

# Baptism and the Lord's Supper – Avoiding Error

Posted on [July 7, 2012](#) by [Jerry Nelson](#)



The July 6, 2012 reading in Table Talk ([Ligonier Ministries](#)) succinctly states the special work of God's Spirit in the Lord's Supper and Baptism. "We must avoid two errors when we discuss the sacraments. The first of these is the view that says the sacraments convey grace *ex opere operato* – "by the working of the work." (This view says)the sacraments always provide grace as they are performed. This understanding turns the sacraments into magical rites that people rely on for salvation instead of relying on Christ alone by faith. This view also obscures the sacraments' function as conduits of judgment, not grace, for those who do not receive in faith that which the sacraments signify and seal (1 Corinthians 11:27).

The second error views the sacraments as bare signs with no special utility in the Spirit's hands to further our sanctification. In this view, sacraments are, at best, reminders of what God did in the past in the atonement and our regeneration; the sacraments convey no spiritual power, benefit or grace in the present. Most people who hold this view likely do so because they fear that a high view of the sacraments could obscure the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone. We sympathize with this concern. Nevertheless, Scripture does not allow us to deny a special working of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments.

We must affirm a special working of the Spirit in baptism (and the Lord's Supper) because the New Testament connects this sacrament and the work of the Holy Spirit very closely. We see this, for example in Titus 3:5 ("God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.") Elsewhere Peter says that "baptism...now saves you (1 Peter 3:21).

Given the entire witness of Scripture, we must, of course, confess that baptism is not the prerequisite for regeneration and salvation. If that were so, for example Jesus could not have promised salvation to the penitent thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). The benefits of salvation signified in baptism are not confined to the the sign, which would make it impossible for anyone who has not been baptized to be saved...Nevertheless, the saved person who is never baptized is the exception not the rule.

We do not believe in baptismal regeneration, but with the New Testament, we do confess that baptism is a real means of grace wherein the Spirit strengthens our faith and reminds us of the work of Christ... The New Testament knows of no true convert who consciously refuses

baptism. If you trust Jesus but have never been baptized, you must receive the sign and seal of baptism.”