

BAPTISMAL GRACE

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The purpose of this essay is specifically to define and to compare the biblical doctrine of Baptism and Grace, noting how our gracious God and Father in Heaven most wonderfully supplies our every spiritual need through the blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism, by Grace, for Christ's sake.

Indeed we cannot hope to exhaust all that the Holy Scriptures or the truly Lutheran Confessions have spoken on the subject of Holy Baptism or especially the term "grace". May it, however, suffice at this time to study the following theses:

I. That Holy Baptism is a Sacrament instituted by God, and that the true Christian Church today is commanded to baptize and that Christians are to be baptized;

II. That it is a blessed means of grace intended for all men, and that it is necessary for the salvation of our soul, because of the heavenly treasures it conveys and bestows;

III. That the grace of God bestowed upon the converted sinner through Baptism is his greatest joy and comfort, strength and confidence, though the Old Adam, World, and Satan, remain to be resisted by every child of God "steadfast in the faith".

The title of this essay clearly indicates the necessity of knowing and applying the entire biblical teaching, or branch of theology, which we often refer to as Soteriology, namely that doctrine of the verbally inspired Scriptures concerning the application of the merits of Jesus Christ, the eternal and living Son of God who became incarnate and did dwell among us, to the individual sinner, whereby the sinner is led to the actual possession and full enjoyment of all the blessings which Christ has procured for all mankind. This then must include the entire concept of divine grace, i.e. the grace of God revealed in the person, work, face, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as well as the continued function of Jesus as our High Priest, Prophet, and King. This then forces the inclusion of the doctrine of eternal predestination and election as; the prompting, instrumental, and effective causes of the individual sinner's conversion, justification, sanctification, and salvation, accomplished through the means of grace (the Word and Sacraments). But, when speaking of delivering us from sin and the curse of the law, how can we avoid a presentation of both the nature and the scope of original and actual sin and observe the correct understanding and proper presentation of the term Gospel in its wide and narrow sense? Nor dare we overlook the all important distinction between that precious Gospel of reconciliation and the Law of Moses with all its ramifications (and of the Old Testament Church), Furthermore, to the proper understanding of the real God-given value and salutary effect of Holy Baptism we must not forget the resistance of natural man, as well as the true nature and purpose of the Sacrament as instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the eternal and almighty reigning Head of the Christian Church in spite of claims to the contrary, or of substitutes notwithstanding.

We cannot presume to teach in the Christian Church of today the Scriptural and Lutheran catechetical doctrine of Baptism without a proper knowledge and evaluation of the very nature and function of saving faith as a precious, priceless, gift of divine grace; and in our teaching we must always carefully distinguish between the Scriptural and historical Christianity's biblical use of such terminology as conversion, regeneration, new birth, act of faith, the work of the Church, the marks of the Church (*ecclesia abscondita*), the true character of the Church and membership in that Church depicted in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as the Bride of Christ and God's Kingdom of grace and glory, not to mention too specifically the inherent rights, powers, and duties of the Church and its individual members, nor the one holy office of that Church which God has ordained under which all other are auxiliary, and the functions, power, and glory of being faithful servants of the Master and Redeemer Jesus Christ, either as a pastor or under-shepherd and steward of the mysteries of God, or as a layman or laywoman, son or daughter, who from true Christian love always abounds in the work of the Lord as a distinctive joy and satisfaction emanating from a heart in which the Word of God reigns supreme and which heart overflows with over-powering love, zeal, and gratitude to God for the free gift of His Son, through whose blood we have redemption, even the forgiveness of all sins.

These matters have been brought to your attention not to becloud the issue but to clarify and orientate our thinking on this important subject, or rather, clear doctrine of Scripture to be discussed in this brief essay, and to demonstrate the tremendous importance of this Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the life and activity of the individual Child of God.

I.

