

**Truth and Lies about Baptism:  
An Examination of the First Three Questions  
in Dr. Luther's Small Catechism  
(With a Cursory Look at Modern Day False Teachings)  
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[The Pastor-Teacher-Delegate Conference of the Southern Conference of the Nebraska District, St. Paul  
Evangelical Lutheran Church-Broken Bow, NE, January 28-29, 2008]

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Introduction**

You people, all who are baptized,  
Awestruck as your God have met,  
And here your Savior recognized,  
Whose name on you has now been set.  
Ponder and mark, learn all this well,  
With what good these waters swell.  
How that day saved your soul from hell.<sup>1</sup>

Awestruck? Ponder and mark it well? There are some things that leave me awestruck. I am awestruck by how a preschool teacher can get twelve four year olds to stand quietly in a line-I have trouble with just one. I am awestruck at how a pilot gets a big hunk of metal off the ground and back on the ground with seemingly little effort. I am awestruck at how the Detroit Lions can start out a season at 6-2, even giving hardened cynics a ray of hope, only to finish up on the outside of the postseason looking in once again.

Awestruck—about baptism? The truths and lies about baptism? It all seems so simple, that maybe, just maybe, the temptation is for us to take this sacrament for granted. Pastors, are you still awestruck as you cradle the twentieth or the two hundredth child in your arms? Teachers and delegates, are you still awestruck by what you have seen happen countless times during your years in the pew? Have we been affected by the American Evangelicalism mindset which surrounds us, a mindset that de-values the means of grace? Have we allowed baptism to slip into a list of things that we cringe at, just another piece of Lutheranism's "dirty laundry" that we need to explain to the non-member?

Paul Gerhardt was right. We do well to learn all this well. We do well to ponder and mark what this gift, this mystery, is all about. As the Holy Spirit speaks to us through various writers of Scripture, may he work in us a greater appreciation and sense of being awestruck. We could not come to God, so God came to us. He comes to us in a way that is offensive to our reason. In baptism he speaks on us his name as the water is applied and in doing so brings to us nothing less than a cleansing from sin, a divine inheritance, a new family name, salvation!

But I am getting ahead of myself. Volumes have been written on the subject of baptism, and Luther tells us that "every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life,"<sup>2</sup> but the agenda has only given us

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhardt, Paul. Du Volk, dos getauft bist and dienen Gott erkennest. Translation of Gerhardt's hymn provided by Pastor Wade Johnston, <http://www.christsaginaw.com/webdocs/Gerhardt%20Baptism%20Hymn.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Large Catechism* p. 427. Quotations from the Book of Concord are taken from Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord. Ed. Paul McCain. The exception will be quotations from the Small Catechism, which will be taken from the "Blue Catechism" by Prof. David Kuske—most commonly used in our churches and schools.

seventy-five minutes. In addition, the faculty I serve with in Plymouth have begged me not to bore them, so in our brief time together we will take a look at the first three of Luther's four questions concerning baptism as he addresses the subject in the Small Catechism.<sup>3</sup>

I think there is precedence for doing the "elementary" thing and returning to the Small Catechism. Luther himself was not above returning to his catechism daily. He says in the preface to the Large Catechism:

I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning-and whenever I have the time—I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, and such. I must still read and study them daily. Yet I cannot master the catechism as I wish. But I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and am glad to remain so.<sup>4</sup>

## Part 1—The Institution of Baptism

Would you please speak with me from the Small Catechism?

*First: What is Baptism?* Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word.

*Which is that Word of God?* Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!"<sup>5</sup>

Baptism starts with God. Man did not make up baptism. Man did not invent baptism. Indeed, what man could fathom such grace? God is the doer in baptism. And since God is the doer, there is no better place to start in answering the question, "What is Baptism:?" than with the words of our Lord himself. Our Lord Jesus said: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Fresh off of his defeat of sin, death, and hell, Jesus makes sure that what has been done for us—his life, his death, his resurrection—is delivered to us. In the great commission he leaves his disciples no doubt about what they are to be doing in the aftermath of the resurrection. Here is the plan, dear church. Go make disciples. Go make disciples through these means—baptizing and teaching.

"To baptize" means to apply water. Mark 7:4 uses the word in connection with the washing of regular kitchenware. Luke 11:38 uses the word in reference to the washing of hands before a meal. Water is an essential part of baptism. Or to put it more simply: no water, no baptism.<sup>6</sup> The fact that water is needed for baptism may seem so obvious that it is hardly worth mentioning, but we are not taking anything for granted. No other earthly element is even hinted at in Scripture. As water is necessary for life so Jesus tells us that water is necessary for spiritual life. Speaking to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit" (John 3:5).

Water is an essential part of baptism, but not the only essential part. You could have all the water in the world and still not come close to the baptism which Jesus instituted. Remember our definition: "Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word." God's Word is the second essential part of baptism.<sup>7</sup> As you cannot have a baptism without water, so also you cannot have a baptism without the Word.

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<sup>3</sup> I'm not opposed to the fourth question, "What does baptizing with water mean?", but it looks like that is the subject of another paper on the agenda.

<sup>4</sup> LC p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> SC, IV, 1, p. 9. An aside—The Senior Dogmatics Notes from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary note that "excellent and unsurpassed is the classic definition found in the Small Catechism."

<sup>6</sup> At this point we won't concern ourselves with the differing modes of applying the water (sprinkling versus pouring versus immersion).

<sup>7</sup> The Confessions quote favorably St. Augustine's definition of a sacrament: "When the Word is joined to the element or natural substance, it becomes a Sacrament." LC p. 425 and *Smalcald Articles* III.V, p. 278.

And what is that Word of God? His name! The Large Catechism states “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is truly God’s own work.”<sup>8</sup> To be baptized in his name means to be baptized by the authority of his name. The triune God stands behind baptism; he slaps his name on it, and his name is no small thing. His name carries some weight behind it. Maybe this illustration is helpful to underscore the authority of his name. A sign on the door says: “School’s cancelled-Sincerely, Little Johnny”. Another sign says, “School’s on-Sincerely, Principal Johnson”. To the dismay of the kids, and possibly the teachers, you know school is on. Principal Johnson has put his name on it.

God’s name stands behind baptism, but there is something else going on with God’s name in baptism. He places his most holy name on us! Think of the ramifications of this divine naming. As Andrea, Emma, and Naomi—through no choice of their own—belong to the John and Sarah Bortulin family, so those baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit belong to the family of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has committed himself to us by naming us his own in baptism. Through this washing we are made his children. We are sons and daughters. We are heirs. We are brought into a close-knit, family relationship with the Father through the sacrifice of the Son. In explanation of the first petition Luther goes so far as to say, “We are called God’s children and have the Sacraments, by which He connects us to Himself so that everything that belongs to God must serve for our use [Romans 8:16-17].”<sup>9</sup>

Two weeks ago many of our churches celebrated the Baptism of our Lord. In that Gospel we see the Father stamping his approval on Jesus and his work: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16-17). The Father is well-pleased with the Son. And in the Son, the Father is well-pleased with you.

