

## DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 26 OCTOBER 2020 – 1 NOVEMBER 2020



**UPPER  
HUNTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

Having confessed that we only need to trust (have faith in) Jesus, this week's questions and answers begin explaining something we might not often think about: the sacraments. Or, perhaps you do think a lot about sacraments. In any case, at least from my observation, I can say that some Christians and churches have been thinking less and less about sacraments, and consequently, have developed some unhealthy views on sacraments. But sacraments or misunderstanding and misuse of sacraments were a very much live issue at the time of the Reformation. That is why the confessions and catechisms of the Reformation almost invariably include teachings on sacraments. For example, the Westminster Shorter Catechism includes seven questions relating to sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). The Heidelberg Catechism, likewise, has eighteen questions and answers relating to the sacraments. This is helpful for us, because we can learn about what the Bible says on the sacraments as we work through these questions and answers. I hope you find these upcoming weeks helpful in clarifying and deepening your understanding of sacraments, which are really wonderful gifts from our gracious God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

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## THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM<sup>1</sup>

### Lord's Day 25

**Q65) It is by faith alone that we share in Christ and all his benefits: Where then does that faith come from?**

A) The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.

**Q66) What are sacraments?**

A) Sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them He might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and might put His seal on that promise. And this is God's gospel promise: to forgive our sins and give us eternal life by grace alone because of Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross.

**Q67) Are both the word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?**

A) Yes, indeed! In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and through the holy sacraments He assures us that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

**Q68) How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?**

A) Two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

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## ROMANS 4:11

[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.

*Paul's larger argument around Romans 4:11 is that being a Jew and having the bodily mark or seal (that is circumcision) does not make one righteous and acceptable before God, but rather it is the faith in Jesus that is needed. In arguing this point, Paul reminds us that God declared Abraham righteous when he believed, rather than when he was circumcised. This is a crucial point in understanding the relationship between faith and sacraments. Just as God declared Abraham righteous because of faith he had, not circumcision, God declares us righteous because of faith we have in Jesus, not because we received sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. So, next time you participate in the sacraments, don't assume that God is pleased with us because we have sacraments. Rather, ask yourself whether you have a genuine faith in Jesus and turn your gaze to Him who died for our sins.*

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.