

LORD'S DAY 25

65. Q. Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, where does this faith come from?
- A. From the Holy Spirit,¹ who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel^{1,2} and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.³

1. **John 3:5** Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

2. **Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Peter 1:23-25 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, ²⁴ because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, ²⁵ But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

3. **Matthew 28:19-20** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

1 Corinthians 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

66. Q. What are the sacraments?
- A. The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.¹ And this is the promise: that God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.²

1. **Genesis 17:11** and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

2. **Matthew 26:27-28** Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.²⁸ "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Hebrews 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

67. Q. 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. The Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and assures us by the sacraments that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹

1. **Romans 6:3** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

68. Q. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant?

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.¹

1. **Matthew 28:19-20** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was

betrayed took bread;²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.



Earlier, in Lord's Day 7, the question was asked, "Are all men saved in Christ as they perished in Adam?" The Catechism answered, "No, only those are saved who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits." Thus not all men are saved. Only those who believe are saved. Only believers receive these gifts or benefits which Christ has earned through His suffering and death.

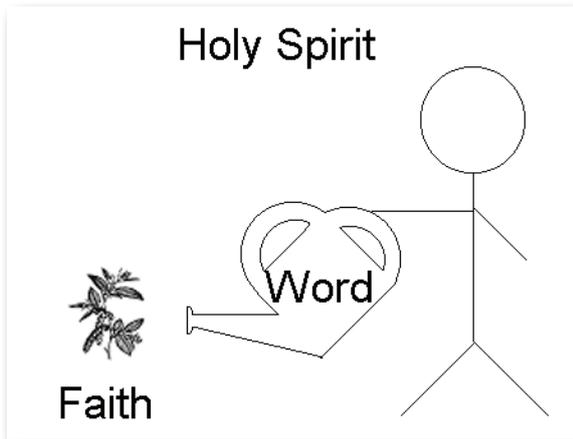
Lord's Day 25 picks up again this theme of faith. In light of the fact that faith is so very important, we want to know the source thereof. "Where does this faith come from?" If we can only receive the benefits of Christ through faith, where do we get this faith?

Man would like to think that faith comes from his own heart. Scripture teaches us, however, that it does not. In the previous

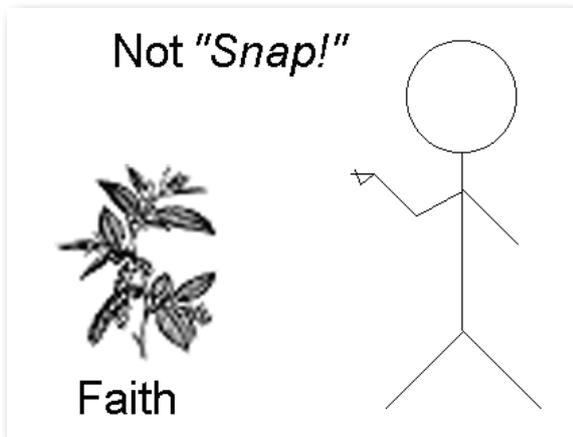
Lord's Day we read the words of Paul: "For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift of God**" (Ephesians 2:8f). He wrote something similar in Philippians 1:29, "For to you **it has been granted ... to believe in Him...**" In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul wrote "I planted (the seed of the gospel), Apollos watered, **but God gave the increase.** God alone causes the seed of the gospel

instrument or means is the preaching of the gospel. The words of Paul are unmistakable: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? ... So then **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**" (Romans 10:14-17).

We could use as example the way that God makes plants grow. God is all-powerful. He could cause mature plants to instantly "pop" out of the ground. But He chooses to have plants grow from seeds, which require water to germinate and to grow. In the same way, the Holy Spirit could simply "snap" His finger, so to speak, and mature faith could be worked in man immediately. The Holy Spirit is powerful enough to do so, but He chooses to use an instrument in working faith. He uses the instrument of the gospel. The Holy Spirit works faith through the preaching of God's Word.



The Holy Spirit uses the instrument of the gospel to work faith.



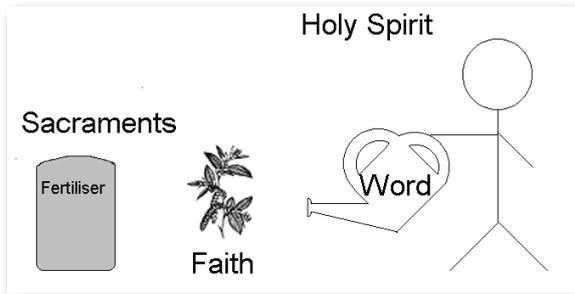
The Bible is sometimes called the "tool" of the Holy Spirit. The church is sometimes called the "workshop" of the Holy Spirit, for we hear the proclamation of God's Word in church. As we sit in the pew listening attentively to the sermon preached by one of God's servants, the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts.

We must never despise the preaching because of the weakness of men who preach God's Word. Neither should we esteem any preacher, as though it is his wisdom and eloquence that makes the preaching effective. The preaching is effective because of the Holy Spirit who accompanies the preaching and is pleased to use this means to work faith. Paul said to the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ...I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

to germinate and grow. Elsewhere in the same letter Paul wrote, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Thus the Scriptures are clear: faith comes from God. To be more specific, faith comes from God the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit work faith in our hearts? This is a great mystery which no man can explain. But one thing is clear: the Holy Spirit uses a certain *instrument* or *means* to work this faith in man. This

Now faith is living. Just as a seed after it germinates needs water in order to live, so also faith needs the ongoing preaching of the gospel. We need to listen to the gospel, not just *until* we come to faith, but also *after* we come to faith. We need to nourish our faith by feeding with the preaching of God's Word.



