



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 10.2 – The Doctrine of Baptism

“In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

Jesus’ instructions to His disciples were clear: they were to apply the water of baptism **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 28:19). Thus, baptism conveys a blessing from the three Persons of God. God the Father adopts us as His children through baptism. In our baptism God gives us Christ, the Son of God, as a covering for our sins. In our baptism the Holy Spirit comes to us and makes His home in us, so that our body becomes His temple.

In the Old Testament, the priests were instructed to pronounce a threefold blessing on the people. God said: **“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them”** (Numbers 6:23-27) In the New Testament this name is revealed more fully as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and this name is **“put”** on those who are baptized in this name.

The apostle John explains that those who are **“born...of God”** become **“children of God”**: **“As many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”** (John 1:12-13). Baptism is, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, a second birth **“of water and the Spirit”** (John 3:5), and thus it is through baptism that persons are **“born of God”** and **“become children of God.”**

The apostle Paul assured the Christians in Galatia: **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if you are Christ’s. Then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”** (Galatians 3:26-29). When we are baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we put on Christ, the Son, and we become sons and daughters of the Father. Baptism in this name has power only because of what Christ accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. Paul wrote: **“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ”** (Galatians 4:4-7).

All of these things fit together: The Father sent the Son to be our Savior. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we receive the benefits of Christ’s work and we put on Christ. At the same time, the Father adopts us as His children by creating faith in Christ in our hearts. At the same time the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts and our bodies become His temple.

Paul asked the Christians in Rome: **“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”** (Romans 6:3). To be baptized in the name of the Son means that we receive all the benefits of His death. We were baptized into His death. This means that we have the forgiveness of sins won by Christ through His death. All of the blessings that Jesus won for us by His suffering and death are given to us. This is what it means to be baptized in the name of Christ.

The Christians in Corinth were emphasizing their human leaders, whether Paul, Apollos, or Peter. Paul did not want this at all, so he wrote to them: **“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”** (1 Corinthians 1:13). The blessings of Christ’s crucifixion are what come to us when we are baptized in the name of Christ. The human being who administers the baptism

is of little importance. Paul wrote: **“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say I had baptized in my own name”** (1 Corinthians 1:14-15).

All of this is a gift of God’s grace wholly undeserved by us, for Paul wrote that all of this was planned by God from eternity: **“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:4-6). And John wrote: **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God”** (1 John 3:1).

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter promised that God would give them the gift of the Holy Spirit through their baptism: **“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”** (Acts 2:38). Notice that he is not extending to all of them the special gifts of the Holy Spirit (which are not distributed equally to all), but he is giving to all of them the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself through their baptism. The gift is the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to those who are baptized. All Christians receive God’s spirit. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“You are not in the flesh, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His... As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”** (Romans 8:9, 14).

Thus, the Triune God works in baptism to grant overwhelming blessings to sinners like us. **“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** are not empty words, but words filled with blessings from God.

Sometimes, for the sake of brevity, the Scriptures speak of baptism as baptism in Jesus’ name, rather than baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For examples, see Acts 2:38, Acts 8:15, Acts 10:48, Romans 6:3, and Galatians 3:27. But in spite of the different wording, there is only one baptism. Nevertheless, there is at least one denomination that insists that baptism must be in the name of “Jesus only”. Those in this group (the Oneness Pentecostals) have abandoned the teaching of the Trinity and baptize in the name of Jesus only.

The Holy Spirit uses different terms in the Bible to explain to us the blessings of baptism. As we have seen, one such blessing associated with baptism is the remission (forgiveness) of sins. The apostle Peter made this clear on Pentecost when he told the crowd: **“Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”** (Acts 2:38). When Ananias of Damascus baptized Saul of Tarsus (the apostle Paul), he said to him: **“Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”** (Acts 22:16). Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“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, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

It is clear that the forgiveness of sins was conveyed through the baptism of John the Baptist, for it is written: **“John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”** (Mark 1:4). The same phrase is used in Luke 3:3.

Since baptism conveys the forgiveness of sins, it also conveys the blessings of salvation and eternal life. Jesus said: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:15-16). The apostle Paul likewise taught: **“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).

The apostle Peter compared the water of the great flood in Noah’s time with the water of baptism and stated that both the flood and baptism were instruments of salvation. The sentence structure in

English is somewhat complicated. He wrote: **“He (Jesus) went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – 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”** (1 Peter 3:19-21). Perhaps the term **“antitype”** needs to be explained. When there is a picture in the Old Testament foretelling something that will happen in the New Testament, that is called a type. When the picture is fulfilled in the New Testament, this is called the antitype. The type is a picture that points toward the antitype. Just as the flood waters in the days of Noah lifted up the ark and saved Noah and his family, so the waters of baptism today save us, not by removing dirt from our body but by taking away our sin and thus giving us a good conscience before God. Because we receive the forgiveness of all of our sins in Baptism, we no longer have a guilty conscience before God.

It is also clear that through baptism the Holy Spirit regenerates us – gives us a second birth – which is absolutely essential for salvation. Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“You must be born again”** (John 3:7). How can one be born again? Jesus said: **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”** (John 3:5-6). For this reason, the apostle Paul called baptism **“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”** (Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit works through baptism to create in the person baptized the beginning of faith in Christ and the beginning of a new spiritual life. It is not the water that does the regenerating – it is the word of God that is in and with the water, as Peter said: **“Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”** (1 Peter 1:23).

Another blessing of baptism is that through baptism we become members of Christ’s Church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free”** (1 Corinthians 12:13). Christ’s Church is the body of Christ, and each individual Christian is a member of that body.

We have already referred to Paul’s words about putting on Christ. He wrote: **“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Galatians 3:27). The picture of putting on Christ as one would put on new clothes brings to mind the picture of salvation spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: **“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”** (Isaiah 61:10). Notice that we do not put on Christ by an act of our own, but it is God who clothes us with Christ. God provides the covering for us, even as He supplied Adam and Eve with tunics of skin in the Garden of Eden to cover up their shame and nakedness. The prophet Zechariah used a similar picture with reference to the high priest, Joshua. We read: **“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel (who was the Son of God Himself as He appeared in the Old Testament). Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’ And to him He said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.’ And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by”** (Zechariah 3:3-5).

Most Protestant churches claim that baptism does not convey any of these blessings. They say baptism does not give the forgiveness of sins, salvation, or the new birth. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, limits the forgiveness of sins given in baptism to the forgiveness of original sin and sins committed *before* baptism. The Council of Trent declared: “If anyone says that all sins which are committed after baptism are either remitted or rendered venial solely through the remembrance of faith of the baptism once received, let him be anathema” (Seventh Session, Canon 10). But when God’s Word says that baptism is for the remission of sins, there are no such limitations. God’s forgiveness is always total forgiveness.

Questions

1. What blessing in baptism comes to us especially from God the Father?
2. What blessing in baptism comes to us from God the Son?
3. What blessing in baptism comes to us from God the Holy Spirit?
4. What difference is there between us as children of God and Jesus as the Son of God?
5. What does it mean to be baptized into Christ's death?
6. Why must we say that the blessings of baptism are a gift of grace?
7. What is the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us in baptism?
8. What is the strange teaching of the Oneness Pentecostals?
9. What makes it possible for baptism to give us the forgiveness of sins?
10. In what way is the great flood a picture of baptism?
11. Why is baptism called a washing of regeneration?
12. What is meant by putting on Christ in baptism?