STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT

Catechism Two, Lesson 24

Reading: Colossians 1:4–7; Acts 14:21, 22

1. What Is Confirmation?

Confirmation is a sacrament in which the believer receives inner strength through the laying on of hands of the elders. It is a time of completion of catechism studies, a time when human and divine approval are shown. This sacrament enables a deep rooting and firm grounding in faith, preparing the believer to stand during times of testing in the future.

Our English word “confirmation” comes from the Latin confirmare, which means “to strengthen in resolution, to make firm in commitment, or to establish in position.” Three Greek words are translated as “confirm” in our King James Bible, but the more usual one is bebaioo. This word means “to make secure, to stabilize, to establish, or to make firm.”

A. Confirmation adds validity to recently learned truth through public approval.

After many months of catechism study, people are ready for a time of public recognition and approval. They need to have the community as well as its leaders add their commendation to their own sense of accomplishment in having learned the set body of truth. For this reason we all celebrate together. We dress and behave in a formal and festive manner to make this a moment to remember for all who participated.

B. Confirmation strengthens inner conviction through the approval of the elders.

In any teacher-learner situation, the approval which matters most is that of the teacher and those in leadership. It feels good when the other students cheer but it is that A on the report card or that name on the honor roll that gives us the deepest satisfaction. So it is with spiritual accomplishment. The pat on the back, the handshake, and most of all the laying on of hands at confirmation, tells us that our leaders are proud of us and our progress.

C. Confirmation completes conversion-initiation through impartation of inner strength.

In addition to all the psychological supports we receive through public confirmation, the most lasting strength we receive is that which comes through the laying on of hands and prayer. As we have already studied, spiritual blessing is actually transferred from one person to another by faith and laying on of hands. It is a spiritual reality when the elders pray over us to be rooted and grounded in Christ as never before. We will discover during times of testing that something inside of us was made firm and strong in the Lord. We do not waver and doubt any more.

D. Confirmation provides an orderly transition from introductory to more advanced Christian study.

Graduation exercises have a purpose. We are built so as to need times of transition or shifting gears. We need to know when we have completed one stage of growth and are commencing another.

Confirmation serves as a spiritual time of graduation from the elementary studies to the more advanced studies in which we learn how to apply what we have learned.

E. Confirmation provides the psychological support of knowing we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

We did not study in the corner. We did not invent all of this truth which is so new and wonderful to us. No, we are simply part of the universal Body of Christ made up of believers all over the world through all ages who learned the same things about Christ for themselves. All of us who encounter the living Christ learn the same truth firsthand. But when truth comes to us experientially, it gives us such deep support to discover others who have found the same things true. What a dimension of sharing is added to our fellowship through common knowledge!

2. Was Confirmation Practiced In The Early Church?

Yes. Through the centuries many elaborate ceremonies have been developed. This is understandable. Ceremony and ritual are valuable psychological tools for making lasting impressions. Since the time of confirmation is an event to remember, it is a fitting occasion for ceremony and ritual. However, the New Testament records very simply that the apostles went around confirming their converts after their initial experiences with Christ in repentance, faith, water baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit.

A. Confirmation followed a time of being taught.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:21, 22).

They had taught in these cities previously. They allowed the disciples time to solidify their own decisions to believe and to commit themselves to Christ. Then they went back and confirmed them, probably laying hands upon them and praying, as well as warning them that tribulation or trouble is normal for the Christian life. We cannot avoid it, but we can be inwardly fortified to face it and master it.

B. Confirmation includes exhortations to continue as we have begun.

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them (Acts 15:32).

Laying on of hands is not enough. We must be stirred and challenged through words of warning and hope. The discipline we mastered in order to become disciples or learners, will be required throughout our lifetime to enable us to live as examples of Christ in a world full of darkness.

C. Confirmation means the giving of real inner strength.

And after he [Paul] had spent some time there [in Antioch], he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:23).

D. Sometimes the whole church was confirmed.

And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches (Acts 15:40, 41).

Without the confirmation through apostles and evangelists, a local church could suffer isolation from the larger Body of Christ. It is important to know that we belong to one another when we are a part of Christ. This belonging is much bigger than even our local community. The local church can act with confidence when its leaders are assured that they are acting along with others all over the world. We all want to be sure we are a part of what God is doing in the earth today.

3. What Actually Takes Place During Confirmation?

Whatever the outward procedure may be, whether it is simple or ornate, confirmation is essentially a spiritual transaction. As in other sacraments, it is a point of actual meeting with the Lord. Through the laying on of hands and prayer in faith, the Holy Spirit comes to the deep inner recesses of our personalities. There He deposits His own strength. He causes our innermost roots to grasp the Rock, Christ Jesus. He seals and makes the truth we have learned our very own so that it will not slip from us under pressure.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21, 22).

(Note: the word “stablisheth” also means to confirm.)

4. Why Must We Be Established In Truth?

We forget as easily as we learn. Only God could enable us to remember and go on using the truth we have learned of Him. Spiritual truth is subject to even more conflict than ordinary facts we acquire in school or from the newspaper. Satan has a vested interest in causing us to lose what we have gained in the Lord. Or better yet, he would like to make us twist the truth a little bit and come out with some heretical teaching to add confusion to the Word. But the Spirit of Truth guards the deposit He has placed within us.

A. Confirmation grounds us against the winds of deception.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:14, 15).

B. We must be motivated to keep alert and up-to-date in present truth.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these

things, ye shall never fall.… Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth (2 Pet. 1:10,12).

In these days of spiritual restoration we must keep our ear to the ground to keep abreast of what God is doing in the world today. Not every man-made fad is present truth. But revelation from God is progressive; we will know Him better and better as He makes the Scriptures come alive to us.

5. What Are The Results Of Confirmation?

Confirmation establishes our hearts in faith and in grace. We are freed to grow in the Lord character-wise—that is to manifest fruit. We are freed to walk in Him according to what we have learned.

A. Hearts established in holiness are free to increase in love toward others.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (1 Thess. 3:12, 13).

B. Inner sureness frees us to receive His enrichment in our total being.

That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you (1 Cor. 1:5, 6).

C. We receive inner strength to persevere with joy.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness (Col. 1:10, 11).

D. We are equipped to live life above reproach.

… to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature … (Col. 1:22, 23).

E. Being firmly rooted in Christ makes us a thankful people.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col. 2:6, 7).

Faith is an attitude of receptivity or openness toward God. This is how we received all the elementary or first principles. Confirmation should set our hearts permanently in an attitude of receptivity to God. We best express this through thanksgiving for whatever He sends our way. Thanksgiving keeps us open and ready for the next thing. Confirmation is not intended to make us feel we have arrived. In the Christian

life we go through many doors of transition. We have completed certain things, but each time a whole new world lies before us. There is much land to be possessed yet in our Christian experience. We will need all eternity to comprehend the Lord.

Home Study: Lesson 24

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Give several meanings for the word “confirmation” borrowing from the Latin and the Greek:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

2. Why does confirmation serve a real purpose in our lives? List reasons.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

3. How does confirmation protect us against doctrinal error?

4. Does confirmation make any difference in our character?

5. Describe what happens during confirmation.