

The title for this morning's sermon is – Baptism: a Sign, Symbol, and Seal—baptism is a glorious sacrament (ordinance) of the NC, that brings with it profound gospel significance—it's a diamond with three beautiful sides...

Baptism is a sign in that it identifies us as God's covenant people—baptism is a symbol in that it externally illustrates inward truth—baptism is a seal in that is, in that, God through it, seals to our hearts our adoption—it's a means of present and ongoing grace...

- I. Baptism is a Sign of NC Membership
- II. Baptism is a Symbol of Inward Truth
- III. Baptism is a Seal of Present Grace

I. Baptism is a Sign of NC Membership

1. Here I want to begin this first point with a brief reminder—about the Bible as a whole and the book of Galatians in particular...
2. [1] The Bible as a whole—the Bible is a book of covenants—it's divided into two parts—the Old and New Testaments (covenants)...
3. All Reformed Christians are covenantal—that is, they understand Scripture as divided into various covenants...
4. Now, not all Reformed Christians understand these covenants the exact same, but there is a lot of common ground...
5. For example, they all understand that Scripture is divided into two covenants—the Old and New Covenant...
6. Furthermore, all Reformed Christians understand that the OC was largely to physical Israel and the NC to true Israel...
7. Furthermore, all Reformed Christians agree, that the OC typified and shadowed what the NC fulfills in Christ...
8. In addition to these things, Reformed Christians all agree, that both the Old and NC have signs that identify members...
9. [a] Circumcision was the OC sign—it visibly marked or identified covenant members, the sign symbolized the covenant...
10. Every physical descendant of Abraham, became a public member of the OC, when he was circumcised on the 8th day...
11. [b] Baptism is the NC sign—it visibly marks or identifies covenant members, the sign symbolizes the covenant...
12. Every member of the NC, becomes a visible member of the NC, when he or she confesses Christ in baptism...
13. [2] The book of Galatians—here I want to narrow our focus from the whole Bible, to a particular book of the Bible...
14. The apostle Paul within the book of Galatians, has his eyes upon a single issue—the introduction of a false gospel...
15. To put it simply—this false gospel was being taught by Judaizers, or Jewish false teachers who had infiltrated the church...
16. In short—they were telling Christians (Jews and Gentiles), that in order to be God's people they had to keep certain OT ceremonial laws...
17. These OT ceremonial laws could be boiled down to one—circumcision—circumcision was being added to Christ...
18. Thus, these false teachers totally believed in salvation by Christ, but they did not believe in salvation by Christ ALONE...
19. It's for this reason that throughout Galatians, Paul is very intent on showing how a person becomes a son of God...
20. [a] Having faith in Christ, makes us God's children, v26—"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus..."

21. Nothing but faith in Christ—not circumcision, not law-keeping, not even baptism, nothing but faith in Christ...
22. [b] Belonging to Christ, makes us Abraham's seed, v29—"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise..."
23. We belong to Christ by faith, and every person who belongs to Christ, is thus Abraham's true and spiritual seed...
24. Paul is likely thinking back to v16—where he references God's promises to Abraham, in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22...
25. This seed, according to those promises, would be a means of blessing the nations—that Seed was ultimately Christ...
26. Thus, because Christ is Abraham's Seed, those who belong to Christ by faith, are now also Abraham's seed...
27. And because we are now Abraham's seed, we are also—"heirs according to the promise"—the promise made to Abraham...
28. Rom.4:13—"For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith..."
29. This means—the promise made to Abraham concerning the land of Canaan, was a shadow of a larger land...
30. Abraham understood that ultimately his inheritance would be bigger than Canaan, but would include the earth (the new earth)...
31. All of the promises God made to Abraham are ultimately fulfilled in Christ and heaven—and this is what every true descendant of Abraham receives...
32. Thus—here is the point—what does baptism do—well in the first place, it marks a person as a covenant child...
33. It physically and tangibly, distinguishes them from this world—it publically declares them a member of the NC...
34. It visually identifies them as the true seed of Abraham—it marks them as no longer a spiritual and moral Gentile...
35. And thus, it points them to the fulfilment of God's promise, that they, along with Abraham, are heirs of the world...

