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### The Significance of Baptism for the Christian's Faith and Life

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM  
FOR THE CHRISTIAN'S FAITH AND LIFE

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A Thesis presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary  
Department of Systematic Theology

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In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
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Approved by

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM  
FOR THE CHRISTIAN'S FAITH AND LIFE

"Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation."<sup>1</sup> So in Article IX of the Augsburg Confession the Lutheran Church fathers expressed the importance of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. While this statement was not intended to express the absolute necessity of baptism, it was intended to emphasize that baptism is not to be despised.<sup>2</sup> Since the preached Gospel offers forgiveness of sins, it is possible for the sinner to be saved even though he may yet lack baptism. To despise baptism and to refuse this sacrament, however, is a different matter; it is a rejection of God's grace, and such rejection of grace condemns.

The very fact that Christ instituted and commanded Christian baptism is already enough to make it necessary. However, Jesus never instituted anything just for the sake of instituting, nor did the Master command for the sake of commanding. Baptism was given for the benefit of sinners. It is our purpose in the following pages to show the significance of baptism for the Christian's faith and life.

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1. Concordia Triglotta P. 47.

2. St. Louis XI, 985,62, Luther says in a sermon on Mark 16, 14-20, "Darum musz man diesen Text also verstehen, dasz hiermit die Taufe befohlen und bestaetigt, als die man nicht soll verachten, sondern gebrauchen, wie gesagt ist; und doch darum nicht so gar enge spannen, dasz darum sollte jemand verdammt sein, der night zur Taufe kommen koennte."

This significance is shown under three general headings: Regeneration, Sanctification, Glorification - discussed in that order since that is the order of progress of the Christian's faith and life.

I. BAPTISM HAS POWER TO BRING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE INTO BEING (REGENERATION)

Since the fall of man into sin, man's nature is such that Christian faith and life can come into being only through a spiritual rebirth or regeneration.

Man's natural spiritual helplessness is described in the Bible in different ways, but all of them show the total depravity of man as he is by birth.

Thus the Bible describes the understanding of natural man as being dark and blind in spiritual matters, unenlightened by the Spirit of God. Of such spiritual darkness Christ was speaking when He said concerning the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, "whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." (John 14,17)

The Apostle Paul recognized his own immense spiritual understanding, and that of his fellow-believers, as a gracious gift of God, but he knew that as he preached the Gospel of the sinner's redemption through faith in Jesus Christ, his gospel would be rejected by many. He was teaching spiritual truths, yet had to say, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2,14)

In 2 Cor. 4,4 the Apostle places the blame for this spiritual blindness on "the god of this world." Those who are found in spiritual darkness are under the power of the devil, the prince of darkness. That is a result of the sin with which man is born and to which he then adds by his active disobedience to the Law of God. The natural man has no desire to escape this darkness, for he knows no other, and no better, way of life.

In another letter,<sup>3</sup> the Apostle adds the thought that spiritual darkness separates unbelieving Gentiles from God, making them foreigners to Him. This alienation from God is due to wilful spiritual ignorance or hardness of heart, and thus is the fault of the sinner himself.

It is obvious that if Christian faith and life are to come into being, the spiritual darkness and blindness of understanding of the natural man must be enlightened.

The Scriptures further describe natural man's spiritual condition as spiritual death. Paul reminded some of the Christians to whom he wrote of what their spiritual condition had been while they were still unbelievers. He says they were dead in trespasses and sins.<sup>4</sup> Such description shows the total helplessness of the unregenerated sinner. If such sinner is to have spiritual life, that life must be born in him; the sinner must be regenerated.

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3. Eph. 4, 17-19.

4. Eph. 2, 1.5; Col. 2,13 .

Paul speaks of man's natural spiritual helplessness in still another way when he says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." (Rom.8,7)<sup>5</sup> The mind of unregenerated man, hostile to God, concerned with fulfilling the desires of the flesh, cannot please God (v.7b-8), and, indeed, has no desire to do so. What desire and inclination there is, is toward evil. And just this situation is so by nature. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Gen. 8,21) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (John 3,6)

Since man's very nature is corrupt, his thoughts, his deeds, his life will be evil. He does, indeed, bear much fruit: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and the like.<sup>6</sup> The only kind of fruit he is able to bear in God's sight is evil fruit. There is no possibility for the unregenerated sinner to please God. Sin rules his life. He is a slave as Paul says, "I am carnal, sold under sin," (Rom. 7,14) and Paul knew that such slaves are terrifyingly free from godly living. (Rom.6,20)

Because of this spiritual condition and this sin, natural man is under the wrath of God. God is just,<sup>7</sup> and justice requires satisfaction when it has been wronged. This places the sinner under the threat of God's punishment.

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5. Paul also speaks of this natural hostility in Col.1,21 where he mentions it as active in evil deeds.

6. Gal. 5,19-21.

7. Cf. eg. Deut. 32,4 and Ps. 145,17.

The Scriptures amply forewarn of the seriousness of the punishment. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. 3,10) "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18,4) "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6,23) The problem for every sinner is, of course, how to escape this condemnation which God has so justly spoken.

There is only one workable way of escape. Another may be mentioned, but only as theoretical. The theoretical way is that the sinner save himself by his own effort; the true way is that someone else, namely God, save him.

The first mentioned way of escape, the theoretical way, is promptly eliminated by the fact of natural man's spiritual helplessness. To think that the sinner can save himself by doing his best to live a good life is to misunderstand and underrate the seriousness of sin on the one hand, and the just demands of the Law of God on the other. Passages like those mentioned above (Gal. 3,10; Ezek. 18,4; Rom. 6,23) make it clear beyond doubt that every sin condemns. There is not the slightest exception. To grant that a man sins even a little, and then to suppose that God will overlook his sin because he tries his best to live a good life, is making an unwarranted assumption. It is assuming that God did not really mean what He said in the above passages: "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them", and "The wages of sin [every, any, and all sin] is death." Nor does the importance

of the sinning individual make a difference before the judgment of the Law. "For there is no respect of persons with God." (Rom. 2,11)<sup>8</sup>

The possibility that the sinner might cooperate with God, and thus at least help along a bit in escaping from the doom of sin's wages, is also ruled out by man's total spiritual inability. He is not able even to cooperate in his rescue.

Thus the second way of escape from God's condemning wrath is the only possible way. Someone else must save the sinner. Man needs a Savior. Since man cannot save himself, much less anyone else, God Himself must do the saving. God has provided a Savior, His own Son, Jesus Christ, whose entire work was done to save lost sinners. He perfectly and completely kept the Law of God, so that John had to write concerning Him, "In him is no sin." (1 John 3,5b) Paul agrees with this. (2 Cor. 5,21) This active obedience of Christ had as its purpose the salvation of sinners. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rom. 5,19)

But what of the sins which men had already committed, and which they still commit? Since God is just, these must be punished. The Scriptures teach these sins have been punished in Christ, that Christ bore the punishment of the

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8. Cf. also Heb. 2,2; 1 Pet. 1,17.

sins of the world, that He suffered as the substitute of sinners.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the sinner's lost condition, and because of his spiritual inability to save himself, every sinner has need of this Savior, Jesus Christ. It is necessary for the sinner to accept Christ's saving work if he is to be saved. The accepting is done through believing in, trusting and relying on Christ for salvation. Whoever believes in Him will not be condemned, and will not perish.<sup>10</sup> Faith in Christ is the sine qua non of the sinner's salvation.

Since, however, man's natural spiritual condition is one of total helplessness and corruption, he cannot even believe in Christ by his own power. Thus if man is to have saving faith, and then live in a godly manner, it is necessary that a spiritual rebirth or regeneration be wrought in him. Just as physical birth gives entrance into earthly life, so spiritual birth is necessary for spiritual life. This rebirth must of necessity be brought about by a power outside man himself. It bears repeating that the sinner is not able even to cooperate in his regeneration. It is entirely the work of God. Paul plainly teaches that the sinner is saved by God's grace through faith, and that faith is a gift of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

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9. 1 Pet. 3,18; Gal. 3,13; 1 John 2,2, and, of course, Is. 53,4.

10. John 3,16.18.

11. Eph. 2,8-9; 1 Cor./2,3.

Only so can the spiritually blind, dead, and hostile sinner be saved. He must be enlightened, regenerated, converted.

