

The Sacraments

236. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a sacred act

- A. instituted by God,
- B. in which God Himself has joined His Word of promise to a visible element,
- C. and by which He offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ.

Note: The word sacrament comes to us from the Latin Bible, where it translates the Greek word mystery. At first this word described all the saving truths of the faith, such as the Trinity, the incarnation, the redemption, the church (see for instance 1 Cor. 4:1, Eph. 5:32, and I Tim. 3:16). Later it was narrowed down to our present sense.

237. How many such sacraments are there?

By this definition there are two sacraments: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Note: Sometimes Holy Absolution is counted as a third sacrament, even though it has no divinely instituted visible element (Large Catechism IV 74; Apology XIII 4).

- 829 **Acts 2:38** Peter replied, "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."
- 830 **1 Cor. 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (NKJV).

238. Why are we to treasure the sacraments, when water, bread, and wine are such common elements?

"The sacraments and all the external things ordained and instituted by God should be regarded not according to the gross, external mask (as we see the shell of a nut) but as that in which God's Word is enclosed" (Large Catechism IV, 19).

- 831 **1 Cor. 1:28.** [God] chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not to nullify the things that are.

Bible narrative: By God's promise the plain Jordan River had the power to cure Naaman's leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14).