

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

(By Pastor Theo. Reimers)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Theo. Reimers was born near Toowoomba, Queensland, on March 27, 1898, being baptized by Pastor Backen. He entered Concordia College, and later Concordia Seminary, Adelaide, in 1916, graduating in 1924, and being ordained at Greenwood. From 1925 to 1928 he served in the field of labour of the Brisbane and Brisbane Valley areas. In 1928 he accepted a call to the Brisbane Congregation, preaching throughout the Brisbane metropolitan area and Southport, and serving service men and women during the war. He and his wife Hanna (nee Martin) had one daughter, Naomi.

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"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." These words of St. Paul are the source of all comfort, joy and hope for sinful mankind. Since the fall of Adam and Eve all men are conceived and born in sin, are sinners by nature, and sinners in practice; they are flesh born of the flesh, wholly depraved, totally blind of understanding in spiritual things, their will opposed to the will of God, and inclined to do what is evil, without any ability whatsoever to alter or change their natural state. In this natural state man is under God's wrath and deserves temporal and eternal punishment. St. Paul however says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Since it is not His will that any should perish, God in His unfathomable love towards lost mankind, shows a way by which all can be saved. He sent His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners. Jesus Christ in man's stead fulfilled the Law which man had transgressed, and by suffering and dying He bore the punishment which the sinners have deserved. God punished the sinners in His Son Jesus. In view of all that Christ has done, as man's Substitute, God now causes to be proclaimed the glorious message that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Now the invitation comes to sinful man: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." According to these words man is eternally saved by believing in Jesus Christ. However, since man is by nature spiritually blind and dead, he cannot by his own will and strength accept Christ in faith. This is a work which God Himself must perform in man, who is by nature spiritually dead, for no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. Accordingly we confess in our Third Article: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. The means by which the Holy Ghost brings us to faith and keeps us in faith is the Gospel. By the Gospel we mean not only the preaching of the Good News, but also its individual application to men, in those sacred rites which we call Sacraments, which the Lutheran Church designates as signs and seals of God's will towards us. These sacraments have, therefore, also been called the "visible Word." Their efficacy is due to the Word of God connected with them. We accordingly are accustomed to speak of the Word and the Sacraments as the Means of Grace. It is of one of these Means of Grace, of Holy Baptism, that we are going to hear at this convention.

At the Baptist Assembly being held in Brisbane this week, a minister the other day made the remark that there was "a need for literature to enlighten the minds of Baptist people on baptism." Perhaps a similar need exists amongst us Lutherans. The subject has been dealt with many years ago at a previous convention, but, as St. Paul says, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but to you it is safe," we shall, therefore, now hear something about Holy Baptism.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

In dealing with this subject we shall consider the following:-

- 1. What baptism is.**
- 2. Who is to be baptized.**
- 3. Baptism a Means of Grace.**
- 4. Baptism an Incentive to Sanctification.**

1. WHAT BAPTISM IS

(a) Baptism is not a human, but a divine institution. The command to baptize we find recorded in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (28:18-20), "And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In compliance with the command of their Master, the disciples had gone to Galilee to a mountain designated by Him as the meeting place (Matt.28:16). And here it was where the Lord delivered the Great Commission we have just cited, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This Commission Jesus introduced with the words, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." He proceeds, "Go ye therefore," because I, the God-man, possess all authority in heaven, - the heavenly hosts being My willing servants, - and because I possess all authority in earth, - all things being put under My feet, - "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." To this commission He adds the comforting promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It is plain: the Institution of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is Christ, the exalted Christ, omnipotent and omnipresent, also according to His human nature.

It is true, John the Baptist baptized before this general command was given. Of whom did he derive his authority? St. Luke (3:2-3) informs us that "the Word of God came unto John in the wilderness." And what was that Word? We read, "John came into all the country about Jordon preaching the Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." And John himself says in that great testimony of his regarding Christ, "He sent me to baptize with water." John the Baptist derived his authority to baptize from God. Between the Baptism of John and of Christ there is no essential difference. John baptized unto Him that was to come; Christian baptism is unto Him who has come.