The foregoing is basic and foundational for a discussion of the significance of baptism for the Christian's faith and life. It is necessary to bear in mind the total spiritual helplessness of natural man in order to understand the full importance of baptism for spiritual life. When the necessity of regeneration is borne in mind, it becomes very important to state with Scriptural authority that baptism has power to bring Christian faith and life into being.

It was stated above that regeneration is entirely the work of God. But God does not ordinarily work immediately. He uses tools or means.

Baptism is a means used by God the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual rebirth, or faith, and thus it can be said that baptism starts Christian faith and life on its way. God Himself has given baptism this importance. It was the Lord Jesus, true God, Who instituted Christian baptism, connecting with it the promise of salvation,<sup>12</sup> and so making it a means of grace. As a means of grace baptism has the twofold power of a means of grace, "namely, a) an exhibiting, offering, or conferring power (vis exhibitiva, dativa, collativa) and b) an effective, or operative, power, (vis

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12. Matt. 28,19; Mark 16,16.

effectiva sive operativa)".<sup>13</sup> Baptism offers and bestows the forgiveness of sins to the condemned sinner. God has given to this sacrament the same power as He has given to the Gospel. For this reason baptism has been called a "visible Word".<sup>14</sup>

In baptism, as in the Gospel (or we might say, also in this form of the Gospel), the Holy Spirit is the effective power. After Luther in the Small Catechism has discussed the benefits of baptism by saying that it works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe the promises of God given in baptism, he goes on to ask the question, "How can water do such great things?" His well-known answer is, "It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water."<sup>15</sup> On the same subject he says in the Large Catechism, "For the kernel in the water is God's Word or command and the name of God, which is a treasure greater and nobler than heaven and earth."<sup>16</sup> He speaks

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13. John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.441.

14. Apology, Art. XIII(VII)5, Triglotta, p.309. "The effect of the Word and of the rite 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, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same."

Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.492: "The distinctive difference between Baptism and the Gospel in general is this, that God's individual offer of grace in Holy Baptism through its application by water to the individual person becomes the visible Word (Verbum visibile)".

15. Triglotta, p.551.

16. Triglotta, p.735,16.

Scripturally.<sup>17</sup> Luther does not here mention the Holy Spirit, but the Word, as the thing which gives baptism its power. Yet it is the working of God's Spirit which makes the Word effective, whether that Word be visible, audible, or whatever form it may have.

Luther also speaks of the necessity of faith in connection with the benefits of baptism, and, indeed, faith is necessary to receive these benefits,<sup>18</sup> but here again the work of the Holy Spirit is essential, for there is no faith apart from the working of the Holy Ghost.<sup>19</sup> Thus in baptism, the Holy Spirit is the effective power. Baptism is one of the means which He uses to bring Christian faith and life into being.)

Recognizing baptism as a means of grace which the Spirit uses to awaken Christian faith will eliminate

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17. Cf. Eph. 5,26. This passage will be discussed later.

18. Rudolf Kirsten, Durch die Taufe ins Kreuz!, p.268: "Damit sie zustande kommen kann, ist es noetig, dasz der Taeufeling die Taufe der Kirche auch ungehindert an seinem Herzen und in seiner Seele arbeiten laeszt und ihr nicht gegen die bessere sittliche Erkenntnis, die sie in seinem Gewissen aus ihrem Todesschlummer wachruft, mutwillig und geflissentlich widersteht und widerstrebt. Er musz sich auch taufen lassen. Das heizt: er musz die Taufe im Glauben annehmen."

R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel, p.473, says in part on Mk. 16,16: "Faith and Baptism are here combined as the means of obtaining salvation. For one thing, faith and Baptism always go together; ..... By believing he clings to the gospel, and part of that gospel is Baptism. But believing is subjective, the act of Baptism objective. They go together in this way." (All references to Lenski's commentary on the N.T. will hereafter simply be noted as Lenski.)

Faith is necessary for the salutary use of baptism, but is not of the essence of baptism. It is the receiving means.

Th. Engelder, Mimeo. notes on Bapt. Par. 22, "while faith contributes nothing towards the efficacy of Baptism, it is the function of faith, created or strengthened by Baptism, to appropriate the blessing."

So also Luther, Large Cat., Triglotta 745,53, "For my faith does not make Baptism, but receives it."

19. 1 Cor. 12,3.

the wishful thought of the would-be-work-righteous that there is some merit of man in being baptized. Dr. Th. Engelder rightly describes this work-view of baptism when he writes, "The teaching of the Disciples of Christ that forgiveness is attached to Baptism as an act of faith, and of the Reformed, that "Baptism has the necessity of precept, not that of a means" (Hodge, Syst. Theol., III, p.584), some of them stressing the performance of the duty enjoined as the chief thing about Baptism, makes of the Gospel ordinance a legal requirement and, in the final analysis, of the religion of grace a religion of works."<sup>20</sup>

Baptism, Scripturally, is all divine grace, unmixed with human merit. It is all Gospel, all God's work, not Law, which the baptized have succeeded in keeping. Luther says, "There is here no work done by us, but a treasure which He gives us, and which faith apprehends."<sup>21</sup>

Recognizing Spirit-created faith as the receiving means of the grace offered in baptism eliminates the Roman opus operatum doctrine. This sacrament does not confer the grace of God simply by being performed, but the Spirit must create the receiving faith.

Thus against those who make of baptism a work of man in fulfillment of a Law-requirement, we hold that the Spirit is the effective power in baptism, offering and

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20. Popular Symbolics, p.88.

21. Large Cat., Triglotta, 741,37.

bestowing God's Gospel grace; and against those who would make of baptism a mechanical operation, we hold the necessity of Spirit-given faith to receive the benefits of baptism.

By baptism the Holy Spirit can start Christian faith and life on its way. By this means the Holy Spirit makes of the lost and condemned sinner a new creature, holy in God's sight, a willing servant of God, and God's dear child.

Numerous passages of Scripture teach this part of the significance of baptism. We must examine some of them.

On the first Pentecost Peter preached a very powerful sermon so that those who heard him were cut to the heart and came to ask, "What shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2,38)

For our purposes, particularly the words "for the remission of sins" and "ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" are important. Peter urges these sinners to be baptized *εἰς ἀφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν*.<sup>22</sup> The preposition "eis" is much used in connection with baptism, and has been much discussed. "The basic significance of this preposition is direction; it may indicate the aim and purpose and also the end and result of an action."<sup>23</sup> Lenski would rather let its New Testament significance

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22. All Greek N.T. quotations are from Nestle's text unless otherwise indicated.

23. E. W. A. Koehler, C.T.M. Vol. XIV, No. 4, p.242.

be that of sphere. But in connection with this passage he says it is nothing more than a formal grammatical difference whether "eis" denotes sphere, or aim and purpose, or effect. "Sphere would mean that baptism is inside the same circle as remission; he who steps into this circle has both. Aim and purpose would mean that baptism intends to give remission; in him, then, who receives baptism aright this intention, aim, and purpose would be attained. The same is true regarding the idea of effect in εἰς. This preposition connects remission so closely with baptism that nobody has as yet been able to separate the two."<sup>24</sup>

All the sin and guilt of the sinner in his lost condition is forgiven in baptism and no longer charged against him. The guilt which separates the sinner from his holy God is removed as far as the east is from the west. The cause for damnation under the wrath of God is taken away in and by baptism.

The other very important thing which Peter says in this passage is, "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The question immediately arises whether this promised receiving of the Holy Ghost is to be connected with baptism, and if so, whether the Spirit is given at the time of baptism or sometime later.

Surely as these sinners asked Peter what they should do about their lost condition and Peter urged them to

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24. Lenski, sub Acts 2,38, p.107.

repent and be baptized, he was also promising them quick relief from their distress. They should receive forgiveness, and at the same time the gift of the Holy Spirit, and both of these in connection with, and at the time of baptism. This gift of the Holy Ghost is not to be understood as a gift which the Holy Ghost gives, but *Τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι* is better an appositional genitive, meaning that the gift is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in each baptized soul to cleanse and sanctify it before God. So understood, Peter's reply offers the necessary relief to the distressed sinners to whom he was preaching. With sins forgiven, and having the Holy Spirit, these sinners could stand justified and holy before God. What a necessary work for the beginning of Christian faith and life Peter ascribes to baptism in this verse!

