterprise is carried on well enough through such secular organizations as the Red Cross, UNICEF, and United Way, etc.. Nowhere does the Bible teach that *the church* must join the ranks of these organizations and make it her task to do the same thing but with a distinctly Christian flavor. This is not to say that individual believers cannot seek to help others in this way. But this is not the task of the church institute.

The command of Christ to the church institute (the function of the church) according to God's Word

is to preach the Word in season and out of season (II Timothy 4:2). I do not deny that this work may take other sorts of labors and laborers to assist in the work of missions. In her work especially in foreign fields, but also in domestic missions to a certain extent, the church may not neglect the earthly needs of those to whom the gospel is brought. But when taking care of the earthly becomes the focus of mission work, and the preaching of the Word becomes only one of the peripheral tasks, then the church has carved the heart out of missions. The Catechism reminds us, Christ has chosen to gather His church through the objective means of the preaching of the Word. Everything else is peripheral.

We are also taught in question and answer 54 that this preaching must go out into all the world. Christ gathers His church “out of the whole human race”. It is the task of the church, in as much as she is able, to preach the Word in all of the world since it pleases Christ to save a universal church. More can be written on this, but our space is limited. The Catechism in other Lord’s Days pursues the subject of the value of the preaching on the mission field. This we wish to examine.

### **Lord’s Day 25; Question and Answer 65**

The Catechism addresses the reason that the preaching is so necessary on the mission field in question and answer 65 of Lord’s Day 25. “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? 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.” It is by means of the preaching of the gospel that the Holy Spirit chooses to work faith in those who hear. That is one reason the preaching is the chief means of grace: it can actually *work* faith in the heart of a person. This is true, of course, only because the Holy Spirit is working through this means. The Holy Spirit is the one who

actually works faith. Christ gathers His church through the Spirit. Preaching in itself has no power to work faith. But Christ through His Spirit powerfully uses the preaching to work faith in someone.

When born and raised in the sphere of the church and covenant we often do not pay much attention to this aspect of the preaching. This is true because the preaching is also used by God in the established church to nourish, strengthen, and maintain the faith of those who are already saved. The Spirit through the preaching confirms the faith He has already worked in us. Because this is true of many of us, however, we do not give much thought to the truth that the Spirit also uses the preaching on the mission

field to *work* faith in many who are not saved and do not have faith.

It can be true in the sphere of the established church too, but more often on the mission field the Spirit of Christ is pleased to use the preaching to transform a person from spiritual death to life. The preaching actually effects the power of regeneration or conversion. At that moment the faculty or power of faith by which a person is bound to Christ is worked as well. That, in turn, immediately produces the activity of faith. A person

becomes conscious of his salvation. He receives the knowledge and confidence of faith. In this way the preaching works faith. In that connection too, often times the preaching is used by the Spirit on the mission field (especially on the domestic field where most people have been exposed to some form of Christianity already) to bring a person to a more complete knowledge and assurance of faith.

### **Lord’s Day 31; Question and Answer 84**

The Catechism further teaches us what must be preached on the mission field in order to bring men to repentance and faith. Again, there is a question and answer of the Catechism that we always seem to apply to the church institute because the Lord’s Day it is

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found in deals with Christian discipline. Question and answer 84 of Lord's Day 31 reads:

How is the kingdom of heaven open and shut by the preaching of the gospel?

Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publically testified to all and every believer, that whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them, both in this and in the life to come.

Certainly, we do not think that this is preached only in the sphere of the church! Sometimes I fear that it is not preached strictly enough in the church itself. Believers must also consistently hear the call to repentance. Daily we are to turn from sin.

But what is true in the sphere of the church is an even larger reality on the mission field. Here is the gospel that must be preached on the mission field. We are sinners who together stand under one common condemnation. We all deserve to perish everlastingly for our sin and unbelief. We must not deceive ourselves, the price of sin must be paid: everlasting punishment. No one will escape the just wrath of God against such sin. All men will die and stand in judgment before God. But here is the good news: God has provided for us a way out of our sin and condemnation. He has sent into this world Jesus Christ who has died on the cross to save sinners. Acknowledge your sin and repent. Turn from sin and to the cross of Jesus Christ. Believe on Him because he is the only way to escape punishment and to be received into God's favor. God gives this promise to those who sincerely repent: he that comes to Jesus Christ in true faith I will in no wise cast out! All those who thirst after Christ I will freely give of the waters

of life.

The opposite must be preached too. It must also be declared on the mission field to all unbelievers that if there is no repentance they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation so long as they are unconverted. In this way God's Word preached on the mission field acts as a two-edged sword. It is a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death.

When the Word is preached in this way, Christ through His Spirit chooses to call people out of darkness and into the light of salvation. The Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel irresistibly draws out of this world of unbelief (John 6:44) those chosen to everlasting life (Acts 13:48) that as a result they receive the promise of the gospel and God grants them the forgiveness of sin and salvation.