The Father also stamps his approval on baptism in general at Jesus’ baptism. In the Large Catechism Luther says,

So, and even much more, you must honor Baptism and consider it glorious because of the Word. For God Himself has honored it both by words and deeds. Furthermore, He confirmed it with miracles from heaven. Do you think it was a joke, that when Christ was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty [Luke 3:21-22]?<sup>10</sup>

So far, the two essential parts of baptism are water and Word. There is a third essential part—the action. That is, you can have all the water in the world, and you can have the necessary Word, and the right name, but without the water applied with that Word, you have no baptism. Baptism is a doing. Baptism is God’s doing. Remember who told his disciples to baptize—none other than Jesus! Baptism is not about man’s decision. Baptism is not about Grandma’s pictures. Baptism is not about the pastor. Baptism is about God making a disciple by application of water and his name.

So what is baptism? Water. Word. Action. We run with God’s name and by his command we use it with water. Let this suffice for the first question, *What is baptism?*

So even, if we had only these words, “Go and baptize,” or such, it would be necessary for us to accept them and do them as God’s ordinance. Now there is not only God’s commandment and injunction here, but also the promise. Because of this, Baptism is still far more glorious than whatever else God has commanded and ordained. It is, in short, so full of consolation and grace that heaven and earth cannot understand it. But it requires skill to believe this, for the treasure is not lacking, but this is lacking: people who grasp it and hold it firmly.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> LC p. 424.

<sup>9</sup> LC p. 412. Or more simply—as God’s children we have this confidence: what God does, God does for us.

<sup>10</sup> LC p. 425.

<sup>11</sup> LC p. 427.

Maybe one other thing is in order before we move on. You might have noticed that as we looked at the basic definition of baptism, we made no mention of who it is intended for. Christ in his command does not exclude any group of people. The “all-nations” of Matthew 28 is all-inclusive. In the “Lies” section of the paper we’ll touch briefly on those who deny infant baptism and why they do so. For now, stick in the back of your mind these reasons for baptizing infants:

- 1) The “all-nations”<sup>12</sup> argument
- 2) The “need”<sup>13</sup> argument
- 3) The “capacity for faith”<sup>14</sup> argument
- 4) The “whole-household”<sup>15</sup> argument
- 5) The “circumcision”<sup>16</sup> argument
- 6) The “history of the church”<sup>17</sup> argument<sup>18</sup>

Now for the blessings of such baptizing, we turn to Luther’s second question.

## Part 2—The Blessings of Baptism

We join together:

*Second: What does Baptism do for us?* Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

*What are these words and promises of God?* Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”<sup>19</sup>

For nearly a century, baptisms in my family have carried with them a bit of history. It started with the slip of the wedding dress of my great-grandmother, Louise Kleinhardt Quandt. Later fashioned into a baptismal gown, it has been worn by various relatives throughout the years at their baptisms. Not much has changed. The dress has yellowed a bit. The kids who wear it from the Bortulin side have a little darker complexion than their German ancestors, but in the end it’s still a neat bit of family history.

Unfortunately, in addition to the family history, this baptismal garment also has given my brother-in-law extra ammunition. He finds it a just a bit humorous that I wore a dress at such a young age. All chuckles aside, it really is worth the ridicule, and not just because I can say I was baptized in the same garment as my grandfather, mother, sister, and daughters. It’s worth the ridicule, when you consider what blessings I received

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>13</sup> Infants are included in those who are born sinful, and thus deserving of death, and thus in need of the forgiveness and life that is offered in baptism.

<sup>14</sup> Infants too can believe. Not only can they believe, Jesus praises the faith of these little ones in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. An interesting aside, Mark 10 has historically been the Gospel read in conjunction with baptisms in Lutheran churches. “Let the little children come to me...”

<sup>15</sup> Scripture indicates that the apostles baptized entire households (Acts 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16). In an era of extended families living under one roof, a likely assumption is that children would be a part of the households.

<sup>16</sup> In Colossians 2:11-12 Paul compares the Old Testament rite of circumcision with baptism.

<sup>17</sup> If God did not accept the baptism of infants, then the Holy Spirit would not be given to them. Luther says look at all those who have been baptized in infancy, and look at the Holy Christian Church continuing to endure, so in conclusion infant Baptism is acceptable to God. LC p. 428.

<sup>18</sup> For those looking for further study on the subject of infant baptism, two excellent little books are available from NPH. One by Andrew Dos deals exclusively with infant baptism; the other by Gaylin Schmeling has a chapter devoted to this topic. Also Luther treats the subject of infant baptism in the Large Catechism, pp. 428-431.

<sup>19</sup> SC IV.2, p. 9.

on Sunday, November 27, 1977 at Emanuel Lutheran Church in Tawas City, MI. I do not mean to be selfish. Insert your own name, date, dress, and locale, and the following story is your story as well.

And what a story it is. Consider the blessings and you could care less what you wore or who held you. Consider the blessings and it is immaterial if the elder forgot to put warm water in the font or if Aunt Beatrice served ham instead of beef in the church basement afterwards. Scripture describes the blessings of baptism in the richest of terms.<sup>20</sup> Scripture is rich in the language it uses to describe the blessings of baptism. Scripture is rich regarding the blessings of your<sup>21</sup> baptism.

We start with Dr. Luther's explanation: "Baptism works forgiveness of sins." Peter speaking at Pentecost, "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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism is for this purpose—the forgiveness of sins. What Jesus accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection are now given through this holy washing. Ananias told Saul shortly after Jesus had appeared to him on the road to Damascus, "What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). This is not merely a sign or a symbol. God has promised the forgiveness of sins in baptism, and God does not lie, in fact, God cannot lie. If baptism did not bring forgiveness of sins, God would have to quit being God, because that is what God has promised.<sup>22</sup>

In baptism there is forgiveness. For past sins? Yes. For present sins? Yes. For future sins?<sup>23</sup> Yes. Baptism is never a license to sin. Justification by faith apart from works is never a license to sin. St. Paul anticipated that response in Romans chapter six. After a marvelous treatment of justification by faith apart from works in the proceeding chapters, Paul asks, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!" (Romans 6:1-2a). That having been said, treasure the forgiveness that God works in Baptism.: Baptism is not just something that happened way back when; it is something that has benefits today. Apart from you, apart from your roots to Das Vaterland, apart from your stunning good looks, apart from your obedience to the law, apart from anything that you do, God forgives you!

"Baptism ... delivers from death and the devil." Baptism delivers from death by connecting us with Christ's death. We think babies and baptism are all about life and funerals are all about death, but for Christians, really the opposite is true. Sit back and enjoy as Paul draws the connecting arrows between Christ and us, his death and ours, his life and ours:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be

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<sup>20</sup> The richness and variety of Scripture's language describing these blessings serves as an encouragement to all of us as we teach others the blessings of baptism and as we begin each day with that remembrance: "I'm baptized! And that means all of these things..."

