

Grace Downtown CG Discussion Guide

April 16-19, 2018

Topic: "Sacraments"

Series: Theology in Life



Announcements:

DC 127 Volunteer Training: DC 127 is holding training for Safe Families volunteers. Family Friends/Mentors, Family Coaches, Host Homes, and Babysitters are required to go through a training session before they start volunteering with families. Breakfast and lunch provided. To find your time slot, check out our website. Contact info@dc127.org with questions. **Saturday April 21.**

Men's Sexual Wholeness Group: Join a group of men that meets for 10-11 weeks to learn about and encourage sexual wholeness. **May 7-July 9.** Contact Elder Rob Spackey at spackey@gmail.com for details.

Spring Get Away: Bring your friends and family to the Strawberry Jubilee Festival at Great Country Farms in Bluemont, VA. Enjoy playgrounds, wagon rides, a jumping pillow, farm animals, a pie-eating contest, and more. **Saturday June 2.** Pick your own strawberries 9-11 am and/or gather with Grace Downtown from 11 am- 3 pm. Cost: \$8. More details on website. Contact: Mazaré at mazare@gracedc.net.

CG Education Curriculum: Community groups have begun a 10-week education curriculum. We will explore theology proper, presbyterianism, and topics of our day. The purpose is to generate healthy discussion and to guide each other in understanding a biblical perspective on these topics. Your care group elders will visit at some point across the 10-week span and will also be available via email to answer lingering questions.

Introduction

The relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament reflects the continuity between Israel and the Church. Together, both Testaments bear witness to the ongoing story of God's salvation for His people through Jesus Christ. Within the meta-narrative, however, there are some discontinuities that signal a new era with a fuller revelation of Old Testament shadows (Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said...but I tell you", which is Jesus reinterpreting and re-applying Old Testament laws). Two traditions that take on a fuller understanding of Old Testament realities are the sacraments of communion and baptism, outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual divine grace.

Westminster Confession defines Sacraments as:

Holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.

Communion

Communion, which Jesus instituted on the night he was betrayed, is directly connected to the Passover Seder (Exodus 12:1-28). The centerpiece of the ceremony was the Passover Lamb whose blood delivered God's people from God's judgment. In a similar way, Communion celebrates the broken body of Christ and the spilled blood of Christ that deliver God's people from God's judgment.

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), along with many reformed churches, believes in the real and true presence of Christ, a sacramental union between the signs (the bread and the cup), and the thing signified (the promise of grace through the Spirit by faith), in communion.

Reformed theologian John Calvin rejected the idea of Christ's actual, physical presence in the elements (Catholic position) since Christ's human nature is no longer present with us but at the right hand of God. Calvin also rejected the idea that communion is just a symbol and memorial and argued for a real and true presence of Christ in the elements. The grace that is given to us is conferred by the work of the Holy Spirit through the elements to those who have faith.

Baptism

Baptism, which Jesus ordained in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), is the visible sign of the covenant symbolizing the entrance into the Church, the new life in Christ, and the forgiveness of sins. Circumcision was God's sign of inclusion in the people of God in the Old Testament. Baptism is the sign of inclusion in the community in the New Testament. The connection between circumcision and baptism is made clear by Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:11-12.

In both circumcision and baptism, faith in Christ is necessary to appropriate all the benefits of being a member in the Body of Christ (Apostle Paul links circumcision and baptism in Colossians 2:8-15).

Infant Baptism

Acts 2:38-39

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Circumcision, the Old Testament sign of the covenant, was given to Abraham after his confession of faith (Genesis 17:22-27), but it was given to Isaac before his confession (Genesis 21:4). The sign of the covenant given to Isaac before his confession of faith speaks to God's grace promised to His people in order that they might know and embrace the covenant God.

For the Israelites, the promises of God were given to adults and their children, which is depicted in circumcision. It is hard to imagine, one theologian argues, that the greater new covenant promises and signs should not also be given to the infant children of believing adults. Apostle Paul suggests this in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14, where he states the children of a Christian parent are set apart to God. Apostle Peter confirms this in Acts 2:38-39, where he tells us the new covenant is for the children of believers.

Read and Discuss
Read Colossians 2:6-15 aloud together.

1. Based on Apostle Paul's explanation, how are circumcision and baptism related?
2. What is Paul referring to in v.11, when he says, "Circumcision made without hands...the circumcision of Christ"?
3. According to v.12-14 what is baptism a sign of?
4. How might our understanding of baptism as a sacrament encourage us to walk in Christ?
5. What hope does baptism offer us as members in the Body of Christ?
6. In what ways is communion a meaningful sacrament for you?

Prayer:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign ... " (Rev. 11:17)

In the name of the Risen Lord and the power of the resurrection, we pray against "rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil" that keep the city in bondage, in poverty, crime and deprivation (Eph 6:12).

We pray for schools in the inner cities and poorer sections of the city. We pray especially for their teachers to have courage and patience. We pray that the students will get a good education that will earn them employment.