Do we need to be baptized? Article IV of the *Apology* (on Justification) is most useful in our present consideration in that it sets forth most clearly the utter depravity of the human race. All men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, and because of their inherent depravity and natural enmity and wilful resistance or determined opposition to God and His holy will, which exists from conception, through birth, through life, and into the grave, because of which all men are under the wrath of God and are children of condemnation. This is indeed a terrible plight and awful to consider. But thank God that a part of the human race has been rescued from this horrible dilemma. Even though also this part, or remnant, retains its sinfulness, yet these few are free from the wrath and punishment of the just and righteous God and rejoice in His abiding love to guide them and to sustain them. For them there is, however, a continual need of God's abiding grace, but for all others there is need of this grace lest they die in their sins.

How does God's grace, love, His every blessing come to the sinner? It comes only but abundantly through the preaching of the Gospel! "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17) which Word of God is in and with the water in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and is the saving power whereby faith is generated and also preserved, such saving or justifying faith which is in Jesus Christ and accepts the Holy Trinity as the God of all grace, power, mercy, and wisdom. Again we read (in I Cor. 1:21) "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of **preaching** to save **them that believe**". (Cf. II Cor. 4:6) John relates the Lord's words to Thomas about believing the **spoken Word** of

report, and John's statement that Scripture is "**written** that we might believe" applies also. (John 20:29f)

Paul's claim is worthy of our remembrance at this time. (Cf. II Tim. 3:15-17): Not only does he say "Whatsoever is written aforetime is written for our learning" but makes direct reference to the necessity of personal and thorough study of and meditation on divine revelation, the Holy Scriptures, and to know their ability to save alone as the clear statements of the Scriptures themselves testify. The Old Missouri Synod did but reiterate the position of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the doctrine of the Scriptures which teaches that the "act of saving faith is the acceptance of the benefits of Christ offered through the means of grace by knowledge of, and consent to, and reliance on, the **teachings** and **promises** of the Gospel", and especially confidence, abiding and unwavering trust in each word and syllable of that Scripture which "cannot be broken", seeking Refuge and Victory in the revealed Christ of Holy Writ." (Cf. *Doctr. Theol.* 146) Hence Peter exclaims with jubilant heart, enraptured over his and all Christians favoured position among men in the presence of God: "according as His divine power hath given unto us **all** things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath **called** us **to glory** and virtue". (Cf. II Pet. 3:18: I Pet. 1:3) See how John emphasises the need of the **ministry of the WORD** when he states: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that **believe on His name.**" From our Catechism instruction we all learned, in the study of the Second Commandment, that God's name is everything whereby He makes Himself known unto us.

Truly the Word, the eternal Logos, who became incarnate, is the power, grace, mercy, peace, joy, and salvation of sinful, lost, condemned mankind who, though created in God's image, fell, into complete rebellion against God and became wholly unrighteous by their **own free will**. The Word of God, specifically the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth". Also as it operates in the two Sacraments accompanied by visible means or elements as by institution of God, it is truly effective through the life of individual witnesses of the Truth which dwells in their hearts by the effective operation of the Holy Spirit through the power of that same Word, whether through the preached Word or the printed Word. (Cf. Rom. 1:16). Indeed "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:17). But, just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our heart, so the rite (of the Sacrament) itself strikes the eye in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and the Sacrament is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine "that a Sacrament is a visible Word, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were (*quasi*) a picture of the Word, signifying the **same thing** as the Word." Both are **equally efficacious**, in equal measure and equal as to **certainty** of testimony. The Sacraments, and there are two, are outward signs or testimonies having the command of God to which the promises of free and boundless grace are added.

That the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist (and we may also include absolution here by virtue of its divine purpose), are commanded of God is a simple statement of God's infallible Word. (Matt 28:20; Mark 10:14; John 3). That God earnestly desires to save all **mankind**, that He has not chosen some to salvation and others to damnation as it is erroneously claimed by rejectors of clear Scriptures, is positively stated in the words of Peter (Acts 2:38): "Repent and be baptized, **every one of**

you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost". He speaks as the oracle of God. (Cf. I Tim. 2:4; and John 3:16.)