<sup>21</sup> One of the things I treasure about this sacrament, as well as the Lord's Supper, is the individuality of it. Yes, I also appreciate the communal nature of both of the sacraments. But in **my** baptism, God in unfathomable love came to **me**. In the Supper, he places into **my** mouth his body and blood, and says, "This is for **you**." Like a broken record I keep after my confirmation students: "Be selfish about this. Say, 'God did this for **me**!'"

<sup>22</sup> Consider LC p. 429 "We know that God does not lie [Titus 1:2].1 and my neighbor and, in short, all people, may err and deceive. But God's Word cannot err." The old answer from catechism class when you really didn't know the answer—it works here! "Because God says so."

<sup>23</sup> The following illustration is from Pastor Earle Treptow's paper given at this year's synod convention. Use it if you find it helpful. "Picture a white board on which tallies are being placed to mark each sin we commit. That's often what we see and feel: God is keeping track of all of our sins. But the Lord promises that through Baptism all our sins have been washed away. So picture water continually washing off those tallies. Before they can ever be written on the board, they are washed away. That's how God wants us to see ourselves because of Christ and the forgiveness given in Baptism." Treptow p. 12.

done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:1-11)

Christ's death and our death, his life and our life, are intimately joined at the font. There's a reason why for centuries the sign of the cross has been associated with baptism. The order for Holy Baptism in the front of Christian Worship states: "Receive the sign of the cross on the head and on the heart to mark you as a redeemed child of God."<sup>24</sup>

You might get some weird looks when you talk about baptism this way, but it matters not.<sup>25</sup> In the waters of baptism, death has lost its sting. Baptism delivers us from death by connecting us to Christ's death and his resurrection. Rather than avoiding talk about death, in baptism we have the ammunition we need to meet death head on. How more utterly practical can you get, than to talk about death with folks who are dying, as we all are? We do not want to belittle death. Christianity calls death what it is—an unwelcome intrusion into our world. Christianity points to him who conquered death and now in baptism gives the victory over death that he won.<sup>26</sup>

Professor Harold Senkbeil makes this life-death-baptism connection: "In fact, there's no other way to live than through the death of Jesus. We're all dying; we can either die alone, or we can die in Jesus. But His death brings life, and it's when we die with Him that we really begin to live."<sup>27</sup> Gene Veith makes a similar point: "But we must not sentimentalize Baptism. It is not a mere naming ceremony. For all the good feelings enjoyed by the parents, relatives, friends, and the congregation, for the cuteness of the baby in its little lacy robe, in Baptism the child sacramentally dies."<sup>28</sup>

Two of my favorite pictures for teaching life and death, dying and rising, new life and salvation that are given in baptism are actually found in the Old Testament. Both the account of the flood (Genesis 6-8), and the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses and the Israelites (Exodus 14), are not only acts of destruction by water but also acts of deliverance by water. Yes, the unbelieving world met their end by the waters of the flood. Yes, Pharaoh and his army finally let God's people go as the waters of the Red Sea drowned them out. But both of those accounts are accounts of deliverance. God delivered his people at the time of Noah (You can count them on two hands without even using your thumbs). God delivered many more of his people after hundreds of years of living in Egypt. And what did he use to accomplish his destruction and his deliverance? Water!<sup>29</sup>

Another blessing of baptism is deliverance from the old evil foe. The un-named writer to the Hebrews tells us that what God foretold in the garden, he accomplished at the cross. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15). In little tikes' sports programs, many leagues refuse to have winners and losers, it's "not good for the kids"

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<sup>24</sup> Christian Worship p. 14. It has also been customary for pastors to use the sign of the cross when pronouncing a blessing on the baptized (e. g. when dismissing from the Lord's Table or when giving the benediction).

<sup>25</sup> Ask me later about the time I was minding my own business at a baptism luncheon, enjoying my sloppy joe (aka as a yum-yum or hot tamale depending on your roofs), and an otherwise gentle grandmother took issue with what I said about her dear grandchild. If she would have been listening more closely, she would have heard me say the same things about her—and about myself.

<sup>26</sup> Food for thought from Jungkuntz *The Gospel of Baptism.*, p. 65 "Our Christian existence derives from the past fact of death, the death of Christ that becomes our own in baptism ("We have died" Rom. 6:8); faith is God's present and ongoing gift to His baptized ("We believe" Rom 6:8); and the life imparted in baptism belongs to the future ("we shall live" Rom. 6:8)."

<sup>27</sup> Senkbeil *Dying to Live—the Power of Forgiveness*, p. 55

<sup>28</sup> Veith *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Luther in his "Flood Prayer" says that these two events, along with the baptism of Jesus, "Foreshadowed the precious, cleansing bath which you give us in Holy Baptism." You can find a copy of the flood prayer either in *Christian Worship :Occasional Services*, p. 9, or in Luther's *Baptismal Booklet*, appended to the *Small Catechism* in the Kolb-Wengert edition of the *Book of Concord*, pp. 373-374.

they say. Debate that if you want later, but make no mistake about it-when Jesus meets Satan, there's a definite winner and a definite loser. Christ's victory equals Satan's defeat. And a blessed result of that victory is freedom for us. The victory won at the cross is given at the font. Freely. We've come into this world as slaves. Slaves to sin. Slaves to the devil. Well-deliverance has come. Freedom has come.

Forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death, and deliverance from the devil are all summed up in the next words of Luther's explanation: "Baptism... gives eternal salvation to all who believe this." If Matthew 28:19 is the divine command, then Mark 16:16 is the divine promise.<sup>30</sup> "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Maybe you have encountered the same argument that I have. "I thought you Lutherans teach that Christ alone saved us by his death and resurrection. How can you say baptism saves?" Such opposition betrays a misunderstanding of what the means of grace are and what they do. Yes, Christ's life, death, and resurrection were for our salvation. And now God gives the benefit of his life, death, and resurrection through baptism. How can we say that baptism saves? Peter had no problem saying it in that way. "And this water [referring to the water of Noah's flood] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also" (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism saves. This passage emphasize that baptism does not just picture deliverance, it actually delivers deliverance. Baptism saves you, not as a mere physical washing, but because it delivers to you the blessings which Christ has won.

These blessings are "for all who believe this." Faith is the receiving organ of all of these blessings. My faith does not make baptism but receives its blessings. Is faith necessary for baptism? Yes. "Without faith it profits nothing, even though Baptism is in itself a divine overwhelming treasure."<sup>31</sup> As gospel, baptism has the power to work the faith for which it calls.<sup>32</sup> The word of forgiveness that faith receives actually creates that faith. All of this causes us no concern, as we realize that even our faith is a gift of God, not a doing but a receiving. "So you see plainly that there is no work done here by us, but a treasure, which God gives us and faith grasps."<sup>33</sup> Faith grasps this treasure: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation.<sup>34</sup>

## Part 2a—More Blessings of Baptism

I mentioned previously that Scripture is rich in the words and pictures it uses to describe baptism. We could spend hours pondering and rejoicing in these words: "Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." We also will benefit from taking a look at how else Scripture describes the blessings of baptism.

Picture the young couple, eagerly anticipating the birth of their first child. Many evenings are spent peering over any number of websites or books. "20,001 Names for Baby"<sup>35</sup> gets whittled down to maybe fifty. Finally the name is chosen. At that time, to that couple, there could scarcely be anything more important than that name. After all, your child will have to live with it their whole life (or at least until they reach an age where they can legally change it).