Acts 22,16 - "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins."

These words of Ananias to Saul again connect baptism and the removal of sin. Saul had very definitely been an enemy of Christ and His Church. He had persecuted the followers of Christ with fear-instilling zeal. Yet now he is to be washed clean of his guilt and soul-damning filth. Thayer must not be permitted to spoil the verse with his remarks on ἀπολούω: "Whoever obtains remission of sins has his sins put, so to speak, out of God's sight, - is cleansed from them in the sight of God. Remission

"is (represented as) obtained by undergoing baptism."<sup>25</sup>  
Why the "so to speak"? Why the added "represented as"?  
Surely the ἀπόλυσαι is a real washing and cleansing as  
much as βάπτισαι is a real baptism. These are not pic-  
tures, or representations, in the sense that baptism  
only pictures the cleansing from sin. The cleansing of  
baptism is real.<sup>26</sup>

Paul, the former persecutor of the Church, saw in  
baptism the power of Christ to cleanse His Church from  
every spot and wrinkle that it might be holy and without  
blemish. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for  
it "that he might sanctify and cleanse it [better, that  
he might sanctify it, having cleansed<sup>27</sup> it] with the  
washing of water by the word." Eph. 5, 26.

Here baptism is spoken of as the instrument which  
Jesus uses to cleanse His Church. This is the same  
cleansing credited to baptism in passages such as Acts 2, 38  
and 22, 16, i.e. the cleansing from the filth and guilt of  
sin. This cleansing takes place τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος  
ἐν ᾧματι. Those words are Paul's definition of baptism  
and the one Luther put into the words, "Baptism is not  
simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in  
God's command and connected with God's Word." The water

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25. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, sub ἀπόλυσαι, p. 65.

26. Cf. Lenski, sub Acts: 22, 16, p. 910.

27. Expositor's Greek Testament points out that the  
cleansing need not be prior to the sanctifying, but  
simultaneous, and that καθαιρέσις expresses the way in  
which the sanctifying takes effect, rather than the time.

of baptism is always connected with the Word, the command of Christ to baptize, and the promise to forgive the sins of the believing baptized. Where water and Word are not connected, there is no true baptism, and no cleansing. But wherever there is true baptism, there is also the offer of forgiveness for the sinner; there is God's justifying grace. Koeberle writes, "If the Baptism of John had already pointed to the forgiveness of sins with prophetic symbolism [sic] (St. Mark 1,4), so the Baptism in the name of Jesus is the actual establishment by the Spirit of God of a new state of righteousness, the real pledge to the sinner of God's unconditional favor."<sup>28</sup>

Baptism then offers the sinner the very thing he needs in order to stand before God, namely justification, the forgiveness of sins.

Other passages dealing directly with baptism and its significance for the beginning of Christian faith and life teach that the baptized person shares in the work of Jesus Christ and is brought into communion with God.

Baptism is ever connected with Christ and His redeeming work. It cannot be separated from Him and still remain Christian baptism. "We must never separate Baptism from Christ; it exists only because Christ commanded it,

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28. A. Koeberle, The Quest for Holiness, p.63.

"and it is efficacious only because it rests on His vicarious atonement, by which He secured all the spiritual blessings that are offered in Baptism."<sup>29</sup>

In Rom. 6,3,<sup>7</sup> the Apostle shows how very closely baptism connects Christ and the Christian. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death."

That the connection is very close is indicated by the frequent use of the prepositions εἰς, ἐν, and ἐντὶ in this entire section (v.3-11). We are baptized εἰς Christ Jesus and εἰς His death. We have been planted together (συνεφύτευται γεγόραμεν) in the likeness of His death. (In baptism the believer shares in Christ's death; he enters into closest connection with Christ's redeeming work. In baptism the believer dies in and with Christ, and is henceforth delivered from the power and dominion, and authority of sin and death. He obtains all the benefits of Christ's death.)

This same thing Paul expresses in Col. 2,11-12. "In whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

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29. J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.489.

In this passage Paul is not referring to the mode of baptism when he says *συνταφείσθε αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισματὶ*,<sup>30</sup> but to its action and result. It connects the believer with Christ, with His death, and with His resurrection (*ἐν τῷ καὶ συνήγείσθητε*). When the sinner shares in Christ's work, sin loses its power over him. In fact, Paul says in v.11 that the body of flesh, the sins of the flesh, are put off in this circumcision made without hands, i.e., baptism. Thus the baptized person is cleansed from sin by being buried with Christ and raised again with Him in baptism.

The Apostle in this passage connects the effectiveness of baptism with faith in the baptized. Faith receives all the blessings which baptism offers. Some, including Luther,<sup>31</sup> have used this passage also to prove that baptism works faith. While it is true that baptism works faith,<sup>32</sup> it has been rather vigorously denied that it can be proved from this passage. Both Lenski and Expositor's Greek Testament insist that when Paul uses the word "faith" followed by a genitive, this genitive is either subjective, naming the person who believes, or objective, naming the person or object believed. Here it must be the latter. Lenski says, "We see no escape from this construction."<sup>33</sup>

30. Cf. Thayer, op. cit. sub *συνταφείσθε* and Expositor's Greek Testament on this verse, which gives this verse a typical meaning.

31. Luther translates, "durch den Glauben den Gott wirket", making the genitive *τῆς ἐρεχθείας* a genitive of cause.

32. Cf. discussion of Tit. 3,5-7. p.24.

33. Lenski, sub. v.12. Expositor's Gk. Test. agrees. Revised Standard Version translates, "faith in the working of God." Dr. J.T.Mueller accepts this interpretation. (St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism" C.T.M. XIX, No. 6,p.436).

This by no means changes the effectiveness of Baptism, but places the faith (which baptism creates, Tit. 3,5-7) on the solid foundation of all that God has done for the salvation of sinners. Thus baptism connects the believer with Christ, who died and rose again for all sinners.

When baptism brings the baptized into fellowship with Christ, it also connects him with the Father and the Holy Ghost. This is shown by the very words of institution, Matt. 28,19, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations [make disciples of all nations], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Here baptism is shown to be a means of making disciples.<sup>34</sup> It is not a mere rite, nor a symbol of a discipleship which already exists, but it brings the baptized into connection with the Triune God and the whole revealed way of salvation. In baptism the baptized is brought into communion with the Father, with His love and mercy, and readiness to adopt; with the Son and His redeeming, sin-overcoming work; with the Spirit who takes up His sanctifying dwelling in the heart. It is truly an intimate and saving fellowship which baptism works between the baptized and the Triune God.

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34. For a fine discussion of this verse cf. H. J. A. Bouman's essay, "Holy Baptism" in Proceedings of the Central District, 1943, p.21 ff.

The whole relation of the hostile sinner toward God is changed in and through baptism, so that instead of remaining an enemy of God, the baptized believer is made a child of God. This truth is taught in Gal. 3,26-27, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In this remarkable and beautiful passage the new and very close relationship between God and the baptized is again expressed. The Apostle had been teaching that the sinner is saved by faith in Jesus Christ, rather than by doing the deeds of the Law. The Old Testament people were indeed under the Law, but Paul says no man can really keep the Law, and, therefore, no man can be saved by the Law. The Law served as a school-master to bring sinners to Christ, so that, having seen their need for a Savior, they might be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ, God's Son, sinners are made sons of God, no longer under the guardianship of the Law. When then Paul says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ", and especially when he says this just after he has stated that faith in Jesus Christ makes them God's sons, he is surely saying that baptism is the means of establishing this new relationship. To "put on Christ" in baptism is justification.<sup>35</sup> "Baptism thus is

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<sup>35</sup>. Cf. Lenski on this verse. He quotes Is. 61,10 as proof.

"a means of grace by which we put on the garments of Christ's merits for our justification and salvation."<sup>36</sup>

When Paul here speaks of salvation by faith in Christ and connects it with baptism, he makes baptism the means of bringing that faith into being. But we have another important passage for that point:

Tit. 3,5-7, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

The Apostle here points out that the sinner's salvation is the work of God, not the work of man, and immediately names the means used by God --

διὰ λουτροῦ  
παλινγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου.

