

# Class Six

## THE SACRAMENTS

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### WHAT IS A “SACRAMENT”?

The word *Sacramentum* was first used by Cicero and other 1<sup>st</sup> century Romans to represent the oath of allegiance soldiers would make to the emperor. Tertullian, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian, adopted the term to signify the means by which Christians swear allegiance to God and Christ, the Captain of the army of God. A “sacrament” could be defined as a sign and seal of the righteousness we have by faith in our covenant relationship with God (**Romans 4:11**). We consider a sacrament to be a visible sign of an invisible grace; that is, it is a visual aid of the grace we have received through Christ. At Park Street Church, we recognize two sacraments (as do most Protestant churches): baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both sacraments were instituted by Jesus (**Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 22:14-20**), and are specifically for the covenant community of faith. This is why we do not consider rites like marriage to be a sacrament (as important as it is): marriage is a social institution created by God and is for those both within and without the covenant community.

### OT PARALLELS TO BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER

The Old Testament correspondence to the sacrament of baptism is circumcision (**Genesis 17:9-14; 23-27**), and the correspondence to the Lord’s Supper is the Passover Meal (**Exodus 12:1-27**). Circumcision was given as the sign of initiation into the Old Covenant community, while the regular observance of the Passover Meal was to signify a continual renewal of the covenant. In the same way, baptism is the sign of initiation into the New Covenant community (**Matthew 28:19; Galatians 3:26-29**), while the Lord’s Supper signifies the regular remembrance and renewal of our covenant with God and each other (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**). Thus, baptism and the Lord’s Supper go hand-in-hand: the former as a once-for-all initiation into the covenant community and the latter as the continual renewal of the covenant. Based upon this understanding, the PSC minister who administers the Lord’s Supper to the congregation invites only those who are baptized believers to participate.

### THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

It is important to understand the symbolism of baptism in order to grasp its significance. The New Testament tells us that the washing with water symbolizes the washing away of our sin (**Acts 22:16; 2:38**). Being “under” the water (whether figuratively or literally) symbolizes being dead and buried with Christ (**Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:11-12**); only when we identify with Christ in his death and burial can we share in a spiritual resurrection to newness of life that will be followed one day with our physical resurrection.

Even more significant than this is the symbolism of the water itself. In the Old Testament, water often symbolized the judgment of God. For example, at the flood most of humankind was consumed by the waters of God's judgment while Noah and his family passed through; at the crossing of the Red Sea the Egyptians were consumed by the waters of God's judgment while the Israelites passed through. Neither Noah and his family nor the Israelites were any less sinful or deserving of God's judgment than those who were consumed by God's wrath; rather, God showed great mercy to them and saved them by his grace. In **1 Peter 3:20–22**, Peter calls the flood a baptism and compares it to the baptism we experience in the Christian community. The water poured out in baptism symbolizes the fact that a person is rightly under the judgment of God and only God by his mercy and grace can bring him through that judgment and save him. This salvation, of course, is through faith in Christ, who is our "ark."

### **VIEWS OF BAPTISM AT PARK STREET CHURCH**

Two views regarding the proper recipients of baptism are represented within evangelicalism and at Park Street Church. Adherents of the Baptist position ("believer baptism") hold that initiation into the covenant community is only for those who profess faith. The main biblical support for this position is that throughout the New Testament confession of faith and baptism are closely associated (**Matthew 28:19–20**). The most common Reformed position ("infant baptism" + "believer baptism" of adults who come to faith who were not baptized as infants by believing parents) is that children of believing parents are to be initiated into the covenant community. The main biblical support for this position is the correspondence of baptism with circumcision. As circumcision was the sign and symbol of Israel's covenant relationship with God, baptism is the sign and symbol of the Church's covenant relationship with God. Just as believing parents of the Old Covenant applied the sign of circumcision to their sons, so believing parents of the New Covenant participate in the same responsibility and blessing as they apply the sign of baptism to their children. (**Genesis 17:11–12**; **Colossians 2:11–12**). The New Testament also teaches the principle of family solidarity, by which whole households were baptized upon the profession of faith of the parents (e.g., **Acts 11:13–14**; see also **1 Corinthians 7:14**). Like circumcision in the old covenant, baptism in the new covenant is not considered to be salvific. Through baptism infants are welcomed into the covenant community to receive all the benefits of being part of it: the faithful nurture of Christian parents, the prayers and influence of family, friends and teachers, the involvement in worship services and children's programs where they will hear God's truth. The belief is that God uses the benefits of this participation in the community of faith to bring little ones to know him so that they might make a profession of faith when they are older, and so fulfill the intent of their baptism.