God's grace is universal as well as personal, and yet He has ordained that "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God", stressing in these words particularly the impossibility of man's providing his own righteousness to any degree whatsoever, as well as man's inability to possess anything as a preparation for receiving God's free grace or making man worthy of God's consideration as a recipient of His goodness. Regeneration is mandatory. Christ rejects natural righteousness, (John 3:5), such as that of Nicodemus or all modern Pharisees. Scriptural demands differ radically from man's inherent boasting, pride, arrogance, conceit. One statement of our Lord comes to mind most vividly: "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:20). He insists upon a complete change in the moral condition of any and every man, and demands a thorough, all-inclusive transformation of the **heart, mind**, and of **the will**, all of which is by nature corrupt, so as to prevent even an inclination to be receptive to Truth and Love.

Though a (the) new birth may prove to be unreasonable to self-righteous people, Jesus, the living Truth, demonstrates the absolute need of such regeneration or conversion by water and the Spirit, absolutely essential, a prime-requisite or pre-requisite for entrance into His Kingdom of grace and glory. Another has said, such regeneration is "unavoidably necessary to salvation". (Cf. *Trigl*.p.309) Of course we are fully aware of the fact that a man can be saved without Baptism (as the thief on the cross). But we are not speaking now of the exceptions God makes to the rules He gives for us to follow. Baptism is the rule; God's will is for us to do. God's mercy is exercised with His wisdom in any exceptions to the rule which He permits.

II.

In spite of all the argumentation of modern Baptists and the Reformed Churches in general that reason is to prevail over revelation and that Scripture must be interpreted by reason: in spite of their claim according to their reason that Christ is personally and only residing in heaven; in spite of all philosophical speculation or manipulation to eliminate the true cause and effect of the means of grace (Cf. Matt. 28:18-20; John 21:17, of both Word and Sacrament, claiming with Zwingli and Calvin in true synergistic fashion, "We have never read in Scripture that material (German "*sinnliche*") things, (things perceptible to the senses) which the Sacraments are, do bring with them the Spirit", (this statement being a plain rejection of revealed Truth itself); yet it is the Lord's good and gracious will to have His holy Church, **every** Christian, use the Sacraments, Especially shall the Sacrament of Holy Baptism serve as a precious means of bringing, conveying, and assuring us of divine grace. (Cf. Is. 55:10-11; John 6:63; Rom. 1:16; I Pet. 1:23.) Luke states clearly and most emphatically in Acts 2: "Repent and **be baptized every one** of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, **for the remission of sins**, and **you** shall receive the gift of the **Holy Ghost.**" As circumcision in the Old Testament was bound to the Words and promises of God as an effective means of grace, and also the Passover, (Cf. John 8:56; Romans 4; Gen. 22) so the New Testament Baptism and Lord's Supper are ordained of God to offer, seal, and convey the gifts of His infinite grace as well as operate through them by the Word connected therewith toward the **full**

acceptance of His universal love and/or toward perseverance in, and greater assurance of, their possession, as in adults who have been previously regenerated by the spoken or written Word of Life. (Cf. Exodus 12:21;23:24).

Dr. Stoeckhardt in his *Gnade um Gnade* (pg.342ff.) so beautifully states in his sermon on John 3: “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Only by a new birth can we be fit to accept or appropriate and determine to have and to hold the gifts or treasures of heaven, and such a birth, a new birth, is wrought by Baptism, In **no other way** can one **know** and **appreciate** the person and work of Jesus Christ”.