Far more important than what John and Jane Doe decide to name their baby is the name put on you in baptism. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes to \_\_\_\_\_. And now \_\_\_\_\_ receives the family name of the triune God, and God cannot depart from his name. He's willing to bring you into his family. In the Old Testament, God assured his chosen people that they were his. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah he said: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). You are his

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<sup>30</sup> Pieper *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. III, p. 268.

<sup>31</sup> LC 426.

<sup>32</sup> See Pieper pp. 285-286 for an excellent summary of this point.

<sup>33</sup> LC 427.

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix 1 for a helpful chart answering this question: "Is faith required for the reception of baptismal blessings?" The chart is from Professor Forrest Bivens, stuck in between pages 67-68 of my Senior Dogmatics Notes.

<sup>35</sup> By Carol Mcd. Wallace. Available from Barnes and Nobles for \$12, \$10.80 if you're a member. The "boy name" portion of the book is available from the Bortulins-free of charge.

and he is yours. Without stealing Tutor Olson's thunder, that makes a difference as you face each new day with the challenges it might bring. You belong to God, and all the blessings previously mentioned, well, they belong to you as well.

Another blessing of baptism is membership in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. Richard Jungkuntz rightly observes: "Holy Baptism is at once the most individual and the most corporate more of God's dealing with man."<sup>36</sup> You do not become a member of the church by decision or by birth, but by baptism. St. Paul emphasizes the corporate nature of baptism when he tells the Corinthians that through baptism we became a part of the body. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). We tend to make distinctions in the church, and admittedly sometimes distinctions are necessary. But the members of the church have this in common—they have been baptized. In the Holy Christian Church we have a special relationship with other members of the body. We also have a special relationship with our head, that is, Christ.

Another blessing of baptism is being clothed with Christ. Finally, that's what it is to be a Christian, a little Christ. Paul writes "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). Clothing identifies a man. To the best of my knowledge, there is only one maize and blue jacket in the entire village of Plymouth. And I would guess that if I would have left it downtown at the soup supper last weekend it still would have been there when I went back to claim it the next year. I am proud to wear maize and blue. I am prouder to be clothed in Christ. Baptism is a taking off of the old self and a putting on of the new man. Clothed in Christ's robe of righteousness, I am acceptable to God as well as my works, thoughts, and words. In Christ, so are you.<sup>37</sup>

In your baptism God identifies with you as his child. The Father's voice beams down from heaven on his Son dripping wet at his own baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The Father is well-pleased with the Son. And the Father is well-pleased with you, too, for in baptism you are clothed with Christ. He's willing to deal with you as a son. He's willing to call you, his.<sup>38</sup>

One more? We will deal with this passage in the next section, but it also fits here:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

This passage shows yet another blessing of baptism: rebirth or regeneration. Yes, correctly understood, you are a born-again Christian. You need not worry. You had as much to do with your re-birth as you did your original birth. Jesus tells Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).

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<sup>36</sup> Jungkuntz, *The Gospel of Baptism*, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Consider the garment of choice for many baptisms is a white gown. No coincidence. The white symbolizes the purity and holiness of Christ that now covers that sinful little wretch. The alternate order for Baptism in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* catches the symbolism: "If a white garment is put on the baptized, the minister may say: Receive this white garment to show that Christ has taken away your sin and put on you his perfect robe of righteousness. OR If the child is wearing a white garment, the minister may say: This white garment shows that Christ has taken away your sin and put on you his perfect robe of righteousness." Also, see Jungkuntz, pp. 79-80 for a deeper discussion on how in Scripture a person's garments show the depths of his feelings (2 Sam 3:31, Jonah 3:6-8, Matthew 26:65, Joel 1:13, 1 Samuel 24:4-6, Revelation 3:4) and how clothing is often an expression of a person's true nature (Deuteronomy 22:5, Genesis 27:35-36, Zechariah 13:4, Acts 12:21, James 2:2 et al)

<sup>38</sup> Gerhardt, Paul. *Du Volk, das getauft bist und dienen Gott erkennest*. St. 8 (I'm sorry—when I find a good hymn, I have a hard time letting it go) "Through this we're won as God's own son, and Christ our shame in mercy hides with all that which for us He's done, and now that crucified must rise, for him whom God's blood purifies, is precious in the Father's eyes. That one the Spirit sanctifies."



This list of blessings is by no means exhaustive, nor was it intended to be. As I remind my confirmands-to-be from time to time, this is not about simply learning the cold hard facts. This is about marveling at the grace of God and throwing ourselves before him with thanks and praise for all that he has done. The blessings of baptism stated simply:

The power, work, profit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is this—to save [1 Peter 3:21]. For no one is baptized in order that he may become a prince, but, as the words say, that he “be saved.” We know that to be saved is nothing other than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil [Colossians 1:13-14]. It means to enter into Christ’s kingdom [John 3:5], and to live with Him forever.<sup>39</sup>

### Part 3—The Power of Baptism

Once more we speak together:

*Third: How can water do such great things?* It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God’s Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God’s Word the water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit.

*Where is this written?* St. Paul says in Titus, chapter 3, “God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.”<sup>40</sup>

The reason of fallen man asks this question: how can water do such great things? We are inclined to take water for granted, but it does not take long to be reminded how essential water is for life and how much it is a part of our everyday lives. Think of all the uses we have for water. Why already this morning, water played a part in my morning shower, my shaving, my teeth brushing, my cup(s) of coffee. Water falls from the sky and from irrigation pivots and provides farmers with what is necessary to grow their crops. Water has even been known on occasion to make for a nice summer afternoon (fishing) or a lousy summer afternoon (golfing).

But how can water do these things? Specifically, how can water work the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation? Natural religion looks for the spectacular, for the zinger. But that is not the way of salvation. God became man. God speaks through sinners, whether they wear a white alb with a stole or a black robe or a combination thereof. He comes in water, either in the Jordan or from the tap. He comes in a meal, most often Mogen David and unleavened wafers. Although our reason objects, God has chosen to work this miracle through water and his Word.<sup>41</sup> Luther candidly answers the question, “How can water do these things”, with these words: “The Holy Spirit speaks this way, ‘Are you listening? Here are God’s will and Word; remain with these, and let your own opinion go.’”<sup>42</sup>

Care for a story, an old story, where God used water and his Word to accomplish a cleansing? Check out 2 Kings 5:1-14. Naaman was a commander of the army of the King of Aram. We are told he was a “great man ... highly regarded ... a valiant soldier.” But he had leprosy—that awful, infectious, shameful skin disease. A servant girl, an Israelite servant girl, encouraged Naaman to seek out help from God’s prophet Elisha. We pick up the account in verse ten:

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<sup>39</sup> LC p. 425.

