

INTRODUCTION TO SACRAMENTS

Definitions

- Augustine – “a visible sign of an invisible grace”
- sacraments are signs and seals of grace

Romans 4:11

Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith.

What is a seal?

- pledge of the promise | assurance of fidelity
- sacraments not only signify, they *confer* grace

We receive the grace of the sacraments *through faith*

- sacraments do not automatically confer grace
- without faith, sacraments are like sun beating down on blind eyes

Sacraments are not signs/seals from us to God, but God to us

- common error is to think of sacraments as our pledge of faith

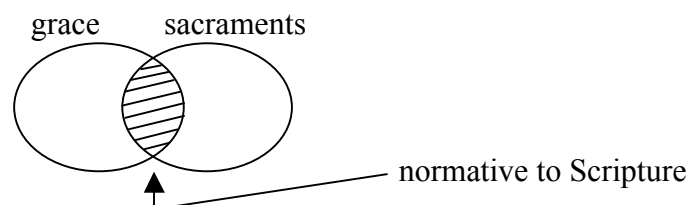
Word and Sacrament always goes together

- sacraments are visible, tangible signs and seals of the Word
- and without the Word, the sacraments are useless and meaningless
- illustration: handshake after an agreement

So then are sacraments redundant?

- no, because they are signs and seals
- as signs, they speak to our senses (gospel in audio-visual)
- as seals, they speak to our hearts

Sacraments are closely linked to the gospel



Can you be saved without baptism and Lord's Supper?

- yes – because sacraments do not save you | Christ saves you

Can you receive sacraments without being saved?

- yes – because sacraments are only effective if received by faith

Then does it not matter?

- no – because sacraments properly accompany faith in Christ

Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

This linkage is so tight, you can speak of one for the other

- sign and thing signified are distinguished without being separate

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. [see also Acts 22:16]

Sacraments are signs and seal of our union with Christ

- in baptism, we are united to his death and resurrection
- in Supper, we are partake of his body and blood

We have two sacraments: baptism and Lord's Supper

- baptism – initiatory rite | washed with blood of Christ
- Supper – fellowship rite | nourished by communion with Christ
- therefore, baptism – only once | Supper – ongoing, regular meal

Sacrament Notes

What is a sacrament?

- Augustine, “a visible sign of an invisible grace”
- more than a picture (like Superman sign) | sacraments point to gospel
 - it’s drama acted out, but even more, we participate in drama
 - this is where fact that sacraments are tactile is important (audio-visual)
- but even deeper, not just a sign, a seal | *Romans 4:11 – Abraham received sign and seal of righteousness*

What is a seal?

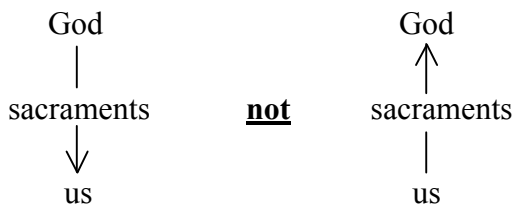
- you seal a letter, place seal on certificate | authenticates, provides assurances
- example: parent says “I love you” and then hugs child (hug seals love)
- sacraments confer grace – build up and strength our faith, experience of God’s love

We receive the grace of the sacraments *through faith*

- sacraments do not automatically confer grace
 - people get confused about infant baptism – does that mean saved?
 - no, for baptism to be effective, must be received by faith (later in life)
- therefore, w/o faith, sacraments like sun beating down on blind eyes
- sacraments are accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who opens eyes and hearts

Sacraments are not signs/seals from us to God, but God to us

- common error is to think of sacraments as our pledge of faith
 - people, “I’m not ready to be baptized, my faith isn’t strong enough”
 - or, “I’m not ready to take Supper until my faith is more consistent”



- again, relates to issue of infant baptism | how baptize w/o faith?
- baptism isn’t a sign of faith | sign of God’s grace, receive by faith

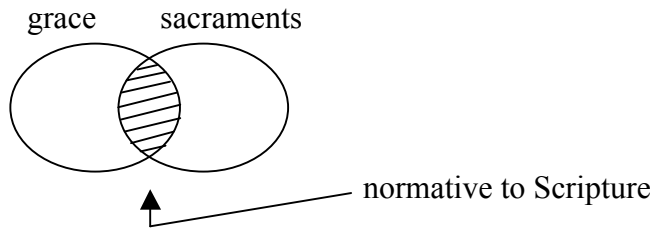
Word and Sacrament always goes together

- sacraments are visible, tangible signs and seals of the Word
 - sacraments communicate same message as Word, but through the *senses*
- and without the Word, the sacraments are useless and meaningless
- *illustration*: handshake after an agreement
 - after an agreement, handshake seals and confirms deal
 - but without words, just a handshake would be meaningless
- Roman Catholic Church has sacraments without the Word
- this is why in PCA, only ordained ministers can administer sacraments

So then are sacraments redundant?

- sacraments communicate the same thing as the Word
- no, because they are signs and seals
- as signs, they speak to our senses (gospel in audio-visual)
- as seals, they speak to our hearts

Sacraments are closely linked to the gospel



Can you be saved without baptism and Lord's Supper?

- yes – because sacraments do not save you | Christ saves you

Can you receive sacraments without being saved?

- yes – because sacraments are only effective if received by faith

Then does it not matter?

- no – because sacraments properly accompany faith in Christ

Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Jesus doesn't make baptism optional, but an essential part of making disciples

Every time in Acts, you see someone converted, they are immediately baptized

- example of Philippian jailer – Paul baptizes him right away

Acts 16:30-33 [not printed in handout]

³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

This linkage is so tight, you can speak of one for the other

- in theology, “sacramental union”
- baptism is so closely related to salvation, Peter says, “baptism saves you”
- but of course, baptism doesn’t save you, but what baptism signifies and seals – Christ

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sign and thing signified are *distinguished* without being *separate*

- we can discuss distinguish one from other (not same thing), but in Scripture, they are never separate

Sacraments are signs and seal of our *union with Christ*

- what is union with Christ?
 - everything that is his is ours | marriage analogy
 - this is how we receive benefits of salvation
- in baptism, we are united to his death and resurrection
 - Romans 6:4-5, in baptism we have been united to his death
- in Supper, we are partake of his body and blood
 - why do we consume bread and wine?
 - because we partake of what Christ suffered on cross | his broken body, shed blood

We have two sacraments: baptism and Lord’s Supper

- baptism an initiatory rite | washed with blood of Christ
- Supper is a fellowship rite | nourished and sustained by communion with Christ
- therefore, baptism is done only once | Supper is an ongoing rite, regular meal