II. Baptism is a Symbol of Spiritual Truth

1. Now—before I go any further, I want to first make an admission, that a SIGN and a SYMBOL are closely related...
2. In other words—if baptism is a sign of the NC, then of necessity, it's intended to symbolize spiritual things...
3. Simply put—because baptism is a sign of the NC, it obviously symbolizes or portrays the blessings of that covenant...
4. Thus, let me plainly say—the blessings of the NC are all found in Christ—Christ is the Mediator of the NC who mediates the blessings of that covenant...
5. Now—don't get me wrong, saints within the OC had these blessings, as they believed the promise of Christ...
6. Thus—water baptism is not only covenant sign, but is also an outward symbol of inward and spiritual truth...
7. Perhaps I can put it this way—baptism is an outward display of what takes place in the heart, by faith, in conversion...
8. Whenever a person believes on Christ, they are put into Christ savingly, and this is pictured in water baptism...
9. Thus, when Paul says in v27—"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ"—he is referring to water baptism...
10. But—he is referring to water baptism as it symbolizes all that took place by faith, when they were converted...
11. For example—I became a Christian in January of 1994—it was then that I was put into Christ, and thus put on Christ...

12. But I wasn't baptized until October of 1994—thus it wasn't until October (9 months later), that I was publically put into Christ...
13. We must make the necessary distinction between what actually took place, and what publically took place in baptism...
14. I was actually put into Christ BY FAITH (in January)—but I was publically put into Christ BY BAPTISM (in October)...
15. Thus—the Scripture points us to baptism, to remind us of all that actually took place by faith in our conversion...
16. Now—here I want to suggest that, according to Gal.3:27, baptism symbolizes two very great and related truths...
17. [1] We were put into Christ—"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ"—that is, put in union with Christ...
18. The ordinance of baptism signifies, being placed into Christ—just as we are put into the water, so were put into Christ...
19. Being placed INTO the water, is symbolic of our being placed INTO Christ, by faith, at the moment of conversion...
20. John Stott—"Our baptism sets forth visibly our union with Christ. This cannot mean that baptism itself unites us to Christ. The entire letter of Galatians is devoted to the theme of salvation by faith not circumcision. It is inconceivable that Paul would now substitute baptism for circumcision and teach that we are in Christ by baptism..."
21. Thus baptism signifies or symbolizes UNION WITH CHRIST—it reminds us that we are in Christ vitally and intimately...
22. [a] Christians are in Christ vitally—by this I mean, because we are in Christ, we have life—spiritually and eternally...
23. Now—I've chosen to retain the older historical term "vitally" even though I know it may not be easily understood...
24. But, the word is used all around us—"vital" means "essentially and necessarily"—something that is vital is necessary, it's essential...
25. For example, doctors refer to "vital signs"—which are 4 or 5 essential signs, that show the life of the patient...
26. These things have to be there if there is life—they are essential and necessary—they are absolutely important...
27. So too, our union with Christ is VITAL—it's saving, essential, and necessary—put another way—it is life giving...
28. By nature we are spiritually dead, because of union with Christ we have life, we are made alive because of Him...
29. Through our union with Christ, every saving benefit is communicated to our souls—justification, sanctification, and glorification...
30. [b] Christians are in Christ intimately—by this I mean, because we have union with Christ we now have communion with Christ...
31. Put another way—our union with Christ isn't merely transactional but highly personal and relational—we become one flesh...
32. Now—most of us are aware, that the Scriptures uses the imagery of marriage, to describe this mutual union...
33. For example, think of a young bride recently wed—she thinks back to her wedding ceremony with great fondness...
34. Well this is what baptism is—it's a public ceremony—a formal wedding—a bringing together of two people (Christ and a Christian)...
35. [2] We have put on Christ—"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ"—every person put in Christ, puts on Christ...
36. In fact the imagery is that of clothing, thus the NAS—"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ..."
37. Thus—the questions becomes—what exactly is Paul referring to when He speaks of us as clothed with Christ...

38. [a] Christians have put on Christ's righteousness—that is, they have been washed in blood, and robbed in righteousness...
39. Isa.61:10—"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness..."
40. [b] Christians have put on Christ's character—this is by far the most likely meaning, according to the commentators...
41. First—whenever Paul speaks about putting off and on, he usually refers to moral character (Eph.4:22-24; Col.3:8-17)...
42. Col.3:8-10—"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."
43. Christians have put off the old man, and they have put on the new man—they've put off Adam, and put on Christ...
44. This is a once for all act that happened at conversion—"you have put off the old man...having put on Christ (the new man)..."
45. Now—it's true that the same Scripture that says—"you have put off the old man," also says, we are to put off the old man (Eph.4:22-24)...
46. And, the same Scripture that says—"you have put on Christ," also says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts..."
47. In other words, Christians are to live in harmony to what they are—because you are new, live as new people...
48. Secondly, it appears Paul is making an allusion to the OT practice of purifying (consecrating) the priests for duty...
49. Ex.29:4-5—"And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately (skilfully) woven band of the ephod..."
50. Thus, when Paul describes Christians as "putting on Christ" he's talking about that radical change of regeneration...
51. The new man is raised in place of the old man—or put another way—the old man is put off and Christ is put on...
52. Thus—baptism symbolizes the fact, that every Christian is in Christ, and has union and communion with Him...
53. Furthermore, it symbolizes the fact, that every Christian is now a new man, the old man having been put off...