Most of the teaching staff of PSC hold to infant baptism; however, we do not believe that baptism is an issue to divide over (i.e., break fellowship over), and so our practice at Park Street Church is to perform both infant baptisms and infant dedications depending on the convictions of the parents, as well as baptisms of those who profess faith as adults who had not been baptized as infants by believing parents. At the end of the day, those who choose to baptize their babies and those who choose to dedicate them would agree on the kind of spiritual nurture their children should be given.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

The Lord's Supper is an act of worship and a ceremonial meal in which we remember and renew our covenant relationship with God (vertical aspect) and with our brothers and sisters in Christ (horizontal aspect). Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread on the day the Passover Lamb was to be sacrificed (**Matthew 26:17–30; Exodus 12:14–20**), signifying that he himself would be the true Passover lamb: as the Passover celebration was to remind Israelites of their redemption from Egypt, so the Lord's supper is to remind us of our redemption from death and forgiveness of sin (**1 Corinthians 11:23–26**).

This covenant meal is our regular renewal of faith, or our regular recommitment to the Lord, which is why we examine our hearts before partaking of it. We often hear people speak of “recommitting their lives to the Lord”; we should keep in mind that this is what we do every time we take the Lord's Supper. Regarding the renewal of our covenant relationship with each other, sharing together in the Lord's Supper signifies the commitment we have to one another in the body of Christ. We must admit that there is nothing in the Bible that speaks about becoming a “member” of a church, or going through a “membership” process. What the Bible does speak about is forming a committed bond with each other through sharing together in this covenant meal (**Acts 2:41–47**). Thus, when you become a member of Park Street Church you will be making “official” what you have already proclaimed by regularly participating at the communion table with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

# *Questions for*

## **REVIEW, THOUGHT & DISCUSSION**

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1. What is the symbolism of baptism and why is it important to know?
2. Why do we not divide over when and how to baptize?
3. What is the symbolism of the Lord's Supper and why is it important to know?
4. In what ways can you deepen your experience of the Lord's Supper as you reflect on its meaning and significance?
5. As this class nears its end, spend some time looking over the different ministries of the church. Read the "Window Into Park Street: Hospitality" on the next page. Pray about how you may want to get more involved in the church, if you are not already connected.

## WINDOW INTO PARK STREET

# *Hospitality*

The author of Hebrews enjoins us, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2). Because Park Street is such a large and ever-changing church, it is important that we intentionally focus on hospitality. It is too easy for someone to get lost at our church, and so it is our duty and privilege to actively seek to welcome people.

Sometimes it takes a little discipline to show hospitality. Commit once a month in these capacities to help you remember to reach out to strangers:

- **Greeters** before each service to welcome people with a friendly smile.
- **Ushers** at each service to hand out bulletins and collect the offering
- **PSC Connect volunteers** for each service to answer questions about how to get connected (training provided).
- **Prayer Team members** to pray for others after the worship service.
- **Coffee Hour volunteers** to help set up and serve coffee after the 8:30 AM or 4 PM services.
- **Friendship partners** to spend some time with an international student.

Think too about other ways to welcome folks: Host a small group in your home, or host a one-time neighborhood gathering, or prayer meal during missions conference. Serve as a host at a Women’s Ministry event or other large group event.

Finally, remember that communion is the covenant meal we share with our church family. We encourage you to use Communion Sunday to invite folks to your home or out to lunch or dinner.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

Want to love people, but don’t want to be up front? There are plenty of other ways to serve and build up the church. Here are a few ideas:

- Administrative help for the church office or a specific ministry, like small groups or Family Ministries.
- Planning Teams for Women’s Ministries Fall Brunch, Spring Retreats or other events; Family Camp, Kidsweek, Kid’s Art Festival; Small Group Retreat, etc.
- Set up or take down tables and chairs for Park Street International Fellowship or Sunday Night Band.
- Bake for Coffee Hour or provide a meal for someone in need.
- Run PowerPoint on Sunday nights or sound in any service.