

I. WE LOOK NOW AT THE TWO SACRAMENTS CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO HIS CHURCH

A. Sacraments are signs and seals of God's grace to us

1. A sign is something visible which points to a higher, spiritual, invisible reality.
2. A seal is a mark of authenticity, a guarantee that something is genuine.

B. Sacraments are designed by God to strengthen faith: a person must have faith before he can profitably use the sacraments.

II. THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

A. Remember that the Bible speaks of Baptism in two ways: baptism as the spiritual reality of salvation, and baptism as water baptism, and often it speaks of one in terms of the other.

1. Washing

- a. Washing is the most significant meaning of baptism. That is why it is *water* baptism.
- b. Water washes away the dirt of the body; so the blood and HS of Christ wash away sin. Water baptism is the sign of what the blood and HS of Christ do (Acts 22:16)
- c. But we must be careful to note that water baptism does not itself wash away sins.
- d. Also, only baptism is a sign and seal of the washing of sins. Having a shower at home is not a sign and seal of the washing of sins. The Spirit is pleased to use baptism to strengthen faith.

2. Regeneration

- a. Here especially the work of the Holy Spirit is in view. Baptism is a picture of the renewal of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47; I Cor. 12:13; Tit. 3:5).
- b. But we must be careful to reject baptismal regeneration, the idea that water baptism regenerates.

3. Union with Christ

- a. The elect are united to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This reality is signified in baptism especially by the prepositions "in" and "into."
- b. We are baptised into Christ, into the name of Christ, in the name of Christ; thus baptism identifies us with Christ. Gal. 3:27;
- c. We are baptised into Christ into the power of His death, burial and resurrection Rom. 6:3-4.

4. Entering into fellowship with the Triune God

- a. The baptismal formula in Matt. 28:19 says "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The Greek is "into" -- baptism brings us into fellowship with God.
- b. By "baptism" we do not mean "water baptism" but the real, spiritual baptism by the Spirit.
- c. Since Jesus is the revelation of the Triune God to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ is the equivalent of being baptised in the name of the Trinity, and since Christ is the Head of the Covenant we enter into fellowship with God through Him (Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5).

5. Entrance into the church

- a. Baptism does not make one a Christian (it is not a "Christening") or a member of the church, but it is a symbol of God's making us members of Christ by engrafting us into Jesus Christ. Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13.
- b. It is also the way in which a person (either an adult convert or a child of believing parents) officially becomes a member of the church institute. Baptised members/confessing members.

6. It is a mark that we belong to Jesus Christ and are separated from the world. Baptism means consecration or dedication to Christ.

- a. We see that especially in the two great types (foreshadowing pictures), the passage through the Red Sea and the Flood. I Cor. 10:2; I Peter 3:21.
- b. Baptism is the sign which distinguishes Christians from unbelievers; just as in the OT there were the circumcised and the uncircumcised; so there are today the baptised and the non-baptised.
- c. The Belgic Confession is esp. clear, "baptism ... by which we are received into the church of God and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to Him whose ensign and banner we bear .." (Art. 34). *Baptism obliges us to new obedience.*

B. Baptism is a sign of what God does.

1. We mention this b/c of the error of many Evangelicals that baptism is a sign of what we do.

- a. Baptism is not a sign of a person's decision to follow Christ, or a sign of repentance and faith.
- b. Baptism, as a sacrament, points to the work of Christ.
- c. That's why the Bible says "baptised" (passive voice), never 'baptised yourself' (reflexive).

2. Baptism can only be a seal if it seals what God does.

- a. The sacraments are "pledges of God's goodwill and grace toward us" (Belgic Confession, 33)
- b. Therefore, baptism seals, or confirms, God's promise to us.
- c. As surely as water washes away dirt from the body, so surely do the blood and HS of Christ wash away sins. *That is the assurance we need; and by that the HS strengthens our faith.*

3. We must not be deceived by the Roman Catholic view which is baptismal regeneration.

- a. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1263 ("By baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin"). After baptism a person is free from sin; only concupiscence remains which is a weakness of the human nature, a tendency toward sin against which the sinner can fight with the help of grace.
- b. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1266 ("The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptised sanctifying grace, the grace of justification"). Baptism does not only remove sin, it gives something. And notice how Rome confounds justification and sanctification.
- c. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1215 ("The sacrament is also called the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit"). And 1213 ("Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God"). According to Rome, baptism actually regenerates.

4. Rome appeals to various texts to prove baptismal regeneration

- a. John 3:5, "Born of water and the Spirit." But there is nothing in the context about baptism. The meaning is that the new birth is a cleansing work of God. If water baptism was the meaning no person not baptised (no exceptions) could be saved.
- b. Titus 3:5, "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Again no mention of baptism. The text is speaking of the gracious salvation of God ("not by works") which is by the renewing work of the Spirit and by regeneration which is a cleansing work ("washing").
- c. I Peter 3:21, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." This is a difficult passage but it is not speaking about baptismal salvation ("not the putting away of the filth of the flesh").
- d. Acts 22:16, "Be baptised and wash away thy sins." There is a definite relationship between baptism and the washing away of sins, but it is not a causal relationship. Baptism does not cause or bring about the forgiveness of sins. It is a sign of the washing away of sins. Remember the sacramental union: the reality is often described in terms of the thing signified.

C. So there are three views of the sacrament of baptism

1. Rome:

- a. Rome confounds the sign and the reality.
- b. This is baptismal regeneration, part of Rome's sacramental salvation.

2. Evangelicalism

- a. Baptism is a mere sign, nothing but a testimony to what the convert has done.
- b. But baptism cannot be a means of grace.

3. Reformed

- a. Baptism is a sign of the spiritual work of God in saving His people by washing away their sins, engrafting and incorporating them into Christ and bringing them into fellowship with Himself.
- b. But water baptism *does not do these things*: it points to what God has done.
- c. At the same time baptism is a powerful seal: it assures us that God does wash away our sins.