III. Baptism is a Seal of Present Grace

1. Now—there is a sense in which this point is the most difficult to explain, thus I want to start by defining SEAL...
2. When Christians speak of baptism as a seal they mean—God uses it as a means of sealing our adoption to our hearts...
3. That is—of impressing its reality deep down into our souls—of using it as a means to bring comfort to our hearts...
4. And thus, it's very important to understand, the sacraments are seals or means of grace, only to those with faith...
5. This is the serious error of Roman Catholicism, to claim the sacraments communicate grace apart from faith...
6. My friends, we can be baptized a thousand times, and it will never benefit us, unless we personally have faith...
7. This of course is the same with regards to the Lord's Supper—is the Supper a means of grace, yes, but not without faith...
8. There is nothing native to the bread and cup, or water—that automatically communicates grace to our souls...

9. These are only means of grace as we look past the symbol to Christ—all grace is fully and exclusively in Him...
10. Thus, when I refer to baptism as Seal of Present Grace, I mean, baptism is a means of present and ongoing grace when reflected on by faith...
11. Now—almost all of our Reformed and Puritan forefathers (with little exception), spoke of baptism as a covenant SEAL...
12. James Ussher—"What are Sacraments? Seals of the promise of God in Christ: wherein by certain outward signs, commanded by God, and delivered by His minister, Christ Jesus with all His saving graces is signified, conveyed, and sealed unto the heart of a Christian. For Sacraments are seals annexed by God to the word of the Covenant of grace; to instruct, assure, and possess us of our part in Christ and His benefits, and to bind us to all thankful obedience unto God in Him..."
13. Shorter Catechism—"A sacrament is an holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the NC, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers..."
14. Hercules Collins—"What are the sacraments? A. They are sacred signs and seals set before our eyes and ordained of God for this purpose, that He may declare and confirm by them the promise of His gospel unto us, to this, that He gives freely remission of sins and life everlasting to everyone in particular who believes in the sacrifice of Christ which He accomplished once for all upon the cross..."
15. LBC (Of Saving Faith, 14:1)—"The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened..."
16. But—the question becomes—does Scripture itself speak of baptism as a means whereby grace is sealed to our hearts...
17. Rom.4:11—"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also..."
18. [a] Circumcision was a sign—that is, it was the physical sign that separated Abraham from the other nations...
19. [b] Circumcision was a seal—"a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised..."
20. That is—Abraham had God's righteousness, by faith, before he was circumcised—he was saved before he had the sign...
21. Now—it's true that God commanded Abraham to give the sign to his infant offspring, but that was before faith...
22. Thus, circumcision was a seal only to those who received circumcision as believers—those who had the righteousness of God by faith...
23. Put another way—God used circumcision as a means to seal to Abraham's conscience the truth that it betrayed...
24. As Abraham reflected upon his circumcision, exercising faith in the promises it symbolized, grace came to his soul...
25. Dear brethren—this is exactly what baptism does—baptism is a seal of the righteousness we have in Christ...
26. But—baptism is only a seal for those who have faith—it's a seal as we believingly lay hold of what it symbolizes...
27. Thus—Christians must think about their baptism—they must ponder what their baptism symbolizes to them...
28. William Perkins—"Baptism must be (as it were) a daily sermon unto us"—that is, we must remind ourselves what it signifies...
29. And as we do this—God the Holy Spirit, seals to our hearts, all that water baptism signifies and illustrates...
30. Or, put another way—baptism is a present means of grace, whereby the Spirit encourages or strengthens our soul...
31. It's for this reason that the NT often points Christians back to their baptism, as a reason to obey God presently...