Although the expression "washing of regeneration" has been variously interpreted, it is assuredly a reference to baptism. Meyer says, "The expression τὸ λουτεῖον παλινγενεσίας has been very arbitrarily interpreted by some expositors, some taking λουτεῖον as a figurative name for the regeneratio itself, or for the praedicatio evangelii, or for the Holy Spirit, or for the abundant imparting of the Spirit. From Eph. 5,26 it is clear

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36. Dr. J. T. Mueller, "St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism", C.T.M. XIX, No. 6, p.430.

"that it can mean nothing else than Baptism; compare, too, Heb. 10:23; 1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 22:16."<sup>37</sup>

Paul calls baptism a washing *παιγιερεγίας* καὶ ἀνακαλυρώσεως. The genitives are descriptive, thus making baptism a washing which regenerates and renews. The "renewal" is parallel to the "regeneration". Dr. L. Fuerbringer has pointed out that the renewing spoken of here "is not to be understood in its later dogmatic sense of sanctification in the narrower sense -- the result of justification, but the renovatio is the same thing as regeneratio. The two can only be abstractly distinguished."<sup>38</sup> The Pulpit Commentary agrees, "This renewal is the work of the Holy Ghost in the new birth, when men are 'born again' of the Spirit (John 3:5). It is evidently parallel with the *παιγιερεγία*."<sup>39</sup>

The distinction between the two words is finely drawn, but it has been attempted. Some commentators on this verse refer these two words to one and the same action of baptism, but indicate that these words approach the action from different angles. So "regeneration" is viewed as a single, instantaneous act of kindling a new spiritual life, while "renewal" views this same bringing

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37. Meyer, Commentary, sub v.5, quoted by Dr. J. T. Mueller in C.T.M. XIX, No. 6, p.437.

38. L. Fuerbringer - Mimeo notes on Titus, p.27.

39. Pulpit Commentary, sub v.5, quoted by Dr. J. T. Mueller in C.T.M. Vol. XIX, No. 6, p.438.

to life with the added thought that it then continues and develops.<sup>40</sup> This really is sanctification in the narrower sense and is not contrary to Scripture, even though this particular verse may speak only of regeneration.

In this washing of regeneration and renewal the Holy Ghost is the active agent by whom the regeneration and renewal are effected. This passage makes baptism pure Gospel. In baptism God does all in mercy and love. There is no room in this passage for cooperating or saving merit on the part of the sinner.

Our passage has been well summarized thus: "St. Paul tells Titus that Baptism 'is the washing of regeneration', that by it the Holy Ghost renews us, that by it God saves us, that this is done by virtue of the abundant merits of Christ, our Savior, that Baptism bestows upon us Christ's justifying grace, that by Baptism we are made heirs, that is, God's children, that by Baptism we are blessed with the hope of heaven. (Titus 3:5-7)"<sup>41</sup>

Thus by baptism the Holy Ghost creates a new spiritual nature, which is alive unto God.<sup>42</sup> The old nature, the old Adam, still remains, but the new nature, God's man, is in baptism born of water and the Spirit. "Die heilige Taufe hat unsere Natur nicht geaendert, aber in diese unsere Natur ist ein neuer Mensch, ein neues Leben gesetzt, so dasz ein getaufter Christ ein Doppelmensch ist: den

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40. Cf. Kretzmann Pop. Commentary and Lenski on this verse

41. Arthur E. Neitzel, "The Sacraments". Essay in The Abiding Word, Vol. II, p. 386-7.

42. Cf. 2 Cor. 5,17.

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"ein Menschen hat er aus seiner fleischlichen Geburt, den andern aus der Wieder geburt. Nach dem einen gehoert er dem Teufel an, nach dem andern ist er Gottes Eigenthum geworden."<sup>43</sup>

When the Apostle teaches that by baptism the Holy Ghost regenerates and renews the spiritually dead sinner, he is teaching that the Holy Ghost through baptism gives the sinner the faith by which he appropriates to himself what baptism offers and works. The sinner receives the benefits of baptism by faith, and that receptive faith itself is wrought by the Spirit through baptism. Baptism is Gospel, and has the Gospel's regenerating power. Paul's term "washing of regeneration" shows us the faith-creating power of this sacrament; and when he says in the same section that this sacrament justifies and saves, he shows us the benefits and blessings which that faith receives. Dr. Mueller states the matter clearly:

"Holy Baptism does exactly what the preached or read or symbolized (crucifix, John 3:14) Gospel does: it offers us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and it works faith in us to accept the forgiveness which it offers. In other words, it has an offering power, and it has an operative power. When, for instance, God's Word says: 'Be baptized . . . for the remission of sins' (Acts 2:38), then it is clear to every believing Christian that Holy Baptism is not a mere outward ceremony, but a divine means of grace, which seriously offers us forgiveness of sins. Again, when the Word says: Holy Baptism is a 'washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost' (Tit. 3:5), then it is clear to every believing Christian that Holy

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43. Essay: "Die reine Lehre von der heiligen Taufe in ihrer Bedeutung und Wichtigkeit fuer den Glauben und das Leben der Christen" in Syn. Report, Sued, 1892, p.57.

"Baptism is a divine means of grace which works the very faith that accepts the forgiveness of sins, and through this faith, regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, the implanting into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and so forth."<sup>44</sup>

Since baptism has Spirit-given power to bring faith into being, it becomes unnecessary and (what is more important) unscriptural to say an infant must be baptized on the strength of another's faith or in view of its prospective faith, or to insist that faith must be present before baptism.<sup>45</sup> It is likewise unscriptural to say that baptism works regeneration without kindling faith.<sup>46</sup>

Scripture knows of no regeneration apart from faith, but regeneration and coming to faith are identical. Pieper says: "Auf Grund der Schrift ist festzuhalten, dass eine Wiedergeburt ohne Glauben an die durch Christum erworbene Vergebung der Sunden ein non-ens ist."<sup>47</sup> Such regeneration-without-faith idea must be rejected as a considerable leaning toward Romanism's opus operatum, which declares that God's grace is bestowed on the baptized without faith on the part of the baptized.

Faith is necessary to receive the benefits of baptism, but baptism has in itself Spirit-given regenerating power.)

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44. J. T. Mueller, "Holy Baptism", Essay in The Abiding Word, Vol. II, p. 405-6.

45. Cf. Popular Symbolics, p.91, where these views are ascribed to Roman and Eastern Catholics and Reformed groups.

46. E. F. Giese, "Regeneration by Baptism" in The Lutheran Quarterly, New Series, Vol. IX, p.390 ff., e.g. holds the child is adopted in baptism, but saving faith is awakened sometime later in life. Regeneration and saving faith need not fall together at the same moment, he says.

47. Cf. F. Pieper, Christliche Dogmatik, Vol. III, P.312.  
Cf. also Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.493.

Since baptism regenerates, it also gives entrance into the kingdom of God. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3,5) In this passage Jesus Himself, speaking to Nicodemus, not only shows the necessity of baptism (It was necessary to mention this to Nicodemus because of Pharisaic rejection of baptism - Luke 7,30), but also names baptism as the means of grace by which sinners may become God's people. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation, not only signifying entrance into the communion of saints, but working it. The Lutheran Church is right when it prays after a baptism, "We thank and praise Thee that Thou dost graciously preserve and extend Thy Church."<sup>48</sup> By means of baptism souls are added to the Una Sancta.<sup>49</sup>

The Scriptural doctrine of the significance of baptism for the beginning of Christian faith and life is clear. Baptism is an effectual means of grace, bringing Christian faith and spiritual life into being.

Reformed errors reject this blessed effect of baptism, and make of this sacrament nothing more than a mere symbol and outward sign of the regeneration allegedly effected by the immediate operation of the Spirit. Calvin writes of baptism:

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48. Liturgy and Agenda, C.P.H. St. Louis, 1921, p.322.  
49. 1 Cor. 12,13.

"He as truly and certainly performs these things (the benefits) internally on our souls as we see that our bodies are externally washed, immersed, and enclosed in water. For this analogy or similitude is a most certain rule of sacraments; that in corporeal things we contemplate spiritual things, just as if they were placed before our eyes, as it has pleased God to represent them to us by such figures: not that such blessings are bound or enclosed in the sacrament, or that it has the power to impart them to us; but only because it is a sign by which the Lord testifies His will, that He is determined to give us all these things: nor does it merely feed our eyes with a bare prospect of the symbols, but conducts us at the same time to the thing signified, and efficaciously accomplishes that which it represents."<sup>50</sup>

Other Reformed writers follow Calvin's thinking.