That which is born of flesh is flesh and all nature is bound to destruction. Flesh was and is ruined, by the Fall; is **ruined nature**, or flesh, and a **complete** ruin. As Jerusalem was destroyed so that not one stone was left upon another, so in ruined man not one single good thing remained. By nature we are, together with all we have attained to or obtained, altogether no more than a dross-heap (*Schlacken*). Civic righteousness or anything of its kind does not fit us for having or holding godliness. (Cf. Hos. 13:4; Col. 2:12-13,—also compare what the Common Confession does not say about the imputation of Adam’s sin with the firm declaration of the Brief Statement.) Natural devotion to fellow-man or common decency or the righteousness of a Nicodemus are all evil and poisonous. Think of the social gospel’s message, or the message of the modernists and liberalists today! No, natural man’s **heart** is **enmity** against God, and by nature man **wars** against the Spirit. If man is to enter God’s kingdom of grace and glory, he must be changed throughout, even his **natural**, stubborn or **willful** resistance (for they are one and the same thing) must be overpowered and humbled. How is this brought about? Not by the assistance or co-operation of man, since man’s ability is nil, but this change is wrought in God’s own mysterious manner by the power of the Spirit through the Word and Sacrament. The Spirit of God works faith in man’s heart by water and the Word, as Paul declares (Titus 3:5f): “According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” etc.

In the case of such as claim that they have come to faith but doubt the validity or need of this heavenly washing, we too ask with the blessed Apostle (Acts 10:47): “Can a man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” Then here are the direct commands of the Lord and Savior: “Go ye and teach **all nations**, baptizing **them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost”; “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he **cannot enter** into the Kingdom of God.”

If we reject Baptism as a Sacrament, a precious and efficacious means of grace, with all that it implies, if we are uncertain about the need of Baptism for infants or adults and doubt the baptismal faith of little ones of which the Savior did say “which believe in Me”, then **we are** worthy of the Lord’s bitter rebuke given to the disciples; for in the denial of baptismal grace in any of its God-given power or scope of function upon the heart or life, soul or body, of the individual believer upon, whom God’s grace has been bestowed, we are indeed undermining one of the pillars of true Christian faith, weak as that faith might be, and most thoroughly undermining the implicit faith of others in God’s clear words and promises, yes, depriving thousands of “babes in arms” of their certain and joyous hope of salvation.

III.

Now as to the godly purpose of Baptism, Baptism is no more or no less than a God-given means or rite, a sure sign whereby God in and through said Sacrament offers and conveys the satisfaction which Christ has gained for us before God (*satisfactio vicaria Jesu Christi*) namely the forgiveness of **all** our sins. Hence Baptism is also called a **means of justification** (*Rechtfertigungsmittel; medium justificationis give remissionis peccatorum*), and therefore is not at all a work which we do **to God** but which God does **to us**, by grace; for Christ's sake.

To attribute any cause or co-operation in man by making an unscriptural distinction between natural and wilful resistance is positively depriving God of His holiness and majesty. Sad to say, this synergistic heresy is found in many Confessions of liberal churches, including Lutheran bodies. Nor is this false doctrine condemned in the recently adopted Common Confession as it has always been severely condemned in all good Lutheran confessions. It is also an error of Rome, and of Romanizing Lutherans and sects in general, when they teach that Baptism is merely an act whereby we, (as also in the Lord's Supper) by our mere act of being baptized (just going through the *paces-exopere operato*) without faith, take or receive God's proffered grace (thus marriage, e. g., is claimed to be a Sacrament too). The Apology therefore states that this is a Jewish opinion; but we say with due alarm that such Judaizing claims are today tempting the Church to overthrow the true doctrine of the Sacraments as well as the clear Word of God itself. (Cf. *Apology*, 204; *Triglotta*).

Rome, of course, anathematizes us who accept Scriptures alone as the source, and norm of all doctrine. Others ridicule us and even accuse the faithful adherent to God's Word as being guilty of prostituting and manhandling the Truth. The Papacy must by all means retain its tyranny over men's consciences even at the expense of the eternal Truth and divinely instituted Sacraments. Rome's teaching on Baptism, though it may be done in the name of the Trinity and with water as the visible means, has the definite purpose of vitiating God's free grace, God's vocation to "Come, for all things **are now ready**". Such error also spoils God's act of regenerating "whereby the sinner may **put on Christ** and from that moment **actually be** a new creature in Christ Jesus". Furthermore, this unscriptural teaching (Cf. Matt. 11:28; II Cor. 5:17) forbids God's renovation or sanctification as well as His express will to preserve the faith given by the Spirit which faith trusts in God's rich mercy and power. Even St. Augustine condemns this error, and Romans 1:10 states: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, but with the lips confession is made unto salvation".

