



May 7, 2023

Abounding Grace: Belonging Seals of Grace

Ephesians 1:3-14

For Discussion and Reflection

1. Read Galatians 3:7-9, Romans 3:20-26. Both passages teach God's rescuing grace is received by faith alone in Christ alone. Contemplate the simplicity of this truth.
2. The confession says that "The grace of faith," that enables us to believe, is "the work of the Spirit of Christ." (WCF 14:1) How does Ephesians 2:8 teach this truth? What does that teach you about the presence of faith in your life?
3. Take a moment and read through the Westminster Confession, ch. 27. What questions do you have? What stood out to you from that chapter?
4. The confession teaches that there is a spiritual relationship between "the sign and the thing signified." (WCF 27:2) In other words, the ceremony communicates a spiritual truth. What does circumcision teach, Genesis 17:9-14 (Colossians 2:11)? What about Passover, Exodus 12:13,21-27 (1 Corinthians 5:7)? What about baptism, 1 Peter 3:20-22? What about communion, Matthew 26:26-29?
5. The "spiritual relationship" is more than mere symbolism but rites that the Holy Spirit uses to "confirm our spiritual interest in him." (WCF 27:1) What do we anticipate when we witness or participate in baptism and communion?
6. The grace in these sacred rites (sacrament) is not found in the mere performance of the rite, neither does it depend on the piety of the minister. What two principles does it depend upon? (WCF 27:3) Why do we state the words of institution before we partake?
7. Why are the sacraments (sacred rites) properly administered by a minister, WCF 27:4? Consider Dabney's argument: "And it may be urged...that since the presbyters, and especially the pastor of the Church, are the guardians of the sealing ordinances, responsible for their defense against abuse and profanation, it is reasonable, yea, necessary, that they should have the control of their administration...Again, the great commission (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:5) seems evidently to give the duties of preaching and baptizing to the same persons." (Dabney, Systematic Theology, p.670)
8. The Larger Catechism, Q/A 162, says that the sacraments are a pledge from God, but also a pledge from us, saying, "to oblige them to obedience." How are we to respond to the Sacraments when we witness or participate in them? Consider this response, "Father, you have put your grace on display before me, which is mine by faith in my Surety, Jesus. By your grace, you are mine and I am yours. I commit myself to you afresh and pray for the Spirit's continuing work to make me faithful to you." How could you respond?
9. Today, I compared the sacraments to my wedding anniversary. Each year, Debbie and I remember the day we sealed our marriage, having given each other a symbol (ring) of our covenant. Each year, we affirm our commitment to each other and celebrate our union. What regular practices from your life can you connect to the practice of the sacraments?
10. What did the Spirit say to you today? What did you learn? How did your affection for God grow today? What steps can you take to grow in his grace?