



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 8.1 – The Sacrament of Baptism**

VIII. The Sacraments of Baptism and of the Altar

Baptism

The Sacrament of holy Baptism is administered among us as a part of the Gospel ministry. We learn from God's Word that baptism is a washing of spiritual regeneration (new birth). The Holy Spirit works through the Word applied with the water of Baptism to create faith in the Savior and to give forgiveness of sins.

In this way Baptism imparts the blessings of Christ to young and old. We believe that infant Baptism is also taught by Scripture – both in the Savior's command to baptize all nations and in God's promise that Baptism has the power to save us and our children. The method applying the water of Baptism is not prescribed in Scripture. We regard a Baptism as valid when it is performed in accordance with Christ's institution – namely, that it is done with water and in the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

John 5:3: Jesus answered ... "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Titus 3:5-8: ... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Matthew 28:19: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38-39: Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

1 Peter 3:21: There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Comments:

The term "sacrament" is not found in the Bible. In fact, there is no word in the Bible that is used to refer to both Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Bible students have noticed, however, that there are certain similarities between Baptism and the Lord's Supper and they used the word "sacrament" to refer to both of them. The Roman Catholic Church claims that God has instituted seven sacraments, but some of their seven are not even mentioned in the Bible. Our Lutheran confessions sometimes including confession and absolution as a sacrament in addition to Baptism and the Lord's supper, and so speak of three sacraments.

Our customary definition of sacrament is derived from looking at Baptism and the Lord's Supper and finding what they have in common. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted or started by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper promise and give the forgiveness of sins. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper connect the promise of forgiveness with the use of earthly elements: water in Baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Thus, our usual definition of a sacrament includes these three items: a sacrament is a rite or ceremony that has been instituted by Christ, connects the gift of forgiveness of sins with the use of an earthly element.

Confession and absolution has also been instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but it differs from Baptism and the Lord's Supper in that there is no earthly element involved. That is why we generally say that there are only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But we must remember that our Lord Himself has not given us a definition of sacrament in the Bible, and so we should not make the number of sacraments a matter of doctrine. The important thing is that we practice Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as confession and absolution, as our Lord commanded them, as given in Scripture.

Even before our Lord began His ministry, God commanded John the Baptist (the Baptizer) to preach and practice a baptism of repentance. John told his disciples, **"He ... sent me to baptize with water"** (John 1:33). John's baptism was connected with the preaching of repentance. He called on the people to confess their sins and put their confidence in the Promised One that God was sending to His people. **"And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"** (Luke 3:3). **"Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins"** (Matthew 3:5-6). But **"the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him"** (Luke 7:30). Jesus' disciples also baptized in Jesus' name during Jesus' ministry (John 4:1-2).

After Jesus completed His work of atoning for human sin by His death and resurrection, He gave these orders to His followers at a mountain in Galilee: **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"** (Matthew 28: 19-20). This is how Jesus instituted Baptism as a ceremony or rite to be practiced by His followers from that time to the end of the world. Baptism was a way by which they would begin to make others into believers in Jesus Christ. Baptism was to be followed by thorough instruction.

Throughout the book of Acts we find Jesus' followers baptizing. On Pentecost Peter addressed the huge crowd who were troubled by their sin in these words: **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"** (Acts 2: 38-39). **"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized"** (Acts 2:41).

Jesus intended His baptism to be for all nations, not just the Jews; it was for both men and women, not just the men (as was the case with circumcision); it was for old and young, for parents and their children. We find examples of families being baptized in the book of Acts: Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15) and the jailer of Philippi and his family (Acts 16:33). The historical records indicate that infant baptism was practiced from the early days of the Church. At the time of the Reformation, however, a number of Anabaptists ("rebaptizers") insisted that only adult believers should be baptized. They claimed that infant baptism was terribly wrong. Baptists as well as many other Christian denominations still hold the opinion that infant baptism is wrong.

We practice infant baptism because Jesus made no restrictions concerning age. Because infants are conceived and born in sin, they need forgiveness just like everyone else. Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees who rejected baptism. But Jesus said to him: **"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"** (John 3:3). **"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"** (John 3:5-6). Infants are flesh born of flesh and therefore need Baptism, just as all sinners do.

Many ask how the application of water to the body can wash away sins. Notice that Jesus said that a person is born of water and the Spirit, not just water. Therefore, we can call Baptism the Holy Spirit's washing of regeneration. Baptism is water connected to God's Word in which the Holy Spirit applies Christ's forgiveness to us, gives us new spiritual life, makes us children of God, and enters into us, making us His temples. It is written: **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life"** (Titus 3:5-7).

Baptists and many others think of Baptism as a Law command – as something we do out of obedience to Jesus – and therefore object to the teaching that Baptism saves us by giving us the forgiveness of sins and a new spiritual life. They consider Baptism a work of man, and since we are saved by grace, not by works, they think that Baptism cannot save. But the Bible tells us that Baptism is not Law, but Gospel. Baptism is not something we do for God, but something that God graciously does for us. Baptism is God's gift of grace to sinners who cannot save themselves. Peter says, **"There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism"** (1 Peter 3:21). And Paul writes: **"Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word"** (Ephesians 5:25-26). God's Word is clear: Baptism saves us by washing away our sins, sanctifying and cleansing us.

Some insist that the only valid Baptism is a Baptism by total immersion of the body under water. Immersion is certainly one proper form of Baptism, but our Lord has not given us any commands concerning method of Baptism, therefore we teach that the water of Baptism may be applied in many different ways: by immersion, by sprinkling, by pouring, or by daubing. The Greek word for "baptize" does not always mean immersion. This is clear from the fact that Mark refers to the **"washing (literally "baptism") of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches"** (Mark 7:4).

If a person has been baptized with water in the name of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we regard that Baptism as a valid Baptism, even if it has been administered in a Christian group that tolerates false teaching. The power of Baptism does not reside in the person or group administering the Baptism, but in the Holy Spirit using the Word of God with the water.

Questions

1. What do Baptism and the Lord's Supper have in common?
2. What is our usual definition of a Sacrament?
3. Why did John the Baptist perform Baptisms?
4. When did Jesus institute Baptism for His Church?
5. Which words of God must be connected with Baptism to make it valid?
6. What are some proper ways to apply the water of Baptism?
7. Why are Baptists opposed to infant Baptism?
8. Why do we practice infant Baptism?
9. Why is Baptism called a washing of regeneration?
10. What makes Baptism a part of the Gospel, rather than the Law?
11. How would you baptize someone in an emergency situation?