<sup>40</sup> SC IV.3, pp. 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> I think Pieper is helpful here. “Though the Reformed teaching of Baptism manifestly contradicts the Word of God, we must not close our eyes to the seductive power of the objection: ‘Water is water and cannot possibly do such great things.’ Not to believe God’s Word and work is natural to all men. Consequently man looks upon the water of Baptism though God has united his word with it, as simple water (Luther, drastically: ‘With the eyes of a cow,’ i.e., without understanding. That is, man perversely ignores the word joined to the ‘washing of water’). Pieper III, p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> As quoted in Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, p. 294.

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’” So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. (2 Kings 5:10-14)

Elisha proposed a seven-fold washing for the commander’s disease. But Naaman knew better. “This dirty, little river is going to do that? Give me the Abana. Give me the Pharpar. Give me something powerful and spectacular. Give me a mighty wonder to look at.” Naaman expected a mighty cure from a mighty prophet of God. But that’s not how our God chose to work. So instead Naaman received common water with a few words. Who would have guessed? Plain water, to which God attached his Word and promise, and you have a cleansing from leprosy.

Naaman wanted something greater than the waters of the Jordan. We see the same in those whose reason argues against infant baptism or who wonder aloud how the waters of baptism can indeed do such great things. Why water? We do well to be reminded that it is not for us to tell God what he needs, nor do we tell God how to do it. God in his wisdom chose to come to us in the flesh in the person of Jesus. Who are we to challenge that he would bring us the benefits of Jesus’ death and resurrection through water? Could God make disciples apart from baptism? Yes. Does he bring forgiveness apart from the Lord’s Supper through the Word? Yes. Then why use either of the sacraments? Because he commands it! God—who is rich in mercy—chooses to come to us in preached Word and in the sacraments. The Lord has so many ways to tell us he loves us, so many ways to bring the fruits of Christ’s life and death to us.

Back to the question—how can water do such great things? The Lord who cleansed Naaman with simple waterworks an even greater cleansing today in baptism. But how can water do such great things? The first thing to remember as you answer that question is who is at work with the water. The water of baptism is a “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit!” Back to Jesus’ nighttime conversation with Nicodemus:

Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:3-5)

The Spirit is key. The power in baptism is found not in us nor in the water but in God. As you had nothing to do with your first birth so also you were equally a non-participant when it came to your re-birth.

The Spirit works life. The Spirit works life through the power of the Word used in baptism. How can water do such great things? “It is not mere ordinary water, but water comprehended in God’s Word and command and sanctified by them [Ephesians 5:26–27]. So it is nothing other than a divine water. Not that the water in itself is nobler than other water, but that God’s Word and command are added to it.”<sup>43</sup>

Confessional Lutherans walk the narrow road between saying too much about the water or too little about the water. With the power residing in the Word, any notion that the Word somehow spiritualizes the water so that it becomes a newer, more-powerful, super-water is rejected.<sup>44</sup> All the blessings mentioned before are not brought about by magical water but by the power of the Word. “For if the Word is separated from it, the water is the same as the water that the servant cooks with.”<sup>45</sup> Pastors do not throw a fit when the elders empty the water from the font by pouring it down the drain. Neither are parents encouraged to bottle up the leftover water

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<sup>43</sup> LC p. 424.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Smalcald Articles III.v, p. 278.

<sup>45</sup> LC p. 425.

and save it for a later day when they think the little rascal could use another dose of baptism. On the other hand, recognizing the power of the Word with the water, baptism is rightfully seen as more than a symbol. German theologian Werner Elert pictures the relationship between water and Word with these words:

This Word connected with it [water] gives to Baptism the character of a “water rich in grace,” which becomes something different from “simple water”. The name of God spoken at Baptism makes the water a “divine,” “spiritual,” “divine, heavenly water.” Lutheran rituals demand that this sacred character of the act of Baptism should not lead to a superstitious veneration of the water.<sup>46</sup>

We are reminded in Luther’s explanation that “With this Word it [the water of baptism] is baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit.” We’ve spent plenty of time on the blessings of baptism already, but this picture is worth our consideration. Baptism is a gracious water of life. God in his grace, in his love that finds its cause completely in him apart from us, comes to us in the waters of baptism.

Out of all things God could have used for baptism, he uses water. Just think of how necessary water is for life. You can take meat and potatoes out of a man’s diet and he will live—albeit a little more on the grumpy side. You could even cut the Mountain Dew junkie off from his beloved green and gold can, and he will live—albeit a lot more on the grumpy side. But cut off water—and soon enough you die. Water is necessary for life.

Water is necessary for spiritual life as well.<sup>47</sup> In the waters of baptism, the Spirit has given us new life. The Spirit has given us new life by connecting us to the saving work of Christ. A radical change indeed! No longer headed for hell because of the sin we were born in and steeped in, we have a new outlook. In the gracious waters of baptism we have a new life, a new life which finds its strength and reason for living in Christ. And the new life that is ours in Christ can only look forward to the greater and eternal life waiting for us in heaven. Luther draws this final Word-water connection: “God is surely a God of life. Because He is there in this water, it cannot but be the very water of life, which puts death and hell to flight and makes alive with the life that has no end.”<sup>48</sup>

## The Lies

This portion of the assignment really could have been covered in one paragraph.<sup>49</sup> What do other churches teach regarding Holy Baptism? Well in Plymouth, both churches are for it. Amen. But alas, when I mentioned this option to my Sunday morning Bible class at St. Paul’s, I was informed that such an explanation would be “the chicken’s way out.” So on we go.

Before we start throwing darts at the doctrine of those of a different stripe than our own, a word on why we expose the error of another (whether that “another” is a person, congregation, or denomination) is in order. How many times has it been said, even in our own circles, even out of these lips, “There’s not much difference between us and \_\_\_\_\_ church. Just a little difference on the sacraments....” After reviewing all that baptism is and does, it just does not add up to minimize the differences by saying, “We’re really pretty close on all this, but....” This is not a matter of whether your church has a softball team or a youth group. There is more at stake here than whether you usher people out of the sanctuary with stoic ushers giving the ever-so-slight head nod or whether you disperse with a mad dash for the donuts and coffee. Professor Mark Paustian hits the nail on the head: “Is there grace to be found for my baby girl in that simple water and Word that is Holy Baptism? Disagree with my joyful yes if you must, but don’t say it doesn’t matter. It matters to her as few things in her life ever will.”<sup>50</sup> What is at stake here is the gospel.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, p. 296.

<sup>47</sup> Harold Senkbeil has one that sticks in my mind: “The ancient church described baptized believers as fish, conceived in water, born to swim in water. And you know what happens to fish out of water.” *Dying to Live*, p. 61

<sup>48</sup> Luther (WA 52, 102, 29). As quoted in Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> And possibly by this time in the afternoon you’d welcome that. I’m sorry. Blame Pastor Helwig.

<sup>50</sup> Paustian, Prepared to Answer, p. 116.

As we plow through what different denominations teach regarding this sacrament, it is helpful to boil it down to these questions.

