

Biblical Topics

Sacraments

The word “sacrament” is not a Biblical term. Originally it signified an oath or solemn engagement, such as the military oath of a Roman soldier, by which he renounced allegiance to everyone else and swore loyalty to the Roman emperor. Because in the early Church, Christians at their Baptism renounced their former idols and vowed loyalty to the Triune God, which was really their ‘sacrament,’ the term was by and by applied to Holy Baptism itself. Later on it was also applied to the Lord’s Supper. Sacraments are now visible means of spiritual blessings. They are religious rites instituted by Christ. By the standards listed below in A, B, and C, Lutherans say there are only two Sacraments (Baptism & Lord’s Supper).

By a Sacrament we mean a sacred act:

- A. Instituted by God Himself. A Sacrament which offers God’s blessings cannot be instituted by man or the Church, but by God alone.
 - Baptism – Matthew 28:18-20
 - Lord’s Supper – Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

- B. By which God offers, and gives us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us. The Sacraments are not mere signs by which the person using them. They are the means of grace through which God offers His grace to men.

- C. In which there are certain visible means connected with His word. We may not use any external means we choose, but only those which God Himself has designed. It is He who offers the gift of grace. It is He alone who can determine the means of grace.
 - Baptism – Water
 - Lord’s Supper – Bread and Wine

The above information is taken from: “Luther’s Small Catechism” annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.