Baptism is a divine institution. Luther's large Catechism says, "In these words (of institution) we must notice, in the first place, that here stands God's commandment and institution that we shall not doubt Baptism is divine, and not devised and invented by man. For as truly as I can say no man has spun the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer out of his head, but they are revealed and given by God Himself, so also I can boast that Baptism is no human trifle, but that it is instituted by God Himself, and that it is most solemnly and rigidly commanded that we must permit ourselves to be baptized, or we cannot be saved."

(b) Who is to Administer Baptism? Christ says, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Before proceeding, let us consider the words: "Teaching all nations." Literally these words mean: disciple all nations. Since, in the English language we have not the verb "disciple," we must say, "Make disciples of all nations." How is this to be done? By baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Christ's command literally reads, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

To whom does the Lord say, "Go ye"? To His disciples. How many were there to whom He spoke? There were eleven, for Judas the traitor was no longer with them, he had gone to his place. But the eleven were not the only ones for whom this charge was intended, but for all disciples of Christ for all time. The Lord said: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Baptism was thus made a permanent institution of the Church. The eleven died, but the charge to make disciples is valid to the end of time.

Every disciple is to carry out this command of the Master. By God's grace we, too, are disciples of Christ, and have the privilege and the right to administer baptism. Every Christian congregation, and every member of such congregation possesses this right. Why then do not individual Christians baptize their children? Because God has instituted the holy ministry in the Church and appointed His ministers as the stewards of His mysteries. Since in the Church everything is to be done decently and in order, Christian congregations delegate to their pastors the right to baptize. The pastor acts on behalf of the congregation and does what God has asked the congregation to do. But in cases of extreme necessity, when it is impossible to summon the minister, or when there is a danger that a child may die before his arrival, any Christian has the right to administer baptism. The minister, in due time, will make inquiry how such emergency baptism was performed, he will notify the congregation, and record it in the register of the congregation, so that the child concerned, in later years, may rest assured of its having been validly baptized. Lest anyone should get the impression that the Lutheran Church teaches that after all it does not matter, in ordinary cases, whether a pastor or a layman baptizes a child, let us hear what the Augsburg Confession says on the matter (Art.45), "No man should publicly in the church teach, or administer the Sacraments, except he be rightly called. Let everything be done decently and in order."

(c) The meaning of the word "baptize." For centuries there have been great controversies concerning the meaning of the word "baptize." Some hold that the word means immerse or dip under, and nothing else. Others hold that the word means "to wash," without implying in what manner the washing is to be done, whether by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring. The word used in the original Greek, baptizo, has in the English Bible been frequently rendered by the word "wash." Christ commanded His disciples to baptize or wash all nations without telling them in what manner the water was to be applied. It is only natural that they would understand this word in its ordinary meaning as applied to ritual applications of water to which they were accustomed. The proof for this: in Luke 7:4, etc. In Mark 7:4 we read, "And when they come from the market except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables." The point at issue is: what does the Greek word, "baptizein" mean? The Baptists say it means to immerse; we contend that this Greek term has a wider

usage, that it means applying water, by washing, pouring, sprinkling, or immersing. Mark 7:4 clearly proves this wider usage. This passage speaks obviously of the religious, ceremonial washing observed by the Jews.

In the market possibly they might have come in contact with an unclean thing such as a dead animal (or a Gentile), or they might in some other manner have rendered themselves ceremonially unclean. On coming home they "baptized" themselves. "Baptizontai" is the Greek work used, which our English Bible translates, "They wash themselves." Literally Mark 7:4 reads, "And when they come from the market except they baptize, they eat not, and many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the baptizing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables." It is evident that the word baptize means to wash, and it is also evident that this washing is done by pouring or sprinkling, for in this manner these ceremonial washings were performed. The Jews on their return from the market did not immerse their whole body; and when they washed their tables they certainly did not immerse them. The same word used in Mark 7:4 concerning the Jews washing themselves and washing cups, pots, brazen vessels and tables, is used in the Lord's commission, "Baptize all nations." Christ does not prescribe any particular mode of baptism as essential.

(d) What is baptizing "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"? Christ's command reads, "Baptize them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The phrase "into the Name" has a deep significance. It does not merely mean, Baptize them by the authority of the Triune God, but "into" denotes entrance, it denotes coming into fellowship with the Triune God. "Baptize into the Name" makes the promise, and gives the assurance that the person who before baptism was without God, now, by baptism, has entered into relationship with God, has become a child of God, has been received into blessed communion and fellowship with the Triune God, and accepted as a member of the family of heaven.