1. Is Holy Baptism something man does for God (a sacrificial act)?
2. If Holy Baptism is something that God does for man, does he do it all, or partially?
3. Is Holy Baptism something God does for man completely (a sacramental act)?<sup>52</sup>

### *Baptism as something man does for God*

Who is at work in baptism? Who gets credit for our salvation? The answer to the two questions is one and the same—the Lord. Many, however, see baptism not as an activity of a gracious God but as something that a believer does for God. Baptism is viewed as a sign, a commitment, an outward testimony that one has been filled inwardly by the Holy Spirit. Such a baptism is often called a believer’s baptism.

To understand how such a theology could develop, it’s imperative that we see where false teaching regarding baptism stems from. How can a Lutheran, a Reformed<sup>53</sup> person, an Evangelical, and a Mennonite pick up the same Scriptures and go to the same passages and come up with a completely different theology of baptism? False teaching regarding baptism does not materialize out of thin air. Those who believe baptism is something we do for God come at Scripture with a presupposition that baptism cannot be the work of God, completely and totally.<sup>54</sup>

There are different presuppositions that drive this teaching. And it must be kept in mind that not all who teach that baptism is a work of man hold to all of the following presuppositions. The first is a misunderstanding of original sin.<sup>55</sup> We are conceived in sin. We are born in sin. Not only do we inherit our pug noses and floppy ears from our parents, but we have inherited their sin, the sin which we can trace all the way back to Adam. If you deny original sin, or if you deny that those cute, cuddly babies have the capacity to sin, then all of a sudden baptism does not apply to them. Follow their logic: if baptism is for remission of sins, and babies cannot sin, then they are not to be baptized. Their faulty doctrine of baptism stems from their faulty doctrine of original sin.

A second misunderstanding concerns the will of man.<sup>56</sup> After the fall into sin, mankind is born with an enslaved will. “Not able not to sin” is how the dogmatists describe man. To put it more simply, the baby coming out of the womb has no interest in God and no use for God. We are born alive by doctor’s standards but dead in matters pertaining to God (cf. Ephesians 2:1). And being dead spiritually we were hostile to God. We were born enemies of God. As we hear after the flood, “every inclination of his [mankind’s] heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21 b). St. Paul reminds us “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). Again, if you are wrong on the will of man, if you do not see man as “dead to God” before conversion, if you see mankind as being able to do his part, then you will get baptism wrong as

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<sup>51</sup> Compare with Evangelical Wayne Grudem: “...baptism is not a ‘major’ doctrine that should be the basis of division among genuine Christians, but it is nonetheless a matter of importance for ordinary church life, and it is appropriate that we give it full consideration.” *Systematic Theology*, p. 967.

<sup>52</sup> This section attempts to cover, as best as I’m able, some modern day differences. More complete, and more beneficial, is the paper that Pastor John Vieths presented at the Symposium on Baptism in 2002 at the Seminary. He traces the teaching of baptism as it has progressed throughout the history of the New Testament Church.

<sup>53</sup> Properly speaking, “Reformed” refers to strict adherents of John Calvin. A term which encompasses most of American Protestantism is “Evangelicals”. Included in this are some Calvinists, Arminians, and Baptists. A common denominator of Evangelicals is a low view of the sacraments. For the sake of clarity, this paper will refer to those who see the sacraments as something we do out of obedience to Christ as “Evangelicals”. For a 2-page blurb on the distinction, see Professor John Schuetze in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 101, No. 2, spring 2004, pp.146-147.

<sup>54</sup> I’m indebted to Professor Emeritus Arnold Koelpin and his comments during our summer quarter class for this insight.

<sup>55</sup> For a complete study, see Augsburg Confession Article II, Apology II, Formula of Concord I.

<sup>56</sup> For a complete study, see Augsburg Confession Article XVIII, Apology XVIII, Formula of Concord II.

well. Among those who were wrong on the will of man and as a result were wrong on baptism are a group known as the Anabaptists.<sup>57</sup>

The third misunderstanding is that of the ability of children, infants included, to believe. Many times when you get to the bottom of one's opposition to infant baptism, you stumble across the false presupposition that adults indeed can believe, but not children. Again, follow their logic. If faith is necessary to receive the blessings of baptism, and infants are incapable of believing, then it follows that infants are not to be baptized. Those who are unable to give evidence of faith are considered as unworthy candidates for baptism.<sup>58</sup> Our response is that faith is neither a moral decision nor a commitment on the part of the believer. Rather, faith is a gift from God. Recalling the ground we have covered already, "My faith does not make Baptism, but receives it."<sup>59</sup>

The fourth and final misunderstanding is regarding the means of grace. Those who teach that baptism is something that man does for God refuse to believe that God's Word has the power to do what it says. Hermann Sasse explains:

The Reformed opposition to this Lutheran understanding of Baptism is therefore nothing else than opposition to the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace as a whole. They are opposing the fact that God does not give His Spirit, and therewith the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, to anyone apart from the external means of His grace, apart from the external Word, apart from Baptism, or apart from the Lord's Supper.<sup>60</sup>

We have addressed how water can do such great things. For those who hold to a believer's baptism, they do not need to answer this question. The question for them becomes a "who cares?" For them baptism is not about God working through his powerful Word and water but about making a commitment to God, a statement of their belief, a declaration of their intent to follow in the way.

The theme committee asked me to answer this question: what is lost? When baptism is turned into a pitiful work of obedience by mankind, or when baptism is thrown out completely and babies are simply dedicated or blessed (like a house or a dog), how does that adversely affect the true teaching of baptism?

What comes first to mind is Professor Paustian's question: "Is there forgiveness for my daughter or not?" If the answer is no, then what is lost is the comfort of all the blessings we covered before. If you deny that baptism works forgiveness of sins, then your attention gets turned away from God's gracious doing into something man does. How many people are wrongly directed to their "conversion experience" or to their feelings rather than to the objective reality that is their baptism?

Here is another. If baptism is not the work of a gracious God, then what is the rush? If baptism is a decision that a rational person at an age of accountability has to decide to do, how many dead to God children are kept from this powerful means of grace? It is painful and sad to think how many precious souls throughout the history of the church have been separated from the new life that is given in baptism.

For the sake of illustration, consider this Baptist professor's definition of the ordinance<sup>61</sup> of baptism:

Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Jesus Christ performed once as the initiation of such a believer into a community of believers, the church. This baptism signifies the believer's confidence that Christ's work was complete for his forgiveness and justification and indicates his

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<sup>57</sup> Literally, "Re-baptizers". They were active at the time of Luther. Today's Mennonites trace their roots back to the Anabaptists of the 16th century. The Augsburg Confession condemns their teaching: "Our churches condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism." AC IX, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 977. "In the new covenant it is appropriate that infants not be baptized, and that baptism only be given to those who give evidence of genuine saving faith, because membership in the church is based on an internal spiritual reality, not on physical descent."

<sup>59</sup> LC p. 428.

<sup>60</sup> Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> His terminology, not mine.

desire for unity with the church.... No saving efficacy inheres in either the form or the matter itself.<sup>62</sup>

Compare Professor Nettles' assertion that there is no saving efficacy in baptism with the blessings we discussed before. Indeed, what is lost! A sacrament has been turned into an ordinance. A work of God has turned into a work of man. Our salvation which is one hundred percent God's doing now relies, at least in part, on my commitment or my action.