Shedd writes:

"The Sacrament of Baptism is the sign and seal of regeneration. It is emblematic and didactic of this doctrine. Baptism is not a means of regeneration, as the Lord's Supper is of sanctification. It does not confer the Holy Spirit as a regenerating Spirit, but is the authentic token that the Holy Spirit has been, or will be, conferred; that regeneration has been, or will be, effected."<sup>51</sup>

So also Lowrey: "We must understand this text [Tit. 3,5] to teach that salvation is by the cleansing process of regeneration -- by the agency of the Holy Ghost, of which baptism is an expressive emblem."<sup>52</sup>

Such view of baptism empties this sacrament of its real meaning. It takes God's saving grace out of it and makes the Spirit work without means.

The loud and lengthy cries of the symbol-minded Reformed do not, however, remove the effectual working of the Spirit from baptism. Baptism is not a mere sign

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50. Calvin, Inst., IV, 15, 14, quoted by J. L. Neve in A History of Christian Thought, Vol. I, p.280.

51. G.T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, Vol. II, p.574, quoted in Popular Symbolics, p.217.

52. Asbury Lowrey, Positive Theology, p.305.

that God works immediately what baptism promises, but it is a communicating means of grace used by the Holy Spirit, as the passages considered before show us.<sup>53</sup>

When we think of baptism as a means of grace by which God brings Christian faith and life into being, we are thinking chiefly of infant baptism. Infancy is the normal time for baptism among Christians.<sup>54</sup> Consequently the children of Christian parents are normally regenerated by means of baptism. "Innerhalb der begründeten Christlichen Kirche ist also das Normale und die Regel: die Wiedergeburt wird durch die Taufe gewirkt; sie ist recht eigentlich das Mittel der Wiedergeburt."<sup>55</sup> It is abnormal to grow up and then be baptized as an adult after regeneration by means of the preached Gospel.

Yet in the Church there have always been many who have been won for Christ as adults. These were converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit by means of the Gospel. They also are to be baptized, even though faith has already been kindled in them. Even for them baptism is no mere symbol of an already effected regeneration, but rather remains the washing of regeneration in which forgiveness of sins is offered and conveyed. It is the seal

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53. For the Scriptural and Lutheran answers to Reformed arguments on Baptism cf. the fine article "Die Grosse Kluft in der Lehre von der Taufe" by Dr. J. T. Mueller in C.T.M. Vol. V, Nos. 1 and 2. Also Syn. Report, Mittleren Districts, 1879, p.254.

54. Reasons for this are the usual Scriptural ones presented by Lutherans. a) Children need baptism, Ps. 51,5; John 3,5,6. b) They are included in the baptismal command, Matt. 28,19. c) Children can believe, Matt. 18,6. d) Baptism has replaced circumcision, Col. 2,11-12. e) No passage restricts baptism to adults.

55. F.W.Stellhorn(?), Essay, "Die heilige Taufe in ihrem Verhaeltnis zum Christlichen Leben", Syn. Report, Mittleren Districts, 1879, p.23.

of the promises of the Gospel. In baptism the Gospel is applied to the individual, thus very personally and emphatically assuring the baptized of the remission of his sins. Like a seal attached to a deed, it makes the baptized certain of what the promise offers and gives. The fact that the adult believer is already regenerated before his baptism causes no difficulty. Baptism confirms his faith and continuously offers him forgiveness for the sins he may yet commit.<sup>56</sup> Scripture gives us numerous examples of adult baptisms in which forgiveness is offered those already believing, e.g. Paul, Lydia, the jailer of Philippi, the eunuch. No adult is to neglect or despise this means of grace.

In summary, then, baptism is indeed significant for the very beginning of Christian faith and life. It offers forgiveness to the spiritually helpless sinner and cleanses him of his guilt. It gives the sinner all the benefits of Christ's redeeming work, His suffering and death. It makes the hostile sinner a child of God. The spiritually dead sinner is regenerated by means of baptism and given saving faith; he is made an active member of God's kingdom. Here is no mere symbol, but a beautiful means of grace by which the Holy Spirit calls Christian faith and life into being.

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56. Pieper, Christliche Dog. Vol. III, p.309, Footnote 1059, notes that the Gospel also repeatedly offers forgiveness and regeneration even to those who already believe. No one ought object if baptism does the same thing.

II. BAPTISM HAS POWER TO SUSTAIN CHRISTIAN  
FAITH AND LIFE, AND MAKE IT GROW.  
(SANCTIFICATION)

The effectiveness of baptism does not cease with regeneration, but is important also for sanctification. Its effect is not momentary and temporary, but lasts during the entire life of the baptized sinner.) In baptism regeneration and sanctification in its narrower sense are simultaneous and coordinated. They are separated only logically. As the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, He also gives the new creature power to live a holy life unto God. Yet sanctification is a result and natural fruit of regeneration. <sup>57</sup> That sequence never changes. Sanctification is possible only for the regenerate; but, on the other hand, there is no regeneration without resulting sanctification.

This sanctification, which has its beginning in baptism, may be viewed from both a negative and a positive side.

Negatively, the old Adam, the old evil nature with which the sinner is born, is to be put off. There is no successful compromising between the new man and the old nature. When the new nature is born through regenerating baptism the struggle begins, and it continues ceaselessly throughout the earthly life of the believer. The baptized believer indeed still sins, but baptism has power to free

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57. Matt. 7,17.

him from servitude to sin. Sin is no longer the ruling principle in his life, but is an evil which must be more and more overcome and from which he must more and more rid himself. That this is no easy task every believer knows. As a Christian he does not want to sin, but because of the weakness of his flesh he falls again and again. The baptized believer appreciates the feelings of Paul, who was painfully aware of this struggle, of the strength of sin's power over him, and of his own fleshly weakness.<sup>58</sup> He knows that in his earthly life he will never reach the perfection of godly living for which he strives.<sup>59</sup> No believer is happy in sin, but seeks forgiveness of the sins which he commits and tries to subdue and put off the evil nature. The believer can use his baptism to attain this end.

Each time the believer falls into sin he becomes contrite and repentant. He seeks and receives the forgiveness which God offers him in baptism. Thus by daily contrition and repentance and returning to God's gracious baptismal promises, the old evil nature is more and more overcome. ("The daily repentance of the Christian believer (poenitentia stantium) is nothing else than a constant penitent return to the covenant of grace which God has established with him in Baptism, or the continuous

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58. Cf. Rom. 7.

59. Cf. 1 John 1,8; Phil. 3,12.

"apprehension by faith of the gracious promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation offered and conveyed to him in this precious Sacrament."<sup>60</sup>

And Luther says, "If you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong."<sup>61</sup>

Several paragraphs later he says, "Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repent and practise what we began before, but abandoned."<sup>62</sup>

To return to baptism, penitently seeking forgiveness and renewed strength to overcome sin, is using baptism correctly. Again Luther: "This is the true use of Baptism among Christians, as signified by baptizing with water. Where this, therefore, is not practised, but the old man is left unbridled, so as to continually become stronger, that is not using Baptism, but striving against Baptism."<sup>63</sup>

The positive side of sanctification which is begun in baptism is the putting on of the new man. The new man is the new creature brought to life in regeneration; it is the new spiritual life which the Holy Spirit brings into being by means of baptism. The

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60. J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.496.  
61. Large Cat., Triglotta 751,75.  
62. Ibid., par. 79.  
63. Ibid., 749,68.

Spirit, given in baptism, leads the baptized person to walk in newness of life. Christian sanctification is Spirit-empowered.<sup>64</sup> As long as the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer He is at work making the Christian life function. He provides the knowledge, strength, patience, courage to fight sin and serve God. He sustains Christian faith and life when the battle becomes difficult. To the regenerated sinner, the Spirit now gives also the ability to cooperate in the battle against evil and in the striving for good.<sup>65</sup> He works in and with the believer in the matter of sanctification. To the good work which He began in baptism He gives support and growth. The work of the Spirit is necessary for continued sanctification, as it was necessary for regeneration. "Hat der Geist Gottes das neue Leben durch die Wiedergeburt in uns geschaffen, so laszt uns nun auch uns Seiner Leitung und Fuehrung hingeben und so das uns geschenkte Christliche Leben fortsetzen; denn ohne Seine Leitung ist das unmoeglich. Ebenso also, wie die Grundlage des christlichen Lebens vom Geiste Gottes herruehrt, ebenso auch der fernere Aufbau, die Fortfuehrung desselben. Wer nicht im Geist wandelt, nicht von dem Geist Gottes geleitet und gefuehrt wird,

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64. Cf. Rom. 8,5.