Is that true? Let us examine Christ's words more closely. He says, "disciple all nations, baptizing them." How does one become a disciple of Christ? By faith. Who gives us the faith? God works the faith. By what means? By the Means of Grace, and Baptism is one of these. "Disciple all nations, baptizing them," means that baptism confirms the faith in the person baptized; for without faith no one can be a disciple of Christ.

2. WHO IS TO BE BAPTIZED?

Christ says Matt.28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." v.20, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Nations are made up of men, women and children. The command is, "Make disciples of all nations." How is this to be done? By baptizing them and teaching them. The text does not say, First baptize, then teach, or first teach and then baptize. Christ says both should be done, each at the proper time.

How did the disciples understand the Master's injunction? The hearers on the Day of Pentecost were first taught by Peter and "having gladly received the word, were baptized." Lydia was first instructed, then baptized; the keeper of the prison at Philippi likewise. So this was the practice of the Church in regard to adults. Thus the command of the Master was understood and carried out by His disciples.

Now as to children. They, too, are to be made disciples. They cannot be taught. But they are "flesh born of the flesh" and stand in need of regeneration. They are to be made disciples by the only means of regeneration applicable to them, and that is baptism. The objection so often heard, "Children cannot believe," is clearly met by the positive declaration of our Lord Himself, who speaks of "These little ones which believe in Me." Hence our practice is founded on the teaching of our Lord and His disciples. Little children are baptized and thus regenerated: Adults we first instruct, and when they profess faith, begotten of the Word, we baptize them in accordance with the dictum of our Lord, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Baptism is for children, as well as for adults. The Scriptural proof for baptizing children will be produced in the following, as we consider:

Infant Baptism. That both men and women are to be baptized is conceded. The question is, should children be baptized? Children belong to a nation, hence, as long as this general command, "Baptize all nations" stands, so long, we maintain, children are to be baptized. This command being general, is positive proof for the baptism of infants. We need no other. But corroboration of this truth we find amply in the Scriptures.

After Peter's great Pentecostal sermon the hearers "were pricked in their hearts" and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you and your children."

The household baptism in the New Testament proved the same thing. Paul baptized Lydia, a seller of purple, and her household. The keeper of the prison at Philippi was baptized, and "all his." Paul baptized the household of Stephanas. Is it not evident that such expressions as "household" and "all his" are specially used to include the little ones of the family circle? Mark 10:13-16, "And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it He was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little ones to come unto Me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child he shall not enter therein. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them and blessed them."

The subject of this paragraph is the familiar and touching story of Christ Blessing Little Children. Matthew and Luke also related it, but Mark's account is the fullest and most striking.

We are told that "they," the parents, most probably the mothers, "brought young children" to Jesus. Mark says, They were little children; Luke calls them babes, infants. What was their purpose in so doing? "That He should touch them." Matthew explains this by saying, that He should "lay His hands on them and pray." These parents knew and believed that by Christ's touching, that is, by laying hands on them and praying, a blessing would be conferred upon them. They knew that their children, though infants, needed Christ's blessing. What happened? "His disciples rebuked those that brought them." They simply took matters into their own hands. Most likely they reasoned thus, "Why trouble the hard-working Master with such trivial affairs; what good can He do to those infants?"; and so they rebuked the parents. Wherein the rebuke consisted, we know not. The word "rebuked," means they intimidated, terrified, threatened them, in order to hinder them from bringing children to Jesus. The Evangelist says that when Jesus saw it He was much displeased and said to the disciples, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me," that is, forbid or hinder them not; then He adds "for of such is the Kingdom of God." He does not say, "of these," but "of such," of the kind that are brought to Him, that come to Him. They are to "come to Him" in order to be "in His Kingdom," that is, His Kingdom of Grace, the Holy Christian Church. In other words, children, by merely being children are not therefore in the Kingdom of God. In order to be in His Kingdom, they must be brought to Him, or as He says, "Come to Him," to receive His divine blessing. But how can we bring our little babies to Jesus? We can certainly commend them to Jesus in prayer. But we can also bring them to the Sacrament specially instituted by our Lord for initiation into His Kingdom. We baptize them and then apply to them the promises which our Lord has given in connection with this Sacrament. Children are born of the flesh and hence are flesh, and what is flesh is sinful. By nature they are not fit for the Kingdom; that is the truth that must be maintained over against such as deny original sin; but they are made fit by the Holy Ghost. Children, too, must be born again. This passage proves that little children, babes, infants, sucklings can believe, for of such is the Kingdom of God, but no one is in this Kingdom that does not believe.