*Baptism as something God does for man—sort of.*

At first glance it appears that the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism is a breath of fresh air compared to the garbage we just plowed through. At least Rome sees God working in baptism—hence the title of this section of the paper. The idea of a believer's baptism is a foreign concept to Rome.

Rome does see baptism as something that God does for man, but there is a difference between their teaching and the Scriptures. The first difference is in regards to grace. Roman Catholicism teaches that in baptism, God's grace is infused, that is, a good dose of God's saving grace is given to the baptized person which enables the person to cooperate with God.<sup>63</sup> And the gifts of baptism can be received apart from faith, simply by "the deed being done."<sup>64</sup> By not recognizing the complete fallen state of man and attributing to him some ability to play a part in his salvation, Rome finds itself as a strange bed-fellow with the Evangelical camp.<sup>65</sup>

Closely connected with this is Rome's false teaching that baptism deletes all sin in a person.<sup>66</sup> That is simply not the case. Baptism does not cause sin to cease to exist. Read through the struggles of the sinner-saint Paul in Romans seven, or for that matter, confer the struggles you face in your own day-to-day sanctified living. If baptism removes all of original sin, then something went terribly wrong both with St. Paul's baptism as well as my own. We believe and teach that after baptism what remains is a baptized sinner. The guilt and rule of sin has been removed, but what remains is still real sin. In Christ, however, this sin is not charged to our account. "It is finished". The debt has been paid.

Remember Pastor Treptow's illustration from before, the washing off of the tally marks of sin? His illustration would not fly in Papal Instructions 101. Their Catechism speaks:

Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."<sup>67</sup>

Here's the third part of Rome's false teaching. After the first post-baptismal, grave sin, Rome renders baptism ineffective.

What is lost by Rome's false teaching? In the first place, the teaching of infused grace gives man some credit for his salvation, allowing him to cooperate with God. This is in direct contradiction to the doctrine of justification by faith apart from works. Where man gets partial credit, all assurance goes out the window. When one looks at himself for the assurance of salvation, he is led either to pride or despair.

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<sup>62</sup> Nettles, *Understanding Four Views of Baptism*, p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Par. 1999, online edition: "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism." Also par. 405 "Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God."

<sup>64</sup> AC XII condemns this idea, known as *ex opera operato*, p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> AC II and Apology II thoroughly condemn this teaching.

<sup>66</sup> CCC par. 1263, online edition. "By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God."

<sup>67</sup> CCC par. 1446, online edition.

In the second place, teaching that baptism's forgiveness does not extend into the future robs baptism of its comfort. On the basis of this teaching, you can see why at times in the history of the church people put off their baptism to the very end, hoping to die right on the heels of their baptism, "freshly forgiven" if you will. They lived in fear of committing the grave sin that would remove them from their baptismal grace.

There is another group that falls into the "God is at work-sort of" camp. The followers of John Calvin, Reformed in the strictest sense of the term, have no problem referring to baptism as a sacrament. Professor Richard Pratt sounds very Lutheran when he echoes a Calvinistic confession: "Baptism is efficacious; divine grace is 'really ... conferred, by the Holy Ghost' through baptism."<sup>68</sup>

But Calvinists have a problem. With their false teaching of double predestination,<sup>69</sup> Calvinism separates the Spirit from the sacrament and assumes that God must not be working at every baptism. Calvin himself speaks, "They do not themselves bestow any grace, but they announce and manifest it."<sup>70</sup> In other words, baptism does not bring deliverance. It only shows you the deliverance. Confer what we said above about the misunderstanding of the means of grace. The Reformed teach that God is at work in baptism, but not really. And if he's not really at work, then what you have left is again man playing his part. As Lutheran as he sounded before, we see Professor Pratt's true colors shining through: "Reformed churches do not baptize children to regenerate them or to remove the curse of original sin."<sup>71</sup>

What is lost in the false teaching of the Reformed? We will let them speak for themselves. Again, Professor Pratt: "As central as baptism is to the doctrine of salvation, we must never allow anyone to rest his or her hopes for eternal salvation on the rite of baptism."<sup>72</sup> Answering the question, "Should the baptism of infants be required?" he gives this response:

In the past, Reformed churches typically insisted that parents in membership have their children baptized. In recent decades, a number of Reformed denominations have encouraged all parents to present their children for baptism but only required that ordained officers of the church have their children baptized.<sup>73</sup>

What was said before about the number of souls kept from the saving waters of baptism applies here as well. Baptism has lost its comfort and promise of assurance, and the strict Calvinist is left wrestling with the dilemma: did God choose me or not?

### *Baptism as something God does for man*

In the face of lies, confessional Lutheranism continues to sound the clear and scriptural teaching of Holy Baptism. Hermann Sasse said regarding baptism in Luther's day: "As was often the case, Luther's way was the lonely way between Rome and the enthusiasts."<sup>74</sup> Our position is no less lonely today. Keeping in mind what is at stake here, it is worth it to travel the lonely road. We need to be no less clear today than our namesake at the time of the Reformation. In the sacraments, God is actually giving us the very things he has promised to give us. God works in baptism. God does it all in baptism. God does it all in baptism-for you.

### *So, am I a baptized?*<sup>75</sup>

I realize that some who have gathered here today may have been baptized by Father Kurt at Kearney Catholic Church or by Pastor Joe at Broken Bow Baptist Church. After exposing where various denominations and churches go wrong with their theologies of baptism, we at the same time rejoice that baptism does not

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<sup>68</sup> Pratt, *Understanding Four Views of Baptism*, p. 63.

<sup>69</sup> God has elected some for salvation and thereby must have elected others for damnation.

<sup>70</sup> As quoted in Vieths, "The Church Encounters Attacks on Holy Baptism", p. 15. Original citation, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, p. 1316.

<sup>71</sup> Pratt, *Understanding Four Views of Baptism*, p. 70.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>74</sup> Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, p. 44.

<sup>75</sup> For a complete treatment of the subject, see Richard Gurgel's article by the same title in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 99, number 2.

depend on the preacher or on the name of the church. “Lutheranism, exactly like the Roman Church and the Eastern Church, makes the validity of Baptism independent of the personal qualify of the person who baptizes and recognizes not only baptism performed by the laity but also infant baptism.”<sup>76</sup> The goal in exposing errors is not to plant seeds of doubt whether or not you were really baptized. Lutherans accept more baptisms than anyone because we understand what baptism is.

What makes a valid baptism is not the denomination but whether or not they have the essence of baptism. Churches may err when they deny the various blessings of baptism, but if they do not deny the essence of baptism, they still have a valid baptism. “One deals with what the sacrament is [essence], the other with what the sacrament does [blessings].”<sup>77</sup> The essence of baptism again is water, Word, and action with that water and the Word. More simply, those who confess the Triune God and baptize with water and his name have a valid baptism. And so we joyously confess, “We believe in the Holy Christian Church.”