65. The Formula of Concord insists that this cooperation be correctly understood. "But this [that we cooperate] does not occur from our carnal natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion ... the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him, and that as soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God. But if this were understood thus, that the converted man cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the manner as when two horses together draw a wagon, this could in no way be conceded without prejudice to the divine truth."  
Triglotta 207.66.

"kann unmöglich christlich, Gott wohlgefuehlig leben."<sup>66</sup>

When in baptism the sinner is regenerated, he becomes God's child, eager to live a godly life, a life which is in accord with God's will. He wants to learn God's will, and then do it. He would serve as a good citizen of God's kingdom, which he entered in baptism. That service to God is part of his baptismal promise in which the devil and all his wicked works and ways are renounced.<sup>67</sup> The baptized believer recognizes it as a duty and a privilege X to live unto God. "Eine heiligere, bindendere Verpflichtung laeszt sich nicht denken, als eine solche, die in einem Bunde mit dem Allerhoechsten Gott selber eingegangen worden ist! -- Sie ist aber auch zugleich die allerseeligste. Keine seligere Pflicht kann es geben, keinen seligeren Beruf, kein seligeres Amt, als nach Gottes Willen und Wohlgefallen oder Christlich zu leben!"<sup>68</sup>

Baptism is a mighty motive and a mighty power for sanctified living. By constantly offering and bestowing forgiveness of sins and strength to live unto God, it helps Christian faith and life to grow and continue functioning. Thus baptism is important for the whole life of the believer.

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66. F. W. Stellhorn(?), "Die heilige Taufe in ihrem Verhaeltnisz zum Christlichen Leben", Syn. Report, Mittleren Districts, 1879, p.32-33.

67. If it is objected that this promise was made by sponsors without the consent of the baptized, we may answer that as soon as the baptized does not consent he is out of baptismal grace. A believer does not regret this promise, but even renews it in confirmation.

68. F. W. Stellhorn, op.cit., p.39.

Since, however, the believer, in spite of the Spirit-born new man within him, still has his old fleshly and sinful nature to contend with, so that he daily falls into sin, he is in need of repeated admonition and encouragement. Baptism, being a means of regeneration, and a motive and a power for sanctification, can be used for evangelical admonition and encouragement to godly living. The sinner can be reminded of his baptism, of his baptismal vow to renounce the devil and his evil ways. When he has fallen, the sinner is to be admonished and encouraged to repent. It may be sufficient simply to refer him to his baptism in which God offers him forgiveness and by which God has made him His dear child. Surely the believer who has sinned must be invited to return to God's promise of forgiveness made in baptism, and then to return also to God's service.)

Even when baptism is used for admonition it must be remembered that it is Gospel, not Law. Even though a sinning believer may need the Law applied to him, baptism should not be so used. It is ever Gospel and a means of grace.

Of all the writers of Scripture, the Apostle Paul teaches us most and best concerning the practical use of baptism for sanctification. He points to it for admonition, encouragement, comfort. We see from some of the

passages themselves how remarkably Paul uses the doctrine of baptism to further Christian faith and life.

Rom. 6, 3-6 - "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

This passage is very prominent in Paul's teaching concerning sanctification. It was noted before<sup>69</sup> that in this passage Paul teaches that by baptism the believer shares in Christ's death and in His redeeming work, and is thus delivered from the power and dominion of sin. In the context Paul teaches that the sinner is saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He says that grace abounded much more than sin(5,20). That does not mean, however, that the believer is free to sin as he pleases just because God's grace is abundant (6,1). The believer is dead to sin; lives no longer in it(6,2); but he is alive unto God(6,11), and is to serve God with holy works.(6,22)

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69. Cf. p.17.

Into this setting of exhortation to godly living the Apostle inserts his doctrine of baptism. Baptism provides the motive and the power for overcoming sin and living unto God. By the grace of God Christ died for sinners, bearing their sin, paying their penalty. Now Christ's work has become beneficial to these sinners through baptism, for by means of this sacrament they were joined to Christ and received the merits which He procured for all mankind by His death. In baptism they have died with Christ. Sin has lost its hold on them.

Paul's argument continues. If in baptism sinners die with Christ, and are buried with Him, then they also rise with Him, not to serve sin further (they are dead to that), but to serve God, to live a new life. Baptism gives them the power and the motive to do so. Luther uses verse four of our passage as the basis of his answer to his catechism question, "What does such baptizing with water signify?" He says, "It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."<sup>70</sup> When Luther uses the word "signify", he is not detracting from what Paul says. Pieper remarks, "Nach Luther wirkt

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70. Luther, *Small Catechism*, Triglotta, p.551.

"die Taufe selbst was sie bedeutet, naemlich die Ersaeufung des alten Menschen und das Herauskommen des neuen. Luther sagt von der Taufe, dasz sie 'solch neues Leben nicht allein deutet, sondern auch wirket, anhebt und treibt; deendarin' (in der Taufe) 'wird gegeben Gnade, Geist und Kraft, den alten Menschen zu unterdruecken, dasz der neue hervorkomme und stark werde'.<sup>71</sup>

When Paul is left to mean what he says (as Luther insisted, and we with him) we learn that baptism not only has power to bestow the merits of Christ's work on the believer, but that it also bestows grace for sanctified living. That is surely encouraging to the believer who wants to live unto God; and it is an admonishing thought to the baptized person who has not used this grace, but has permitted the old Adam to gain the upper hand.

1 Cor. 6,11: -"And such were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Brief as this reference to baptism is, it still contains great comfort and a powerful admonition. Conditions in the Corinthian congregation were not good. Paul sharply calls attention to the sins found there.

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71. F. Pieper, Christliche Dogmatik, III, p.317. Quotation from Luther may be found in Large Catechism, Triglotta, 750.

e.g., incest (5,1), lack of church discipline (5,2), lawsuits (6,6-7), etc. The charge of being guilty of great sin is leveled directly against them when Paul says, "And such were some of you".

Paul does not leave them helpless and condemned. He reminds them that they were washed, and made holy, and declared justified. The Apostle does not say, "Ye were baptized", but he calls it a washing. Lenski says, "Paul, of course, speaks about Baptism, but when he uses ἀπολούειν he at once names the effect of Baptism, the spiritual washing away of all sin and guilt, the cleansing by pardon and justification."<sup>72</sup> They have the comfort of forgiveness.

Yet the reference to baptism is also effective admonition. God had been merciful, gracious, and good to them. He had made them Christians. He had forgiven their sins through baptism. Yet now they were living such utterly sinful lives, not at all in accord with the Word and will of God who loved them and had made them holy through baptism. It must not remain so. Sin must not be tolerated. How could they go on in sin, after having known the love and grace of God?

1 Cor. 12,13 - "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles [Greeks] , whether we be bond or free."

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72. Lenski, sub 1 Cor. 6,11, p.255.

Our chapter deals with the unity of the holy Christian Church. All believers are members of the Una Sancta through faith in Jesus Christ. But in this great unity there is also variety and diversity. Not all believers in Christ have the same gifts, talents, and abilities, yet each is important in his own way and in his own place. In the Corinthian congregation these differences evidently had caused difficulty. Some were envious of others. In unchristian dissatisfaction, some wanted the gifts and talents of others. Sinful pride made them unwilling to work together for the welfare of the Church. This unhappy lack of sanctified living called for admonition from Paul. As part of his admonition the Apostle refers again to baptism. He shows the wonderful unity which baptism effects. Differences in national background, differences in social position, differing gifts and talents, and the like, make no difference to the Holy Spirit. By baptism He brings all into the great communion of saints, the Church, the body of Christ. In this body there must be no sinful envying the gifts of others, but a readiness to work together to God's glory and the good of the Church, just as feet, arms, eyes, ears, and all organs of the human body, though they differ greatly, cooperate for the welfare of the entire body.

At the beginning of this letter Paul had also referred to baptism in a similar connection.<sup>73</sup> The

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73. 1 Cor. 1,11-17.

