



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 10.6 – The Doctrine of Baptism

The Continuing Use of Baptism in a Christian's Life

In the days of Abraham God initiated the rite of circumcision for all males in Abraham's household and among his descendants. All male babies were to be circumcised on their eighth day of life, and all those older than eight days at this time were to be circumcised at whatever age they were. This ceremony did not have to be repeated in a man's life; it happened only once in his life.

In a similar way baptism happens only once in a person's life. When Jesus gave the instructions for making disciples among the nations, He indicated that baptism was to be followed by teaching (Matthew 28:19-20). There is no indication anywhere that baptism, once administered according to Bible teaching, needs to be repeated.

The reason baptism does not need to be repeated is plain: when God makes a promise, we can count on Him to keep that promise. His Word can be trusted. Therefore, even if a baptized person later falls away from faith and lives the life of an unbeliever, God's Word has not changed. The person can return to the Lord and be assured that God's Word still stands. **"For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, not shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has mercy on you"** (Isaiah 54:10). God's covenant in baptism stands. The apostle Paul asks: **"Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar"** (Romans 3:3-4). God calls His covenant **"an everlasting covenant"** (Isaiah 55:3) and tells the one who has turned away: **"Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"** (Isaiah 55:7).

Thus, throughout their life a Christian can remember their baptism as God's Word to them personally that God has loved them, has sent Christ to be their Savior, has washed away their sins through Christ's blood, and has made them a child and heir of God and a member of His family and a member of His Church. Besides assuring us of God's forgiveness in Christ, baptism is God's pledge to us of His gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He gives us the Holy Spirit to wage war against the sin that continually entangles us. Paul's wrote in letter to the Romans: **"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing that, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin"** (Romans 6:3-6).

Our baptism signifies the crucifixion and death of the old nature of sin, and the rising up of the new nature. Jesus died because the burden of our sin was laid on Him, but when He rose from the dead, that burden of sin was on Him no more. He was free. When we are baptized, we die with Christ, our old flesh is crucified and is buried, and we come forward after baptism with the forgiveness of all our sins and with the power to live a new life as slaves, no longer as slaves of sin and Satan, but as free and willing servants and slaves of our God. Paul says: **"Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 6:18, 22-23).

Martin Luther explained in his *Small Catechism*: “It (baptism) signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (*Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 360*).

Whenever we sin – and especially whenever we become aware of our sin and recognize our guilt – we need to acknowledge this sin to our Lord and return to His promise to us in our baptism that our sins are forgiven. In the strength of that assurance, we rise up again with new life and devotion and service to our Savior. In this way our baptism continues as a constant source of spiritual strength throughout our lives.

Questions

1. How many times was a male circumcised in the Old Testament?
2. How many times was a person baptized in the New Testament?
3. Why does baptism not have to be repeated when we sin?
4. What happened to all human sin when Jesus died?
5. Why was Jesus able to rise with new life after His burial?
6. What happens when we are buried with Christ in baptism?