The neo-Lutheran tendency of the twentieth century is little different. Dr. Fr. Pieper's words (Vol. *III*, 311 *f.*) apply here and now, that any claim that the working or effect of Baptism is a mere kind of nature-working or as an encroachment of some materialistic or mysterious activity for the acceptance of which faith is **not** necessary is a most vicious dogma. Adherents of such tenets therefore must claim that Baptism is not necessary, that you can be saved even if faith is lost— with or without Baptism—and if a baptized person never comes to faith he yet may obtain and possess in himself the Spirit of Christ "as a donation implanted for a life-time." Perhaps this is also, at least in some cases, supposed to eliminate all original and actual sin? If you ask: What can be the

explanation of such fallacies? we simply say: "There is none!" They are naught else but fact that our membership in a theosophic speculation.

Let us here also take note of the visible organization (church body or congregation) **does not depend** upon our (Christian) Baptism in that particular body or congregation-visible church; not any more than our membership in the true Christian Church, the communion of saints, is dependent only upon our Christian Baptism. When pope or cardinal, minister or layman, professor or pastor, tries to tell us that **because** we are baptized according to a certain form in a certain church etc. that therefore we must stay in that fellowship or communion lest we become guilty of denying our baptismal vow and baptismal grace, we stand up in arms. Of course Scripture, namely God Himself, by the requirement that we accept and confess the pure doctrine, tells His own to what church, congregation, or synod, they should belong. But Baptism is God's holy institution whereby God bestows, first the forgiveness or the righteousness of Christ, and thus makes possible the **second**, namely blessed communion with Christ and membership in the One Holy Christian Church. This principle will also clearly direct any Christian in the choosing of the right kind of visible communion or Christian fellowship. (If the first is to be followed by the second, then the second cannot be such that it would in any manner deny or make mockery of the first or endanger the faith which justifies).

What is the good and gracious purpose of God in and through Baptism? Our Catechism teaches us this in a most, beautiful summary: "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal life (or salvation) to all who believe this, as the **words** and promises of God declare". Without these precious gifts no man can be saved or even be happy in this life. They are gifts from Heaven and bring us to Heaven. God is almighty and could certainly have brought us to faith and through faith to salvation through some other means or directly, and can convert and save in other ways if He would so choose, without means, but He has ordained that the Spirit operate effectually upon the heart of every sinner through the Word and Sacrament, and we rejoice with unspeakable joy that we have the precious means of grace and sincerely pray in the name of Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for whose sake God is gracious unto sinners, that we may keep the Word and Sacraments in their purity.

Nor is it the water that makes Baptism efficacious. It is the Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts such Word of God in the water. The Word is the conveyor of heavenly treasures of grace, (e.g. like the electric wire brings or carries the current which causes the bulb to light) and therefore there can be no question as to the true Lutheran confession regarding the blessings given by God and received by the repentant and believing sinner which cause the heart of every Christian to leap for joy.