In that way the preaching serves mission work. *That* is the purpose of mission work: to bring

**That is the purpose of mission work: to bring God's elect people to the conscious assurance and joy of salvation!**

God's elect people to the conscious assurance and joy of salvation! Yes, my heart as a missionary goes out to those who suffer earthly want and need in this world. I am not calloused to that. Where I can, I help. But my real concern is the salvation of their souls! Has God chosen as one of His own that visitor

to whom I am preaching? Has He willed to bring him or her to salvation through the preaching? Will that visitor be given by God's grace a place with me in heaven? Perhaps. But I know that God will accomplish His sovereign will and good pleasure *through the preaching*.

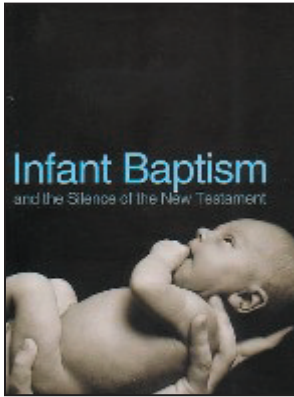
So we preach the Word. We search out every way possible to preach the Word. As a missionary I am assured that I stand in the footsteps of those who have gone on before me. Psalm 68:11, "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." Isaiah 52:7, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" This is how Christ gathers His church. It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe.

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# Book Reviews

## RESOURCES ON INFANT BAPTISM

Reviewed by R. Scott Clark. Taken from the Heidelbergblog.



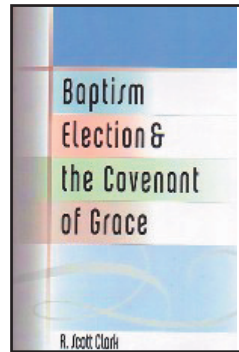
One of the more persistent arguments made by Baptist critics of infant baptism is: “It’s not in the NT.” Bryan Holstrom has written a brief (156 pp) book to address this and related questions about infant baptism. *Infant Baptism and the Silence of the NT* is available at The Bookstore at WSC for \$9.99 (+5.00 UPS

ground shipping and taxes). In his foreword, my colleague David VanDrunen writes,

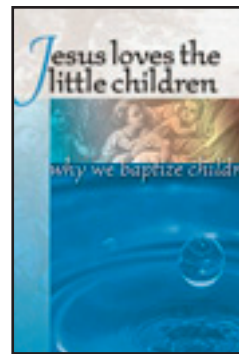
Bryan Holstrom has written an excellent book.... His view is simple: Scripture teaches that the children of believers should be baptized and the Christian church should again unite in the practice of paedobaptism. Holstrom makes his case in exactly the right way. He is clear about where he stands and argues his position rigorously and engagingly. He bases his claims not upon his own opinions or clever syllogisms but upon careful interpretation of Scripture. He gives no quarter to his Baptist interlocutors yet appeals to them winsomely as brothers in Christ—with a firm but gentle spirit. He presses the point that rejecting infant baptism is not a minor error, for it concerns more than just baptism but also the whole biblical story of God’s redeeming work among his people.

...Bryan Holstrom has written an excellent book and I hope that it gets into the hands of many readers. He has served the church and the cause of biblical truth well. Those holding a Baptist view will find themselves challenged in the best sort of way—by a thorough exploration of biblical teaching. Paedobaptists themselves will be pushed to think in richer and more biblically consistent ways about their practice of infant baptism. May this book serve to heal divisions in Christ’s church and to encourage Christians to embrace more meaningfully the covenant promises of God for themselves and their children.

More resources on baptism:



This little booklet (\$1.33 + 5.00 shipping and taxes) deals with the question of the relations between baptism, election and the “double mode” of existing in the covenant of grace. Does baptism confer election of any sort? Does baptism confer salvation of any sort? Does baptism confer justification, adoption or any other of the benefits of the covenant of grace?



Wes Bredenhof says of Danny Hyde’s brief book (104 pp) “First of all, Pastor Hyde has offered a compilation of the best Biblical arguments for the baptism of the infant children of believers. The arguments are offered concisely but with footnotes and references for those who wish to dig deeper.

The skeleton is here, so to speak, but those who wish to see more meat on the bones will not have far to look.

Second, the book presents the Biblical arguments with a sense of church-historical consciousness. Hyde is especially sensitive to the practices and beliefs of the first sixteen centuries of the Christian church. With his references to Reformed liturgies and creeds, he clearly shows that infant baptism has nothing to do with “popery” and everything to do with the apostolic church.

Finally, so far as I know, this is the only book on the subject that deals with the practice of dedication found in some evangelical circles. Pastor Hyde points out that many of the proof-texts used to support dedication are the same texts used to argue for infant baptism. He calls for consistency, but also points out the far greater richness of baptism – a sacrament that speaks of the sovereign grace of a covenant-making God.”