These verses recorded by St. Mark do not teach directly that children are to be baptized. "Suffer little children to come unto Me," does not say, "Baptize little children." What it does say is this, Christ loves little children; He wills that they should come unto Him. He wills to bless them, He wills to impart His grace to them. He says that even they, namely, the little children, babes, infants, who yet cannot reason, cannot be instructed in divine matters, are to be made partakers of all the blessings of His Kingdom of Grace; forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom.14:17). This, the text says explicitly. For this purpose it is here adduced. When, however, the further question is asked, how to-day these blessings are imparted to them by Jesus, the answer is found in Matt.28:18, "baptize all nations." Here we have the clear command to baptize also children, and thus making disciples of them.

Jesus says (John 3:5-6), "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh," says Jesus to Nicodemus, and hence unfit to enter the Kingdom of God. Children are "flesh born of the flesh;" they stand in need of regeneration; they are as the Scriptures say, by nature the children of wrath. How is the entrance into the Kingdom of God effected? Jesus says, "except a man," literally, "anyone," be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter this Kingdom. This second birth is a spiritual birth, effected by the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit does not work without means to bring about the new birth. And the ordinary Means ordained by God Himself is baptism.

Speaking of infant baptism, one of the first arguments adduced against it is, How can little children believe? This is often said in such a tone of conviction as if the mere statement of the question were equivalent to clinching the argument. A certain Baptist commentator says, "Comparatively, young children are sometimes believers, but infants cannot be." Christ says they can be. He speaks of "these little ones which believe in Me." That is final. How that can be is not for us to solve, God will see to that. Christ emphatically states, "For of such (little or young children) is the Kingdom of God." Without faith, however, it is impossible to please God. So the children, belonging to the Kingdom, have faith. In addition to these clear Scriptural passages, let us consider the practice of the Apostles. In Acts 16:16 we read that Lydia and her whole household were baptized; in Acts 16:33 of the keeper of the prison and all his. A household certainly includes children. But we are asked: Where is the passage that demands in express words, baptize children? We answer: Where is the passage that forbids children to be baptized? There is none. Should women be baptized? Certainly. But where is the passage that specifically mentions women? In the New Testament infants are to be baptized, just as in the Old Testament they were circumcised. Circumcision was in the Old Testament the Sacrament for initiation. Would a Gentile become a worshiper of Jehovah, then let him be circumcised. But this sacred rite was also to be applied to infants, and they were thereby designated as belonging to the people of God. There were limitations. The rite was applied only to the male sex. It had to be applied only on the eighth day. These limitations fall away in baptism.

But have we any right to draw this analogy between circumcision and baptism? The Lord does it in His Word. St. Paul tells the Colossians (2:10), "And ye are complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power. In Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands... buried with Him in baptism." The Apostle would say: We Christians have a circumcision made without hands, that is our baptism. Now, if in substituting baptism for circumcision God had wanted the new rite to apply to adults only, He would certainly have intimated that. But nowhere is it even hinted in the New Testament that this new rite which replaced circumcision must not be applied to infants.

Now what was the practice of the Church with regard to infant baptism after the Apostle had died? We cannot find one single assertion made against the baptism of little children throughout the first two centuries. On the contrary, there are strong testimonies in favour of infant baptism, by men such as Justinus, who died a martyr in the year 163 after Christ, and Irenaeus, who was made Bishop of the Christian Church in the year 177. The latter says, "All who are regenerated in Christ are saved eternally,

infants, children, young and old people." It was not until later that infant baptism was challenged by Tertullian. The church was compelled to defend and preserve, in all earnestness, her sacred inheritance, namely, the purity of doctrine of infant baptism.