The denial of Baptismal grace therefore is a complete rejection of the authority of Scripture; and who of us is not aware of the undeniable fact that the rejection of even one word of God's revelation leaves no one a certain hope of salvation? Whosoever **believes** God's word as it is written can see, can know and have, and by divine grace retain, these priceless gifts of grace offered in Baptism, but he who will **not believe** will be left out in the cold of indifference, despair, hopelessness, and fearfulness, to end in the torment of hell, and as long as such an one does not implicitly accept and hold fast to the clear teachings or words of Holy Writ, then such an one will not be able to bask in the warm comforts of God's grace and overwhelming goodness. Deny the meaning and the eternal

purpose of Baptism, what have you left? How close does the denial of Baptismal grace come to mockery? It is a mockery of God's holiness

And finally, just as the forgiveness of sins and regeneration, that is, putting on Christ, and becoming new creatures, are the God-intended result of the faith-working Spirit of God in His Sacrament, so also there is bestowed upon the believer the blessed sonship of God, union with the body of Christ, as a member thereof, so that he takes fellowship in the. Communion at Saints, as St. Paul states: "We are by one Spirit all baptized **into one body**" (I Cor. 12:13). Nor it is God's intention that in the state of faith we complacently or passively become indifferent to the succeeding, and yet inherent, purpose of regeneration. True, the immediate and enduring consequences of faith in the justifying grace of God are peace with God, a good conscience, comfort and consolation under the cross, in trials and tribulations, hope of eternal life, strength and joy in our strife against error and evil. (Rom. 5:8; Rom. 8; Eph. 31. But from the very moment when the primary grace is accepted in Baptism, the same Spirit who made that possible to us also actuates such living faith in the work of sanctification. Also this new holiness, the state of being dead to sins or at enmity with the Old Adam, and the desire to be right with God, is wrought by the selfsame Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Rom. 6:1-11 is very clear on this faith. And Peter exhorts us, "giving all diligence, add to your faith **virtue.**" (I Pet. 1:5) "There is in the entire scope of clear teaching, or doctrine, no other means whereby the inherent sinful and poisonous lusts and desires of natural sins may be overpowered and resisted except by the knowledge and possession of the full Gospel of reconciliation. The Law changes nothing, but rather causes more grief and shame." (*Chr. Dogm.* Fr.P. p.317) In Rom. 6:14 we read: "Sin shall have no dominion over you; for **ye are not** under the law, **but under grace,**" and again in Gal. 5:16-24, "This I pray then: walk in the spirit, and ye **shall not fulfil** the lusts of the flesh" (v.24) and "they that are Christ's **have crucified** the flesh with the affections and lusts." The Law may be a mirror to remind us of that which is pleasing or to warn us against that which is an abomination in God's sight, but never can it serve as an incentive or impelling motive to have progressive sanctification. To grow in grace and knowledge indeed requires (II Pet. 3:18) the right use of the law but the energy and zeal and desire for doing good and resisting evil flows from the love of God which reigns in the believer's heart as implanted by the Holy Ghost in Baptism by the use of the almighty Word. Often we find a Christian seriously doubting his state of faith. He sees his weak and frail condition; too often sin abounds or certain errors are hard to overcome. He then fears that he may not have been converted at all. He even doubts the validity and effect of his Baptism. To such we must say the truth that where God, as in Baptism, offers his grace, i. e. the forgiveness of sins, and faith takes His heavenly, gift, there the Old Adam is *eo ipso* crucified and the new man is brought to life (resurrection) and therefore, though a beginning of holiness is made and seen, it is God's own wish to sanctify His own by the continued use of the Word, whereby He will reprove, correct, enlighten, instruct in righteousness and thoroughly furnish His beloved unto all good works, and supply the strength and love to accomplish His will. We must ever recall the words of II Cor. 9:8: "God is able to make **all** grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work." (II Cor. 11:9; Phil 4:13; John 15:5). After all, good intentions don't save nor keep. We humans are helpless without God's Spirit. "This God that works in you to **will** and **to do** of His good

pleasure.” (Phil 2:13) Pray God then, that such as even you and I are, weak in faith and love or virtue, may resolve with St. Paul who reflects upon the perfection of the saints: “whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.” (Col. 1:29).

