

Acts 22.16—Baptism signifies and seals God's forgiveness

Sacraments are Signs and Seals

- I. To talk about the Christian Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) is to talk about signs and seals, about signifying and sealing.
 - A. It's a fundamental purpose of the Sacraments to signify and seal.
 - 1. As *signs* they point us away from themselves to the promises of God concerning our union and communion with Christ.
 - 2. As *seals* they act as assurances by attesting to us that, by faith, God has made good to us on those promises.
 - B. Given the infallible and holy character of God, His promises don't need to be strengthened by seals (Num 23.19).
 - 1. But He knows how weak and small our faith is and has therefore given us the Sacraments as seals to His Word.
 - 2. So the Sacraments are visible sermons to confirm to our eyes the Word of God heard with our ears.
 - C. Separated from the Word of God the Sacraments are meaningless.
 - 1. Their meaning and efficacy are inseparably tied to the Word they confirm, the Son who blesses them, and the Spirit who applies them.
- II. Regarding baptism...
 - A. It's not a vain symbol or a mere formality.
 - B. It's a *Sacrament* instituted by Christ as a sign and seal of His gracious and saving work in our lives. And one thing which it signifies and seals to us is God's forgiveness of all our sins.

Baptism signifies and seals God's forgiveness

- I. Baptism points to a washing, Acts 22.16
 - A. We need to be washed because we're defiled by sin, Ps 51.2
 - B. Nothing can wash away our sins but the blood of Christ, Eph 1.7; Rev 1.5; 1Jn 1.7
- C. Therefore there's no warrant for thinking that baptism itself is the washing away of our sins.
 - 1. Baptism signifies and seals our forgiveness by pointing us away from itself to the gospel promise of forgiveness by the blood of Jesus.

- II. This makes clear that we're not the actors in the Sacraments but rather the recipients. The Sacraments are a message from God to us not a message from us to God.
 - A. Thus baptism doesn't point to our faith but rather to God's promise. It's not a wet profession of our faith in God but an instituted sign and seal of God's promise to all who believe.
- III. This is why God would have us baptize our small children: because it's not a sign and seal of their faith; it's a sign and seal of His covenant promise.
 - A. Faith isn't required in our children for them to be baptized any more than it was required in Abraham's children for them to be circumcised, Gen 17.7-12; Acts 2.38-39
 - B. This all makes sense when we remember that the church didn't create or institute the Sacraments, Christ did. They're *His* ordinances, instituted by Him, to be a sign and a seal of His gracious incorporation of us into His person and work.
 - C. Our baptism isn't a sign of our strong faith in Christ, it's a sign given to us by Christ to support our weak faith.
- IV. Therefore see that you draw comfort from your baptism and from the gospel it preaches to you by looking in faith to the person and work of Christ which it signifies and seals unto you: *the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin* (1Jn 1.7).