Origen, a divine of that period wrote, "The Apostles have transmitted unto the church the doctrine that children should be baptized." The Bishop Cyprian stood by his side and rebuked a certain Fides whose opinion was that children should not be baptized before the second or third day after their birth. Cyprian presented the matter before Synod of 66 colleagues, as he calls them. This convention of divines unanimously resolved that baptism should not be withheld from little children for a day, but that they should be baptized immediately after birth, because the grace and mercy of God must not be withheld from any living man.

In compliance with the teaching of Scripture, and with the practice of the Apostles and the church during the first few centuries, we baptize our infants. Christ's command to baptize is general, and no exception can be made.

3. BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF GRACE.

Grace is the goodwill and favour shown to one who can plead no merit but only his needs. By His painful suffering and bitter death, Christ merited God's grace for all mankind. God's grace cannot be purchased or merited by man. The redemption of the human soul from the power of sin, death, and the devil, was something that no man could perform, as the Psalmist says, Ps.49:7-8, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their soul is precious and it ceaseth forever."

Christ accomplished what was beyond the power and ability of man. The purchase price of the human soul was His life's Blood, shed on Calvary. For Christ's sake, God bestows on man His grace, and this He does through certain means.

The special means which God has appointed for the bestowal of salvation, are His Word and the Sacraments, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Strictly speaking, the Word of God is the only Means of Grace, since it is the Word which makes a Sacrament of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the means through which God appropriates to the child His grace merited by Christ. Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Salvation includes all the gifts of grace for time and eternity.

Writing to the Galatians, St. Paul says (3:26-37), "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." St. Paul assures the Galatians of their blissful state. He says, "All ye are the Children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Children of God belong to God's family; through faith in Jesus Christ they become His children. How do they become God's children? The Apostle says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Through baptism they entered into a most intimate union and communion with Christ. How intimate that relation is we see from the phrase, "Baptized into Christ, ye have put on Christ." Through baptism they are clothed in Christ's righteousness, and where there is Christ's righteousness, there is forgiveness of sins.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to his hearers (Acts 2:38), "Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." The Pentecost sermon of Peter touched his audience to the quick. Conscience-smitten, they cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" "Repent," says Peter, repent truly and sincerely, realize keenly the fearfulness of sin, admit your guilt remorsefully before your God, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sin. Jesus Christ the Saviour has fully atoned for sin. His merits He has put into baptism, be baptized, and you receive the remission of sins. Baptism is not a mere sign, a symbol or a ceremony which one must receive or go through in order to become a Christian or a member of the church. Some imagine that to become a member in good standing in the church, all that is necessary is that one go through the ceremony of being baptized. That is an altogether wrong conception of baptism. Baptism is a Means of Grace; it conveys and appropriates to the baptized person all that Christ has merited for him, that is forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. The water in baptism is so powerful, because "it is a water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word."

In enumerating the blessings of baptism, Luther says, "It works forgiveness of sins." St. Paul writes to the Galatians (3:26-27) "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." And in the book of Acts we read (2:38), "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of sins." But where there is forgiveness of sins, death and the devil no longer have any power over us. Hence Luther proceeds, "It delivers from death and the devil." St. Paul says (1 Cor.15:55-57), "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Though this passage contains no direct reference to baptism, still, it is relevant.

Since Christ rose from the dead, we, too, shall rise. This is Paul's greatest theme in this grand chapter. We all must die, but our death is really no death, it is but a sleep. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. Death is swallowed up," consumed, done away with, "in victory," Paul triumphantly announces. "O death where is thy sting?" There is none. The sting has been taken out of death. "Oh grave" - grave is the same as death - "where is thy victory?" Victory there is none, death has suffered a defeat. Paul continues, "The sting of death is sin, and strength of sin is the Law." But sin is atoned for, so death has lost its sting; the Law has been fulfilled, so sin has lost its power to condemn us. What a glorious message! Whom have we to thank? Paul says, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The word "giveth" is used in the present tense, and denotes a continued action. Again and again we are assured of this victory over our arch-enemies by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel and in the Lord's Supper. And since Baptism works forgiveness of sin, as we have heard, by Baptism we have been delivered also from death and damnation.