Corinthian believers were to see the folly of the contentions found among them. Some had said they followed Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas, others Christ. What foolishness! for all taught the same thing; all preached salvation by faith in Christ; all baptized in His name. Paul and Apollos and Cephas were all followers of Christ. The Corinthians must put aside their silly divisions and be truly united in the faith in which they were baptized.

From these two passages, then, we can learn a practical application of baptism. Baptism has regenerating power to make the sinner a Christian, a member of Christ's Church. Let each Christian then live in love and unity with his fellow-Christians and all together work for the welfare of the Church to the glory of God.

Gal. 3,26-27 - "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

This passage was discussed before in connection with regeneration,<sup>74</sup> where it was mentioned that to "put on Christ" is justification. Baptism is a means of regeneration and justification, according to this passage; it changes the hostile sinner into a child of God. The believer is saved by God's grace for Christ's sake through faith which is worked in him by means of baptism.

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74. Cf. p.20.

But to "put on Christ" also means to walk in holiness. In this connection Luther says, "To put on Christ may be understood in two ways, according to the Law and according to the Gospel. According to the Law, as in Rom. 13:14: 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ', . . . means to follow the example of Christ. To put on Christ according to the Gospel means to clothe oneself with the righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and spirit of Christ."<sup>75</sup> Paul expects a holy life in believers, even though in our passage he warns against the false doctrine of salvation by works.<sup>76</sup> Christ's power for sanctified living, as well as His merit, is put on in baptism. What comfort and encouragement for the baptized!

Eph. 4,5 - "One Lord, one faith, one baptism". This passage might have been mentioned along with 1 Cor. 12,13 and 1 Cor. 1,13, for the Apostle here again speaks of baptism in connection with the unity of the Church, as is made clear from verse 3. The Apostle begs the Ephesians to lead a godly life in patience and humility, ever being "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."<sup>77</sup> As motivation for such sanctified living he mentions points of unity already in the Church. Among them is "one baptism". Baptism is to be used to preserve the unity.

"Baptism admonishes them to be true to the one Lord and one faith, but it exhorts them also to be eager to preserve the oneness which the Holy Ghost has established

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75. A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians by Martin Luther, translated and abridged by Theo. Graebner. Quoted by Dr. J. T. Mueller in "St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism", C.T.M., XIX, No. 6, p.429.

76. Cf. Gal. 3, 1.3. Arlo M. Mueller correctly writes on this passage, "Here the Apostle employs it [the doctrine of baptism] in the defense of the central article of the Christian faith--justification by faith." The Doctrine of Holy Baptism in the Pauline Epistles, p.25.

77. Revised Standard Version translation of v.3.

"through the washing of regeneration, Holy Baptism thus has a far-reaching significance. It is of sublime importance; for as Christians have been made one in Christ by Holy Baptism, so also they should remain one in Him by applying the power of their Baptism. If they do this, then all false doctrine, all wrangling, all envy and strife must cease. There will be peace and love."<sup>78</sup>

Again then Paul shows the sanctifying power of baptism.

Eph. 5, 25-27 - "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

At first thought it may seem to be an unusual use of baptism, indeed, to speak of it in connection with marriage and the home, and to use it in an admonition to husbands to love their wives. That is what Paul does in this passage. He gives husbands the example of Christ's love for the Church, and urges them so to love their wives. Christ's love for the Church was self-sacrificing. He gave His own life that the Church might be cleansed of all sin. By means of baptism the cleansing won by Christ is offered and given to the Church.<sup>79</sup> Now Paul applies that to husbands as a ground for sanctification. Dr. Mueller sums it up, "If Christ has so greatly loved us that He has

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78. J. T. Mueller, "St. Paul's Usus Practicus of Holy Baptism", C.T.M. XIX, No. 6, p.432-3.

79. Cf. p.15. It was there noted that the words "washing of water by the word" are a definition of baptism. We must not permit the phrase to be split into two ideas, 1) washing of water, and 2) the Word, so as to permit the interpretation that the cleansing is done by the Word and pictured or symbolized by the washing. Some find difficulty here because they do that. (Expositor's Gk. Test. lists some of these difficulties.) The "washing of water by the Word" is one concept, viz., baptism.

"given Himself for us, and if He loved us so dearly that He has sanctified and cleansed us with the washing of water by the Word, then surely we who are Christ's disciples must love one another and help one another in the home as co-heirs of everlasting life."<sup>80</sup> This is evangelical admonition to sanctified living.

Col. 2,11-12 - "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

Again the Apostle discusses the doctrine of baptism by way of admonition. He warns against false prophets (v.8), and urges steadfastness in faith. He reminds the Colossians that by baptism they have been cleansed of sin<sup>81</sup> and have been given power to live unto God. They are to let no heretic take that blessing and that power from them.

Tit. 3,5-7 - "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

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80. J. T. Mueller, essay "Holy Baptism" in The Abiding Word Vol. II, p.417.

81. Cf. p.17f.

The words are addressed to Titus, the young minister, who was laboring in the difficult field in Crete. Paul encourages him to teach the people to live Christian lives<sup>82</sup> out of love to God, even as he (Paul) and Titus were now doing. A man who has been regenerated by the grace of God through baptism must surely apply himself thereafter to godly living. Sanctification must follow regeneration. Therefore, Paul says: "I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds."<sup>83</sup> But Titus is not to let himself become involved in all kinds of controversies.<sup>84</sup> He is to teach fundamentals, of which the glorious doctrine of baptism is one.<sup>85</sup>

From the foregoing passages we see how in various situations the Apostle Paul repeatedly applied the doctrine of baptism to strengthen Christian faith and life. Clearly the Apostle teaches that baptism is a strong motive for sanctification. Those who have been baptized, those in whom spiritual life has been born through the regenerating power of baptism, those whose sins have been forgiven through God's grace which is bestowed in baptism, those who have received the merits of Christ's redeeming work, those who by baptism have been received into God's kingdom of grace, those in whose hearts the Holy Spirit

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82. Cf. Tit. 3,1-2.

83. Revised Standard Version translation of v.8.

84. Cf. v.9.

85. Cf. p.21f. for a discussion of the doctrine of baptism in this verse.

has come to dwell--surely they have reason to be eager to show gratitude to God by holy living. No higher motive is thinkable.

But Paul teaches that baptism is even more than a motive for sanctification. It gives the baptized person the power and ability to live a sanctified life. The new spiritual life is brought into being by baptism and arises to walk before God in holiness and purity according to God's will.

As the Christian goes on his way of sanctified living there may from time to time come sorrows and troubles to disturb him. They may come as a result of lapses into sin, but always the baptized believer can return to God's promises given in baptism and be assured of grace and forgiveness. There is the comfort of knowing that God still loves him, for he is God's child, made so in baptism. Thus the believer may use his baptism for comfort. Luther says, "Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."<sup>86</sup>)

The Romanists remove this blessed comfort from baptism when they limit the saving efficacy of baptism by teaching

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86. Large Catechism, Triglotta, 743,44. A very similar statement is found in his "A Treatise on Baptism", Holman Ed. Vol. I, p.63.

that it forgives only original sin and sins committed prior to baptism.<sup>87</sup>

The Reformed also remove this enduring comfort by their doctrine that baptism is not a means of grace, but simply a symbol of the work of the Spirit done directly in the heart.<sup>88</sup>

God may permit sorrows and trouble for the purpose of testing and trying the faith of His children. Where He does so, He promises to provide the necessary strength to bear the trial.<sup>89</sup> Baptism is one of God's means for giving such needed strength. The believer may ever remember God's covenant and promise to help His children. Peter refers to baptism to comfort suffering believers when he says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 3,21) Christians may be called upon to suffer for the Lord's sake, and for righteousness's sake. They must not despair. Christ suffered innocently and was put to death, yet obtained the victory over all evil. Noah was also delivered from sinful men by the water of the deluge. So also those suffering for righteousness' sake are saved by means of baptism. That is true comfort.

Thus from God's own Word it is clear that baptism has power to sustain the Christian faith and life which it brings into being, and not only to sustain it, but to make it grow.

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87. Cf. Popular Symbolics, p.87.  
88. Cf. ibid. p.88.  
89. Cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 10,13 and Paul's own case 2 Cor. 12.9.

