Lesson 5 Ordinances and Sacraments

Terms and Definitions

Use these terms to follow the lesson's historical discussion and compare how traditions explain baptism, the Lord's Supper, and grace.

Core Terms

Ordinance A practice Christ commanded the church to observe. The term often emphasizes obedience, witness, remembrance, and faith.

Sacrament A visible sign or rite through which God communicates or seals grace. Traditions differ over how the rite relates to grace and faith.

Rite An established religious act or ceremony. Calling something a rite does not settle what God does through it.

Grace God's undeserved favor and saving action. The lesson asks how God's grace relates to outward rites and their reception.

Means of grace Practices through which God works to communicate or strengthen grace. Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed traditions use this language with different explanations.

Sign and seal Reformed language for a sacrament as a visible sign of God's promise and a confirmation of it. The lesson emphasizes reception by faith.

Sacramental efficacy The effectiveness of a sacrament in accomplishing what God promises through it. Traditions disagree about the manner of this effectiveness.

Ex opere operato Latin often translated from the work performed. In Catholic teaching, sacramental efficacy rests on Christ's work rather than the minister's holiness. A recipient can impede its fruit.

Disposition The recipient's spiritual attitude or readiness. In the discussion of Trent, disposition matters for receiving the fruit of a sacrament.

Holy mysteries A common Eastern Orthodox name for sacraments, emphasizing God's transforming work and participation in divine life. Seven is familiar, but usage can be broader.

Memorialism An understanding of the Lord's Supper that strongly emphasizes remembering and proclaiming Christ's work. The lesson associates this emphasis with Zwingli and many later Baptists.

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Practices and Historical Sources

Baptism The Christian rite that marked entry into the community in the early church. Its fuller history and theology are the subject of the next lesson.

Eucharist or Lord's Supper The church's shared meal centered on Christ. Eucharist comes from language of thanksgiving. Traditions differ on Christ's presence and how grace relates to the meal.

Confirmation A rite associated with strengthening or confirming Christian initiation, included in the Catholic list of seven sacraments.

Penance or reconciliation The sacrament concerning repentance, confession, and forgiveness in the Catholic list of seven.

Absolution A declaration of forgiveness. Luther sometimes discusses confession and absolution sacramentally in addition to baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Anointing of the sick A sacramental anointing for those who are ill, historically also called extreme unction. It is one of the seven Catholic sacraments.

Holy orders The sacrament of ordination to ministry in the Catholic list of seven.

Matrimony Marriage, included among the seven Catholic sacraments.

Didache An early Christian teaching text, commonly dated to the late first or early second century. Chapters 7-10 and 14 describe baptism, thanksgiving, and gathered worship.

Justin Martyr and the First Apology A Christian writer around AD 150 whose First Apology describes baptism and the Eucharist, including communion as more than ordinary food.

Augustine and sacred signs Augustine distinguishes outward sacred signs from the spiritual realities to which they point. He uses sacrament more broadly than the later list of seven.

Peter Lombard and the Sentences A twelfth-century theologian and his influential work, which lists seven sacraments. Lyon in 1274, Florence in 1439, and Trent in 1547 affirm that count.