This great deliverance man owes to God and God alone. The Apostle, writing to the Colossians (1:12-14) says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son. In Whom we have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins." He gives the reason for giving thanks to God, "He hath made us meet," i.e., competent, capable, fit, "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." By nature they were not entitled to this inheritance. "The Father hath made them meet," competent, fit, thereto. All merit on their part for a share in the riches of this glorious state is excluded. It is an inheritance. The Apostle makes this particularly clear by saying, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son."

Applying this passage to Baptism, we ask, When were Colossian Christians "made meet" to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light? When were they delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son? In the moment they were in Him "in whom we have the forgiveness of sin," that is, when they believed and embraced this forgiveness, and were baptized into this faith. Their children were transferred into the Kingdom of Light when they were baptized. Since baptism works forgiveness, it at the same time delivers from the power of darkness.

We confess in our Catechism that baptism delivers from death and the devil. Now, it might seem as though Luther says a little more there than he is able to prove. There is no express statement in the New Testament saying that by baptism we are delivered from death and from the devil. But, let us not forget that the Sacraments convey to us the grace which Christ merited and the passages just now quoted show us that Christ has delivered us from death and from the devil. This deliverance is offered to us in the Gospel and is sealed to us in the Sacraments. And so we are quite right in saying Baptism delivers us from death and from the devil. When the devil assails us, when the terrors of death confront us, let us think of our baptism.

There was a friend of Luther's, Hieronymus, whom the devil afflicted with all kinds of misgivings. One day Luther called on him and inquired how he was getting on. "Ach! I am very miserable," said Luther's friend. "Oh," said Luther, "have you not been baptized?" And Hieronymus in relating this said that this question of Luther's had done him more good than a whole sermon.

And Baptism gives eternal salvation. Yes, Christ has gained for us eternal salvation, and what is gained for us is offered in the Gospel and sealed to us in baptism. And this is quite expressly ascribed to baptism in the New Testament.

That Baptism saves is very clearly stated in the Epistle of St. Peter (1 Peter 3:20-1), "The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah when the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water, the like figure whereunto even Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Peter says, "Baptism doth now save us." The statement is so plain that any child can understand it. These words, so clear in themselves, become even clearer when we consider the context. The Apostle speaks of the flood in the days of Noah. "The long-suffering of the Lord waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing." When the ark was finished, Noah's family of eight entered. Then the flood came which prevailed upon the earth for 150 days. The ungodly world perished; Noah and his family were "saved by water." Now the text goes on, "The like figure whereunto even Baptism doth also now save us." In other words, Noah and his family were saved through water; which also after a true likeness, doth now save us, even baptism. The water of the flood saved Noah and his family, the water of baptism saves us. As the water of the Deluge carried the eight souls into a new world, so baptismal water carries us into the Kingdom of God.

Peter says, "Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh." Baptismal water is not an outward purifier of the flesh, nor is it merely a ceremonial washing. Its purpose is not to cleanse the flesh from filth, but it is to cleanse the conscience from sin. Baptism works forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there a good conscience exists.

The Apostle says, "Baptism doth also now save us - by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." By the death of Christ forgiveness of sins was merited; by the resurrection the seal of God's approval was imprinted on the redemptive work of Christ. This forgiveness of sins, effected by the death of Christ, and sealed by His resurrection, is applied to the individual sinner by the Means of Grace, therefore also by baptism.

Can a person who is not baptized be saved? Jesus says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." To the words, "He that believeth" the Lord appends the words, "and is baptized." The Lord joins the two. Baptism for adults is the seal of God's grace. But in the second clause the Lord omits the words, "and is baptized." The Lord does not say, "He that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned." What does this show? That although faith is absolutely necessary to salvation, it cannot be said that baptism is an absolute requirement. Faith must precede baptism. Before baptizing the man from Ethiopia, Philip inquired as to his faith. "If thou believeth with all thine heart thou mayest be baptized." And the faith that precedes baptism is saving faith. Had the Ethiopian suddenly died of heart failure before he and Philip could reach the water, his faith certainly would have saved him.