The sacraments must be used together with the preaching of the gospel, just as fertiliser must be used together with water.

Because of the weakness of our faith and our slowness to believe what we hear with our ears, God has given us something to strengthen our faith. He has given us the sacraments in addition to the Word. The sacraments do not do exactly the same as the preaching of the Word does. Perhaps an example would describe the relationship of the Word and the sacraments.

The sacraments could be compared to fertiliser. Fertiliser, we know, gives extra nutrition to help a plant grow stronger. But fertiliser does not work all by itself. If you put fertiliser on a dry seed, the seed will not germinate. A seed will only germinate when it is given water.

In like manner, faith will not germinate through the sacraments by themselves. If someone only saw the Lord's Supper being celebrated, but never heard from the Bible what the symbols in the Lord's Supper mean, he would not know what was happening at the table. He would think that people were eating a meal. He would not know what the bread or the wine symbolised. He must learn from the Bible what they mean. He must learn all about the work of Christ from the Scriptures. The sacraments must be used with the

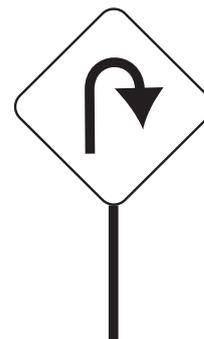
preaching of the gospel, just like fertiliser must be used with water.

Thus we say that faith is **worked** by the preaching of God's Word. And faith is **strengthened** by the use of the sacraments (and by the continued preaching of God's Word).

Because of this difference between the Word and the sacraments, the preaching is absolutely necessary for salvation. The sacraments, however, are not absolutely necessary. A plant can live without fertiliser, but it could never live without water. In like manner, faith can live without the sacraments, but not without the Word. But even though the sacraments are not absolutely necessary, we should not minimise their importance. God has given them for the strengthening of our faith, and they are effective. In obedience to God we must use them for that purpose, with the intent of strengthening our faith.

What are the sacraments? Let us look more closely at the words with which the Catechism defines the sacraments. The sacraments are:

- **HOLY** - The sacraments are set apart by God for a special purpose.
- **VISIBLE** - The sacraments are to be seen. They are directed to our eyes. Sometimes we say that the sermon is the *invisible* preaching, while the sacraments are the *visible* preaching of God's Word.
- **SIGNS** - There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. As we drive down the road, we often see many signs which the Main Roads Department puts up. What are they there for? They



are there to *teach* us something. A sign like the one you see here teaches the driver, "*Caution! The road ahead makes a sharp hairpin curve to the right.*" In this case, one little picture takes the place of at least ten words. So also in the sacraments there is a great message contained in the simple ceremony of the sacraments.

- **SEALS** - A seal is used to prove that something is real. It *assures* us of something. In the olden days, the edicts or proclamations of a king were *sealed*. The king would write down his declaration, close it and then drip hot wax on it. While the wax was still soft, he would press his unique signet ring into the wax. That would leave a unique impression which proved that this edict was really the king's.

Today seals are still used. On my wall are the degrees which I received from the university and college where I studied. On each of them, there is a seal. No one else is allowed to use the symbol on that seal. It is registered with the government. The seal on these papers assures whoever reads them that they are real.

The sacraments are seals. They assure us that the promises which God makes

in the Bible concerning our salvation in Christ, are true. The promises of God are real. We can depend on them. We can and must believe them.

How many sacraments are there? Rome teaches that there are seven: baptism, confirmation (comparable to profession of faith, except that children are confirmed at a much younger age), penance (confessing one's sins to the priest), mass (or Lord's Supper), holy orders (priesthood), marriage, and the last rites (administered to those who are dying). Scripture teaches, however, that God has only instituted two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism and Lord's Supper correspond to circumcision and the Passover of the old covenant. Because Christ shed His blood once for all, making complete atonement for sin, there was to be no more shedding of blood. Thus the Lord instituted new signs which required no shedding of blood. Now we only have symbols which point to Christ's blood.



Questions:

1. Why are we so concerned about the source of faith (where faith comes from)?
2. Where does faith come from? How is faith worked in our hearts? What does Romans 10:17 say? Couldn't the Holy Spirit cause faith to immediately live in our hearts without the use of instruments?
3. What may we call the church with respect to the working of faith? Why?
4. Does the coming to faith or the strengthening of faith depend upon very eloquent or gifted speakers? What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5?
5. Why do we need to hear the gospel even after we come to faith?
6. Why did God give us the sacraments in addition to the preaching of the Word?
7. What do the sacraments do with respect to faith? What will the sacraments *not* do with respect to faith? Why not?
8. Which is more necessary, the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the sacraments? Does this mean that we can neglect the one that is less necessary? Why (not)?
9. Why are the sacraments called "*holy*"? Why are they called "*visible*" signs? What do the sacraments do as *signs*? What do the sacraments do as *seals*? What do they seal?
10. How many sacraments are there according to the church of Rome? How many are there according to Scripture?
11. To what do the two sacraments correspond in the old dispensation? Why were they changed in the new?