That some who hear the precious Gospel and are not saved or wallow in sin and shame, and that many who have been baptized live ungodly lives and are ruined does not affect the value and effect of the institution and Word of God. The fact remains for our eternal joy and comfort, especially when bearing the cross of Christ, or facing death, according to Luther: “Holy Baptism is won for us by the same blood which He shed for us and by which He paid for our sins. For forgiveness of sins is not earned by our works, but by the death and shedding of the blood of God’s Son. Such forgiveness is in the Sacrament.” (Luther VII,77). The same forgiveness is also found in the Lord’s Supper, in the preaching of the unadulterated Gospel. Sprinkling or washing of the water by and with the Word, eating the body or drinking the blood of Christ in the Sacrament, is nothing else than preaching and teaching the Gospel. The minister’s tongue is the Lord’s means of pouring out grace, the layman’s or Christian child’s statement that: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin” is spreading the grace of God. He who believes is baptized by the Spirit and with power. Baptism, simply though mysteriously, applies to the individual believer the full pardon for our iniquity, namely, that forgiveness which, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God has declared to be available as well as wholly satisfactory for all. Should the question arise, in the light of the aforesaid importance and value of Baptism: Will such as have not been baptized all go to hell?—We must answer, that depends on several factors. First of all, we note that there are exceptions in Scripture, e. g., the thief on the cross. Second, let us bear in mind that it is “*contemptus sacramenti damnat, non privatio*” as the rejection of Christ is damnatory. Third of a truth, faith and regeneration **can** be wrought by the Gospel, the Word alone. Without visible means.

In conclusion, we note the following, that the grace of God so freely and richly bestowed upon us through Baptism should be our greatest joy and comfort, though we dare never forget that as our sinful nature abides with us all our life long, with the wicked world surrounding us and attacking us day in and day out, the battle to resist the evil and to increase in love and virtue must never cease and the victory will be ours.

“Thus God wishes Himself to be known, thus He wishes Himself to be worshiped, that from Him we receive benefits, and receive them, too because of His mercy, and not because of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions. Physical or spiritual, in life or in death, as **all** godly persons know.” And this consolation is a new and spiritual life. The life of the Christian is but a look or longing for the lift which is to come, a constant preparation for the coming of the Lord in death or on Judgment Day. Our Baptism should serve us through life; though we need not be rebaptized, yet we should reflect upon it constantly. There we died unto sin and arose to life. (cf. *Trigl.* p.137).

As Noah and his family were saved from the flood, so were we delivered, not by a removal of our sinful life (our flesh always remains), but by entering the covenant through which we have the joy of a good conscience before God. (Cf. Rom.6:3; I Pet. 3:21). The moment that faith was worked in the heart we became heirs of the grace of life, not only that our prayers might not be hindered, but that we may have the abundance

of heavenly goodness showered upon us for Christ's sake. Hence the Christian, a new creature, constantly reflects upon the baptismal covenant with his God, daily confesses sins, rejoices, and finds rest for his troubled soul in the forgiveness of sins given unto him in his Baptism, and seeks to amend his daily life; yes, walking in newness of life, yet continuing to fall into sin, such an one (as you and I also confess to be) daily finds new strength in Baptism to grow in grace, and love. Our Baptism is an inexhaustible source of strength, joy and peace. Pity us if we fail to use it aright!

With what joy our children then will make their confirmation vows after proper and careful, painstaking instruction concerning the true value and meaning of our Lord's redemptive work and concerning the Sacrament of Holy Baptism whereby we receive the blessings of that God-given sacrifice. With what joy every communicant member will regularly approach the Lord's table to eat the body and to drink the blood of Jesus for additional strength and love, given us as a pledge and seal of God's overwhelming love for sinners. What care then must be exercised also in the instruction of adults for communicant membership, for a joyful confession, in full harmony of spirit with us, of the sacred and saving Truth of Scriptures.