32. For example, Paul asks the rhetorical question in Romans 6:1—"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound. Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it..."
33. Rom.6:3—"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death..."
34. He goes on to describe how we were "buried with Him through baptism" and we were "raised with Him to newness of life..."
35. In other words—our baptism symbolizes our union with Christ, death of the old man, and resurrection of the new...
36. Thus, Paul pointed these Roman Christians back to their baptism, in order to remember all that it signifies....
37. Thus, merely remembering your baptism isn't going to benefit you, unless, you remember what it signifies...
38. And so as a result, we must look upon baptism (the sacraments), as visible gifts from God to strengthen our faith...
39. This is the whole point behind sacraments—they are visible and tangible expressions or illustrations of gospel truth...
40. There is a very real sense in which, sacraments are love gifts of Christ, to assist us to see and feel gospel realities...
41. But—here's the problem—most Christians today fill their worship with kinds of visual aids, while neglecting the sacraments...
42. For example—some churches use movie clips, fog machines, incense, all because they want to feel these things...
43. Well, brethren, feeling these things is NOT wrong, providing you use the things that Christ has ordained to use...
44. The sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are visual and earthly reminders of gospel and spiritual truth...
45. It has been my humble conviction for 20 years, that many Christians have a very low and even faulty view of baptism...
46. Most Christians view baptism as merely an expression of obedience—something done once and never thought of again...
47. But dear friends, surely we know by know, that this is absolutely contrary to every facet of our Reformed heritage...
48. Reformed Christians have always believed, that these ordinances (baptism and supper), are means of grace...
49. Thomas Boston—"It's by the sacraments that God solemnly ratifies and confirms the covenant with believers. The covenant is held out in the word to be embraced by all to whom it comes: by believing we enter into the covenant; by the sacraments God declares it to be a bargain, as one does by subscribing a contract, and sealing it..."
50. Thus—I suggest that the Spirit seals our hearts in baptism, as we reflect upon three things—God's promises, Christ's provision, and our obligation...
51. [1] God's promises—Christians should read in their baptism their sonship—that is, that they belong to God...
52. Perhaps I can put it like this—baptism is like our adoption papers—in which God promises us all the privileges of sonship...
53. For example, think of a young teenage girl, who has been in numerous foster homes throughout her 13 years...
54. And then the unthinkable happens, a loving and wealthy family adopts her, and now for the first time she has a father...
55. Well, as you can imagine, at times she has a hard time believing it's true—and she even doubts that it will last...
56. Well, in such times she can take out her adoption papers, and be assured that her adoption is legal and lasting...
57. So too, every baptized believer has in their baptism, a sign and seal, of God's covenant faithfulness and promises...

58. Perhaps I can further explain the significance of a covenant sign, by reminding you of the sign of the Noaic Covenant...
59. If you remember God gave Noah and his family the sign of the rainbow, to CONFIRM His covenant faithfulness...
60. Every time Noah, or his descendants (which include us), saw a rainbow, it brought peace and comfort to their hearts...
61. So too, every baptised Christian, should behold in those waters, a sign and token of God's covenantal faithfulness...
62. But remember, dear brethren—a sign in and of itself is only a sign—it points to something outside of itself...
63. [2] Christ's provision—that is, in our baptism we behold our union with Christ, and His provision of grace...
64. In our baptism we are reminded of who we are in Christ—that we are now in Christ and have put on Christ...
65. Perhaps I can put it like this—in our baptism, we are reminded of our union with Christ—that all He has and is, is ours...
66. For example—what is the sign of an ordinary wedding but the wedding rings—in fact, often times the minister will ask—“What sign do you have of your unending love” and the Groom and Bride will answer—“A ring...”
67. These rings are covenantal signs in which each person can be assured and confirmed in the love of their spouse...
68. Think of a dear woman who got married in 1998, had 5 children, and in the process, put on a few extra pounds...
69. She may at times grow depressed with herself, and wonder if her husband really loves her, for all her faults...
70. But then she sits on her bed, in the early hours of the morning, and she looks at her ring, and she remembers his promise...
71. She remembers that he is hers, and she is his—she remembers that all that he has is hers—they are one flesh forever...
72. Oh dear Christian, this is too often us—we sit on our beds and wonder, will Christ still love me, after all I've done...
73. You say—if only I had a sign to confirm to me His covenantal love—well my dear friend, look into the waters (this is all the sign you need)...
74. [3] Our obligations—baptism not only reminds us of God's promises, and Christ's provision, but our obligations...
75. Gal.3:29—“And if you are Christ's”—that is, if you belong to Christ—if you have been wed to Him by faith...
76. I mentioned earlier, that baptism is a public ceremony, whereby, a Christian is publically wed to Jesus Christ...
77. And so now that we are Christ's, that we now belong to Christ, now that we are His bride, we must obey Him...
78. Perhaps put another way—our baptism reminds us, of who we are in Christ, and what we must now do for Christ...
79. Thomas Boston—“Baptism signifies and seals our engagement to be the Lord's, to be his only, wholly and for ever. It is a dedicating ordinance, wherein the party baptised is solemnly given up to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His ear is bored, that he may be the Lord's servant for ever. He is listed under Christ's banner, to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh. He renounces sin and Satan, these his old masters, as being dead to sin, that he may live in newness of life. And, in a word, it is a declared acceptance of God's covenant offered in the gospel...”