III. BAPTISM HAS PROMISE TO BRING CHRISTIAN  
FAITH AND LIFE ON EARTH TO A HAPPY END,  
AND ASSURES A BLESSED ENTRANCE INTO  
HEAVEN (GLORIFICATION)

As the doctrine of baptism is significant for regeneration and sanctification, so it is significant for the believer's glorification. As the end of the believer's earthly life draws near, the promises which God gave him in baptism give great hope and comfort and courage. Satan may use that last opportunity for violent attack against the Christian in order to separate him forever from God His Savior. The devil may tempt the believer to despair by reminding him that he has been a great sinner, that he has often failed to live according to God's will. Indeed, every Christian must complain about his life as did Paul, and for the same reason<sup>90</sup>-- he still sins much even though he is a Christian. But when the attacks of the devil come, even in the Christian's dying moments, the promises of baptism give the needed security and defense, for the Lord offers eternal salvation to all who are baptized. Jesus promises, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16,16) There is no question about the meaning of *σωθήσεται* in this verse. It is complete and eternal deliverance from death and damnation. This is emphasized by the fact that the opposite is stated at once, "but he that believeth not shall be damned." Lenski says, "In *σωθήσεται* lies both the idea of rescue and deliverance from

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90. Cf. Rom. 7,14-24.

"the mortal danger of death and judgment (destruction,  $\alpha\pi\omega\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$ ), and the placing into a state of blessed security (life eternal) ...The verb and its cognate terms form one of the greatest, most distinctive, and wonderful concepts of the Scriptures."<sup>91</sup> So great is this promise connected with baptism that the believer may long for its complete fulfillment long before his dying hour is near.

The glorious hope of eternal salvation through baptism is either expressed or implied by all the passages which deal with baptism.

Peter implied salvation when he urged baptism for the purpose of receiving forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2,38) When sin is forgiven and the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart, the Christian is of necessity an heir of heaven and salvation. Nothing else is possible.

Peter expressed salvation by means of baptism in 1 Pet. 3,21, where he says, "baptism doth also now save us". As the Christians to whom Peter wrote endured severe suffering for the Lord's sake, they had the assurance from their baptism that the risen, almighty Lord would not forsake them, but preserve them unto eternal life. The Christian's baptism is far more than an outward washing. Let the devil attack, let him cause the believer to suffer until death, let him tempt to despair

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91. Lenski, sub v.16.

by reminding the Christian that he has sinned. The baptized believer has a good conscience, for in baptism he has received the forgiveness which Christ won for him. He is saved already, and only awaits entrance into the glories of heaven where Christ is gone.

We also take an example from the Epistles of Paul to show that he also taught that baptism assures entrance into heaven. In Tit. 3, 5-7 Paul says God "saved us" by means of baptism, so that being justified by God's grace "we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life".

Paul also connects the doctrine of baptism with a discussion of the resurrection of the body. In 1 Cor. 15, 29 he writes, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" The ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν in this verse causes some difficulty, especially if it is understood to mean "in behalf of the dead".<sup>92</sup> The passage is not to be corrupted into the unscriptural teaching that a living person may be baptized so that the benefit of baptism is credited to one/who is dead. That would be directly opposed to all passages in which Paul, and other writers of Scripture, teach the necessity of personal faith.<sup>93</sup> Yet some think that Paul in this verse is referring to such heretical practise.<sup>94</sup> But if Paul is

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92. Revised Standard Version so translates it.

93. Cf. e.g. Hab. 2, 4; Gal. 3, 6-7; Acts 16, 31.

94. Expositor's Greek Testament, sub 1 Cor. 15, 29, lists some who hold this, but itself strongly rejects the idea.

speaking of such practise, then he seems to speak of it with approval, and says nothing to correct it. No, Paul emphatically teaches the necessity of personal faith. It cannot be supposed that he forgot it here. Furthermore the Expositor's Greek Testament points out that such heresy came into use much later among certain groups.<sup>95</sup> We must, therefore, seek another interpretation.

The word  $\nu\pi\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon$  may have a local sense, meaning "over". The thought is that some believers were baptized over the graves of the dead to emphasize their faith in the resurrection of the body.

Lenski gives the phrase the acceptable meaning "with a view to the dead". In this sense  $\nu\pi\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon$  indicates the motive for the reception of baptism, "a duty which  $\nu\pi\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon$  frequently performs in classical as well as in New Testament Greek, for instance in Rom. 15,8."<sup>96</sup> Some of the believers had died in the hope of the resurrection. "Their example, i.e. their Baptism and their godly life and final death in this sure hope, furnishes the motive that prompts the living also to desire and to receive Baptism for the same blessed purpose."<sup>97</sup>

These living believers then were baptized in the hope of the resurrection unto eternal life. Regardless of what

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95. Ibid.

96. Lenski, sub v.29. Thayer lists quite a number of passages where the word is used to indicate "impelling or moving cause". Cf. Lexicon, sub  $\nu\pi\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon$  1.4. Expositor's Greek Testament, accepts much the same interpretation as Lenski.

97. Lenski, ibid.

might happen to them in this world, they would enter glory. Such understanding of the passage is in keeping with the doctrine of baptism found in other Scripture passages which have been discussed.

The glorious promise of heaven God has put into baptism. When Luther asks, "What does baptism give or profit?" he answers, "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."<sup>98</sup> This summarizes the Scriptural teaching beyond our improving.

The believer need have no fear that the promises of baptism will not be kept. God's promises are sure. Even though the believer often breaks his part of the covenant made with God, God remains true. "Auf Gottes Seite steht dieser Gnadenbund ewig fest, trotz unserer vielfachen Untreue und Bundbruechigkeit. Christi Verdienst deckt eben alle Unvollkommenheit auf unserer Seite zu, ja selbst den gaenzlichen Abfall von dem Taufbunde, wenn dieser nur nicht ein bis zum Ende dauernder ist, d.h., wenn wir nur buszfertig wieder zum Taufbunde zurueckkehren. Dann werden wir auch durch einen seligen Tod die ewige Seligkeit, und damit einen - oder vielmehr den - seligen Ausgang unseres christlichen

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98. Small Catechism, Triglotta 551,6. Similarly in the Large Cat., Triglotta, 743,44, he says, "Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."

"Lebens, oder dessen Vollendung, aus Gnaden erlangen."<sup>99</sup>

The certainty of God's promises is given expression in the Scriptures.<sup>100</sup> Such certainty applies also to the promises of salvation made by God in baptism.

The promises are there for all to believe. The baptized believer is indeed richly blessed, for in baptism the promise of salvation has become a very personal possession. It has been applied to him individually. By those who through faith have accepted the benefits and promises of baptism, the end of earthly life may be awaited joyfully.

As it is true that these blessings are accepted by faith, so it is likewise true that they are rejected by unbelief. Even if the sinner has been baptized, the benefits of his baptism will be lost, as far as he is concerned, if he returns to and remains in unbelief. Lenski remarks, "If a disbeliever does receive Baptism, it will not save him, because by his unbelief he refuses to accept the salvation offered him in the Sacrament."<sup>101</sup>

God forces no one to be saved, but states the awful truth, "He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16,16) Thus for his eternal welfare God encourages the believer to cling to his baptism to the end of his earthly life.

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99. F. W. Stellhorn(?) "Die heilige Taufe in ihrem Verhaeltnisz zum christlichen Leben", essay in Syn. Report, Mittleren Districts, 1879, p.56.

100. Cf. 2 Tim. 2,13; 2 Thess. 3,3; Is. 54,10; 2 Cor. 1,20.

101. Lenski, sub Mark 16,16.

When the believer enters into eternal glory the baptismal covenant is completely fulfilled. All the promises given the baptized believer have then been kept. All that remains is the resurrection of the body on the Last Day, after which the believer, body and soul, is forever with the Lord.<sup>102</sup> "So then", Luther says, "the life of a Christian, from baptism to the grave, is nothing else than the beginning of a blessed death, for at the Last Day God will make him altogether new."<sup>103</sup>

Then baptism's glorious work is ended.

What great significance baptism has, then, for the believer! From the beginning of Christian faith and life to its consummation this God-given sacrament is effective. We can do no better in summary than to quote Luther. "Thus it appears what a great, excellent thing Baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains ever efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory."<sup>104</sup>

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102. Cf. John 5,28-29; John 6,40.

103. "A Treatise on Baptism" Holman Ed. Vol. I, p.58.

104. Large Cat., Triglotta 751,83.

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