## **Conclusion**

Imagine there was a doctor somewhere who understood the art of saving people from death or, even though they died, could restore them quickly to life so that they would afterward live forever. Oh, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain. NO one could find access to him because of the throng of the rich! But here in Baptism there is freely brought to everyone’s door such a treasure and medicine that it utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive.<sup>78</sup>

Children of God, you have been given such a treasure. Hold onto it. Give thanks for it. Let nothing ruin the joy that is yours in baptism.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>76</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, p. 292.

<sup>77</sup> Gurgel, “Pastor, Am I Baptized?”, p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> LC p. 427.



## **Appendix**

*Various other teachings on baptism that you may run across in your ministries, friendships, schools, and workplaces.*

### **Southern Baptist Convention**

#### **VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper**

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.<sup>79</sup>

### **United Methodist Church**

#### **Article XVII—Of Baptism**

Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.<sup>80</sup>

#### **Article VI—The Sacraments**

We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him. Two Sacraments are ordained by Christ our Lord, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We believe Baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith, and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship. We believe children are under the atonement of Christ and as heirs of the Kingdom of God are acceptable subjects for Christian Baptism. Children of believing parents through Baptism become the special responsibility of the Church. They should be nurtured and led to personal acceptance of Christ, and by profession of faith confirm their Baptism.<sup>81</sup>

### **Schleitheim Confession (Anabaptist Confession from 1527)**

#### **Article I. Notice concerning baptism.**

Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us; hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope. For this you have the reasons and the testimony of the writings and the practice of the apostles (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:6; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36; Acts 16:31-33; 19:4). We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold to the same.<sup>82</sup>

### **Presbyterian Church, USA**

#### **Book of Confessions CHAPTER XX—Of Holy Baptism (excerpts)**

**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BAPTIZED** ...Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favor God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asD#vii>

<sup>80</sup> <http://archives.umc.org/interior.aso?otid=1&mid=1651>, *From The Book of Discipline of The UMC—2004.*

<sup>81</sup> <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=1655> *From The Book of Discipline of The UMC—2004.*

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/34>

adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit; and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld.

**WE ARE BAPTIZED WITH WATER.** And therefore we are baptized, that is, washed or sprinkled with visible water. For the water washes dirt away, and cools and refreshes hot and tired bodies. And the grace of God performs these things for souls, and does so invisibly or spiritually.

**THE OBLIGATION OF BAPTISM.** Moreover, God also separates us from all strange religions and peoples by the symbol of baptism, and consecrates us to himself as his property. We, therefore, confess our faith when we are baptized, and obligate ourselves to God for obedience, mortification of the flesh, and newness of life. Hence, we are enlisted in the holy military service of Christ that all our life long we should fight against the world, Satan, and our own flesh. Moreover, we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services.

**ANABAPTISTS.** We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God's covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be, initiated by holy' baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.<sup>83</sup>

## **Westminster Confession of Faith**

(A Reformed document from 1646, also subscribed to by the Presbyterian Church, USA)

### Chapter XXVIII (Of Baptism)

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his in-grafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called there unto.

III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

V. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.<sup>84</sup>

## **Non-Denominational Church Samples**

<sup>83</sup> [http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/aafeway.dll/confessions/title00000.htm/confession00001.htm?f=temolates\\$fn=default.htm\\$yid=default\\$3.0](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/aafeway.dll/confessions/title00000.htm/confession00001.htm?f=temolates$fn=default.htm$yid=default$3.0)

<sup>84</sup> [http://www.reformed.orci/documents/wcf\\_with\\_proofs/](http://www.reformed.orci/documents/wcf_with_proofs/)

Pastor Vieths makes mention in his paper that many non-denominational or community or Bible churches have no serious theology of baptism. Since baptism has been a divisive issue among different denominations, and a foundational belief of many of these churches is the ability to disagree, many make no official statement on baptism. I tried to find one from our local community church, Christ Community Church in' Beatrice, to no avail. Attempts to find a statement on baptism from Lincoln Berean Church, Crossroads Church of Lincoln, and Harvest Community Church in Lincoln left me empty-handed as well. The following three give you a taste of what is out there.

### **Elmbrook Church**

(A major non-denominational church in Brookfield, WI)

We believe water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances to be observed by the Church during this age. They are, however, not to be regarded as means of salvation or prerequisites for church membership. (This church shall practice believers baptism by immersion.)<sup>85</sup>

### **New Life Church**

(Colorado Springs, CO—a member of the National Association of Evangelicals)

Water Baptism: Following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the new convert is commanded by the Word of God to be baptized in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38).<sup>86</sup>

### **Willow Creek Community Church**

(A community church standard in Barrington, IL, led by Pastor Bill Hybels)

*Statement on Baptism:* While recognizing the right for other churches to practice infant Baptism if it conforms to their theologies, the congregation of Willow Creek Community Church understands Scripture to teach that only professing believers qualify for Baptism.

Scriptural teaching on Baptism may be summarized as follows:

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have submitted themselves to His sovereignty.
2. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and the newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
3. Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.
4. As a biblical rite of initiation into the body of Christ, Baptism of believers may be considered a prerequisite for joining the membership of the church.

Although the old covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes given as a rationale for infant Baptism, the biblical definition of the functions of circumcision and Baptism shows that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The equation is never made in the Bible between the circumcision of male infants, in the old covenant, and the Baptism of born-again believers, much less of infants, in the new covenant. However, Willow Creek Community Church encourages Christian parents to present their children for the ceremony of dedication, whereby God's blessing is formally invoked upon the children, and the parents publicly commit themselves to raise the children in accordance with the teachings of Scripture.

Because the symbolism of Baptism requires a more adult level of cognitive and developmental readiness, the Elders require that children be at least 12 years old to be baptized. Proverbs 20:25 issues a significant caution against the danger of making a vow before adequate knowledge, forethought, and reflection

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<sup>85</sup> Elmbrook Church "Statement of Faith", <http://www.elmbrook.oro/articlelink.asi?iid=389>

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.newlifechurch.org/oages.jso?id=1>

have been given. In an effort to prevent young people from making a premature commitment that they may not fully understand, this minimum age has been established.

Baptism recognizes and celebrates the redemptive life change that is continually occurring within our church. The Elders encourage, new believers and believers, that have not yet participated in adult Baptism, the opportunity to be baptized by immersion on stage. The Elders' position is that Baptism by immersion paints the truest picture of "dying to sin and arising to Christ and new life." The Elders strongly encourage those choosing to be baptized to participate by immersion. We do recognize, however, that some individuals may request Baptism by sprinkling on the stage because of a strong personal preference, particularly those based on a compelling physical reason or disability. In these cases, the Elders ask that a brief explanation be given on the registration form.

#### *A Word Concerning Infant Baptism*

If the purpose of Baptism is to publicly identify a believer in Jesus Christ, you may well be asking yourself, "What was the significance of my Baptism as a baby?" In the Bible, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them and prayed for them and told us to welcome them. But He did not baptize them, and He did not tell anyone else to baptize them. Baptism is for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation.

If you were baptized as a child, it was the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents' wishes. It in no way repudiates the Baptism you received as a child.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> <http://www.willowcreek.ora/Baptism/WCStatement.asp>

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