



You have talked about a “valid Sacrament.” What makes a Sacrament valid? I grew up as a Protestant and never heard this mentioned.

Anglicanism defines the Sacraments as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace” (*Book of Common Prayer* page 857).

The Sacraments are physical channels or means of grace, instituted by Christ, by which we are sanctified and given divine life. As St Thomas Aquinas pointed out, the seven Sacraments touch all the stages and the important moments of Christian life.

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A Sacrament is:

- “*outward and visible*”: it is physical, i.e., it can be perceived by one or more of the senses
- “*sign*”: a theological term for something which actually conveys that which it signifies (as distinguished from a symbol which merely represents something else; e.g. the “accidents” of consecrated Bread and Wine in the Eucharist are signs of the Body and Blood of Christ, not symbols)
- “*inward and spiritual grace*”: grace is power and strength which God gives to His people
- “*given by Christ*”: the Sacraments are Christ’s. He instituted them, and it is He who acts in them. We *celebrate* the Sacraments; we do not perform them, i.e. we “set the stage.” It is Christ who performs the Sacraments through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because they are Christ’s, not ours, we must “set the stage” in the manner Christ ordained in order for Sacraments to be real or “valid.” We cannot change what Christ instituted and still have an authentic Sacrament.
- “*as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace*”: the Sacraments are objective realities, i.e. they exist and act in their own right (“*ex opere operato*”). Their reality and function are not subjective; they do not depend on our perception of them to exist or to be operative.

Each of the seven Sacraments has five elements:

- *form*: the words which actually effect the Sacrament
- *matter*: the physical element of the Sacrament
- *proper minister*: the person designated and authorized by Christ to administer the Sacrament
- *proper recipient* (“subject”): a person capable of receiving the Sacrament
- *intention*: the intention of the minister to administer the Sacrament as Christ instituted it

All five of these elements as ordained by Christ must be present when a Sacrament is celebrated in order for it to be valid or real.

This is generally not a theological matter in Protestantism because most Protestants believe that the two Sacraments which they recognize (“ordinances” as the more radical Protestants call them) are symbols—subjective reminders of Christ’s teaching—not objective physical channels of God’s grace.

Valid Sacraments are the continuation of Jesus Christ’s ministry on earth and are the principal means God uses to convey grace to His people today. While the Sacraments are objective realities, they are not spiritual magic. Intentional preparation and response—cooperation with God’s Will—by the recipient are necessary in order that the grace the Sacraments convey may be utilized and fully effective in the person’s life.

Sacrament	Form	Matter	Proper Minister
Holy Baptism	N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.	water	Normally a Bishop, Priest, or Deacon validly Ordained in the Apostolic Succession. In an emergency, any person with proper intention.
Holy Eucharist	This is my Body... This is my Blood. <i>(The Eastern Church and some Anglicans teach that an Eucharist—prayer asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ—is also necessary in order to have a valid consecration.)</i>	wheat bread grape wine	A Bishop or Priest Ordained in the Apostolic Succession.
Holy Confirmation	Strengthen, O Lord, your servant N. with your Holy Spirit; empower <i>him</i> for your service; and sustain <i>him</i> all the days of <i>his</i> life.	laying-on-of-hands Sacred Chrism	A Bishop in the Apostolic Succession. A Priest in the Apostolic Succession.
Reconciliation	I absolve you from all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.	Absolution	A Bishop or Priest Ordained in the Apostolic Succession.
Holy Matrimony	I, N., take you, N., to be my wife (husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.	vow	A man is the minister to a woman. A woman is the minister to a man.
Holy Unction	N., I anoint you with Oil in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.	consecrated [olive] Oil of the Sick	A Bishop or Priest Ordained in the Apostolic Succession.
Holy Orders	<i>Bishop.</i> Therefore, Father, make N. a bishop in your Church. Pour out upon him the power of your princely Spirit, whom you bestowed upon your beloved Son Jesus Christ, with whom he endowed the apostles, and by whom your Church is built up in every place, to the glory and unceasing praise of your Name. <i>Priest.</i> Therefore, Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, give your Holy Spirit to N.; fill him with grace and power, and make him a priest in your Church. <i>Deacon.</i> Therefore, Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, give your Holy Spirit to N.; fill him with grace and power, and make him a deacon in your Church.	laying-on-of-hands laying-on-of-hands laying-on-of-hands	A Bishop Ordained in the Apostolic Succession. (Canon Law requires at least three) A Bishop Ordained in the Apostolic Succession. A Bishop Ordained in the Apostolic Succession.