Although the Lutheran Church asserts the necessity of baptism unto salvation, still it does not reach the rash and hasty conclusion, as does the Catholic Church, that all unbaptized persons, as, for example, children who die before baptism, are damned. We must distinguish between something being ordained by God as a requirement and something being absolutely necessary. To say Baptism is superfluous is wrong again. Baptism is not absolutely necessary for salvation, for the Bible teaches, "By faith in Christ are ye saved." Baptism is the means of regeneration, to which God has bound us, but He has not bound Himself thereto. When we say

baptism is necessary, we do not thereby imply that God cannot save him who is not baptized. The impossibility of being saved without faith is one thing; the impossibility of being saved without baptism is an altogether different thing. The words of Jesus, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned," teach beyond all doubt that unbelief is really the only damnable sin. There is only one remedy for sin, God's grace in Christ Jesus. Despise the remedy and the result is damnation. But a man who has come to faith by the preaching of the Gospel will not presume to be wiser than the Master and say he has no need of being baptized. We have the significant statement that the people that heard John (the Baptist) "justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves being not baptized of him (Luke 7:29-30). At the same time we can easily understand that men came to the faith and were called hence by the Lord before they had an opportunity for receiving baptism. The malefactor on the Cross died believing in his Saviour, yet he died without being baptized. Many martyrs of the primitive Church had no opportunity to be baptized. Saving faith may exist in one who is deprived of baptism, but it cannot exist with the contempt of Baptism. Not the privation but the contempt of Baptism is damnable.

4. BAPTISM AN INCENTIVE TO SANCTIFICATION OR CHRISTIAN CONDUCT OF LIFE.

St. Paul writes (Rom.6:1-4), "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead in sin, live any longer then? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Here the Apostle emphasizes the truth that justification must be followed by sanctification. He says, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" That is impossible. To be dead to sin and still to live in sin is a contradiction in itself. We are dead to sin, that is, we are redeemed not only from the penalty, but also from the power and the dominion of sin. "We are dead to sin;" what follows from this? That we cannot continue to live in sin. I appeal to your knowledge says St. Paul. "We are baptized into Christ." In Baptism God imputed to us the righteousness of His Son. Christ died for our sins, and thus destroyed the power of the devil over us. When "we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into His death." He freed us from the penalty and guilt of sin; not only that, He redeemed us from its dominion. Sin is no longer our lord and master; we are dead to sin. Therefore, since we have died with Christ, "we are buried with Him by Baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life." Christ died for our sins. His burial was proof of His death. By the glory of the Father He was raised from the dead. Sin was atoned for; He no longer had anything to do with sin; He entered into a new life. We are His. "Even so we should walk in newness of life." This is the point of comparison here, "like as He" - "even so we."

This new life, begun in Baptism, must become manifest in our daily walk. As Baptism is the seal which God places on a man's entry into the right relationship with God, so it is also the source from which flows the Christian right service which he daily renders to God. The Christian considers himself dead to sin. In that respect he has died with Christ. St. Paul desires to express that very intensively, and he says, "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death." There is nothing in these words to indicate baptism by immersion, but we have here a very emphatic statement that baptism places us under an obligation to lead a godly life. And hence we say in our Catechism that baptism signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts. Hence also the baptismal vows. Since the very earliest days it was the custom that those brought to baptism declared that they renounced the devil and all his pomp and all his works. We made that declaration at our baptism through our sponsors and publicly renewed it with our own lips at our Confirmation. And privately, when in the sweet house of prayer we were also with God, we have renewed it ever so often. And vows are made, not to be broken, but to be kept. And it is the fulfillment of such a vow that we are continually being exhorted. To the Galatians St. Paul writes (5:24), "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." They that are Christ's belong to Christ, they are His possession, bought with a price. Such, the Apostle says, have crucified the flesh. As Christ the Saviour was crucified for them, and thus redeemed them from sin, so Christians out of gratitude have crucified their flesh, and daily walk in newness of life.

To conclude, Baptism is a wonderful Means of Grace given to us by our God in which He offers, conveys and seals to us the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. In trials and temptations, under tribulation and the cross, in life and death, we may draw wonderful comfort from our Baptism. Yea, when the devil will make his last and most determined attempt to drag us down to damnation, we may fell him with one word, our Baptism. Most assuredly the devil has no claim on me, for through Baptism I am cleansed from all sin, God's child and heir of life everlasting! Amen.