

Baptism Clarified
Ordinance (Memorial) or Sacrament (Means of Grace)?

It by a plain reading of scripture even—what do these passages at least seem to say? And why not???

1Pet. 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,

Col. 2:12 having been buried with him in **baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Rom. 6:4 We were buried therefore with him by **baptism** into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What is A Sacrament vs. mere “Ordinance”

WCF 27.1-2 What is a sacrament? Notice especially four distinguishing marks:

- “Immediate Institution”
- “holy Sign”—i.e. it symbolizes that which is promised (see below)
- “holy... Seal”—i.e. it in some sense accomplishes that which is promised (see below)
- “Spiritual Relation . . . between the thing signified and the sign” or means of grace. (see below)

4. What does all this mean exactly? Do the sacraments “effect” anything in so far as salvation is concerned?

Notice section 3—and the answer “yes and no” depending on how we mean it.

- NO: grace is “not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it. Thus, the elements themselves are not in any way transformed as to have any power in themselves (no “holy water” or “holy bread/wine” if by this it is meant they are anything other than they are naturally)
- YES: grace is conferred... upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers. (“holy water” and “holy bread/wine” in so far as they are instruments used by the Holy Spirit to confer grace and salvation “TO THE ELECT” as received and confirmed by faith alone.

In other words, by means of the spiritual presence of Christ that is uniquely related to the sacraments (section 2), the sacraments are powerful to affect that which is being promised. Does this mean that the nature of the power is necessarily exhibited, or even necessarily immediately exhibited vis-à-vis the participant? NO! Again in the words of our confession, only “ordinarily” as per the relation of the church to salvation. In other words, the sacraments are a “means of grace” and not “the agent of grace.” The “agent of grace” is the Holy Spirit, even as God the Holy Spirit is sovereign. (John 3:8)

As a “holy Sign:”

- 1) What is signified in Christian **Baptism**? WCF 28.1 *of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.*
- 2) What is signified in the **Lord’s Supper**? WCF 29.1 *of His body and blood, called the Lord’s Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death;*

As a “seal” I.e. what exactly does it effect? Notice again the sacramental relation: *Spiritual Relation . . . between the thing signified and the sign.* I.e. what is signified is somehow applied in, with and through the sacraments—

- **In Baptism:** *ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.* Thus, WCF 28.6
by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time.

However, note the important qualifications as “according to the counsel of God’s will, in His appointed time” (i.e. “not necessarily and not necessarily immediately”) as then predicated upon the work of the Holy Spirit and how this is explicitly related to the power of Baptism to save:

Not necessarily: WCF 28.5 *yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.*

Not necessarily immediately: WCF 28.6 *The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered*

(Read Mt.28:19, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 3:21, Gal.3:27, 1Cor.12:13, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Rom.6:3-4 and ask, does it not seem to “affect” salvation in some sense?)

Who are the recipients of the sacraments according to our confession of faith?

➤ Baptism: (See *A Baptism that Saves*, Preston Graham)

1. Those who are baptized into the context of the visible church that as defined by the apostolic marks of a true church (New Covenant based confession, sacraments, government)

WCF 25.5 "Unto this catholic visible church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints."

Note—it is NOT a family ceremony, even if the child’s relation to the church is by virtue of their family’s relation to the church...

2. All Believers *and* their children

28:4. *Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.*

Why Children? (See *A Baptism that Saves*, Preston Graham)

- i. The logic of baptism as an entrance and converting ordinance (vs. renewal) in relation to the doctrine of effectual calling (see above on “efficacy” of baptism as a converting ordinance)
- ii. The apostolic example of “household” baptism, albeit without explicit reference to the faith of the various “subordinate” members of the household, while explicitly referencing the faith of the head of household. (Acts 16:15-33, 18:8 Notice as well the teaching in 1Cor. 7:14)
- iii. The hermeneutic principle of continuity between baptism and circumcision (Col.2:11-13) and the suspect “narrowing” of the terms of communion for the New Covenant visible church relative to the Old Testament church IF one were to exclude those members (children) that were previously admitted to the visible church under the Old Covenant.
 1. Compare then the language of Acts 3:25 Gal.3:8 as per baptism with Gen.17:7-9.
 2. Notice that the thing signified in circumcision is exactly the same as the thing signified in baptism (see above)
 3. Notice as well that in the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant, that the stress of “believers baptism” only seems to be greater, given that all converts to Christianity from Judaism were baptized into the New Covenant church. And yet, it is clear that adult conversions in the Old Testament were no less required to be circumcised as converts were required to be baptized under the New Covenant, and yet children of believers were also entered into the church of their parents vis-à-vis circumcision in Old Testament as well. I.e. no difference—believers and infant circumcision no less than believers and infant baptism today.