We all confess that we are sinners. We love to repeat the words: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners" (I Tim. 1:15) but we must not forget to quote the rest of that passage: "Of whom I am chief", and then hang our proud heads in shame as the publican in the temple, in shame and utter disgust! Any person who confesses his sins is in constant need of divine comfort, **much comfort**. Therefore God in love has opened **various channels** in the form of means of grace to supply us with that needed comfort and peace of heart and mind. Not only through the preaching of the Gospel, not, as some claim, by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit whereby we actually feel the presence of God, but through the Sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, God gives us the forgiveness of sins, a positive and never-to-be-broken pledge that He has laid all our iniquities upon His Son. As said in Scriptures: "We are baptized **unto** (German 'zur') the forgiveness of sins" right there in the sacred rite of Holy Baptism by the working of the Holy Spirit who works true, living, saving faith in our hearts, whereby we may take and enjoy forever God's boundless grace. If then the sects deny the use or efficacy of the means of grace, especially of this Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and emphatically describe the Sacraments as misleading toward carnal security, then they are hindering, preventing, stopping the flow of grace to poor sinners and thus serving as messengers of Satan and agents of the wicked liar, actually destroying the souls of men.

Not only do we need comfort, God, through the means of grace, particularly through Baptism, supplies to His beloved children, the blessed elect, the necessary strength and courage and boldness which they need daily to remain steadfast and immovable in the true confession of His holy Name; and also to grow in Christian virtue, yes, to abound in good works. Is it not true that we daily wait for the coming of the Lord, pray for His glorious appearance to receive His own unto Himself? Is not our citizenship in heaven? Has not God called us out of the darkness of unbelief unto His marvelous light and created us anew in Christ Jesus so that we walk patiently and deliberately in those works which He hath ordained for us to do? And are those works not the expected fruits of righteousness? As elect unto faith and salvation, wholly excluding any

synergistic human cooperation or even preparation, we are indeed actively to be engaged in declaring God's love for sinners as revealed in the person and work of Jesus.

We are most emphatically to reject and avoid worldly wisdom and manners, watching against the carnal security of Noah's day, carefully measuring each step on life's way lest we offend the majesty of our King and one Master, who is our Emancipator and Intercessor, doing His will as strangers and pilgrims who never rest in our deliberate and prayerful desire to know the goodness of God and to offer up all things, even our life, as a proper sacrifice of gratitude and thanksgiving, in His service finding joy and delight. To be sure, daily filling our own lamps with oil even at the cost supreme, rejoicing, exulting, glorying in the cross of Christ, though it lie ever so heavily upon us.

Luther has said that the true Christian wisdom and true master piece of Christianity is to turn our backs upon this life and constantly keep our eye set on the goal above, for the things of heaven alone have abiding value, and that is where we belong. True, such is not as easily done as said! But, who of us who has through Baptism, and ever since, tasted of God's free grace, can be content with a nominal Christianity? See how often the Lord moves the prophets and apostles in holy love to turn their eyes to the cross of Jesus, to the open grave of the Savior; and how often do they not plead that we, for Christ's sake, walk in love and adoration of His majestic and matchless grace. (Read carefully Dr. Pieper. *Vol. II*, pg. 105 on this point).

Note well, we are baptized not for this life, nor are we called Christians in order that we may be farmers, mayors, lords, servants of men, but have been brought to faith in Baptism and constantly feed on the green pastures of God's Word, especially hearing and reading the sweet Gospel promises, and believe on Jesus Christ for one reason alone, namely that we forsake all earthly goals, deny ourselves (though on earth ever being faithful in whatsoever our calling or vocation might be), and journey as it were, out of this life into a new realm of existence, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, but all one in Christ, which union begins in this life in faith, as faith is begotten in our hearts, and is invisible; but there, home at last, we shall know even as we are known, and there in the presence of our Maker and Redeemer and Sanctifier we shall have perfect peace, know not death, nor fear, nor danger nor sin, only perfection, where God and Christ and all true Christians, that is believers in His inviolable and clear Word, are one and all in Christ who is All in All, the blessed Author and Finisher of our faith, the Good Shepherd and faithful Bishop of our souls. God grant it! AMEN.

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