



# Baptism

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## THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

### Baptism

The teaching of Baptism has caused great debate and division in the Christian Church. Christian denominations teach a variety of things about Baptism. Here is a brief summary of what some of the major Christian denominations teach about Baptism:

- > *Baptists*: Baptism is a divine ordinance, a symbolic ritual, a sign of having already been saved, but not necessary for salvation.
- > *Orthodox*: Baptism is necessary because it confers forgiveness for both native sinfulness and actual transgressions.
- > *Episcopal*: Baptism is necessary to salvation because it conveys spiritual rebirth.
- > *Lutherans*: Baptism is how God miraculously delivers a person from sin, death, and the devil; gives new life; and brings one into Christ's kingdom forever.
- > *Reformed*: Baptism is an ordinance, a symbolic ritual, and a seal of the adult believer's present faith.
- > *Catholic*: Baptism is necessary for the infusion of the sanctifying power called grace that starts one on the path to salvation.

(“Good News” Magazine, Issue 3, pages 18-19)

To come to a Biblical understanding of the meaning of Baptism it is important that we carefully study what the Bible teaches about Baptism.

given the church the authority to lock the gates of heaven to sinners who refuse to confess his or her sins. If a baptized believer becomes impenitent then heaven is to be locked to them. If this actually happens and that person dies then they will be lost forever. If they repent then they are received into the kingdom of heaven.

Many Christians reject this because they say only God can look into the heart of a person. This is true, however we can also see a sinner who is impenitent and refuses to confess his or her sin. The church is not to take sin lightly. To bind sin, this portion of the Office of the Keys, is to be taken seriously by all Christians.

The second word of importance is “loosed.” This key opens the door of heaven. This key is used to tell sinners who confess his or her sins that they are forgiven of their sins for the sake of Jesus Christ. One way this is done is in the general absolution during worship. The pastor pronounces the forgiveness of sins for all penitent sinners. The words of the pastor are to be believed as if these words came personally from Jesus.

As baptized Christians we are to confess our sins before God and when we sin against a neighbor, we confess our sins to him or her. This is why in Lutheran Worship services the congregation publicly confesses their sins to God together and to one another. We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God.

Once the baptized Christian confesses his or her sins they are to receive the words of Absolution, or hear the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins. In John's Gospel in chapter 20 he records the words of Jesus instructing the disciples on their new mission. John records Jesus saying: **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them (John 20:22b-23a)."** The disciples were to go out and proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Not only were they to proclaim forgiveness they were to personally apply the forgiveness of sins to those who confess their sins.

Historically Christians have called this authority the "Office of the Keys." The "Office of the Keys" is a special God-given way of applying the Gospel to individuals. Martin Luther writes the following about absolution: "God is surpassingly rich in His grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin (the peculiar function of the Gospel ) is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys; and finally, through mutual conversation and consolation of brethren (Luther's Small Catechism, page 225)."

It's important that we study this Biblically. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus says: **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."** Jesus says that he will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the disciples. Jesus also said to his disciples, as recorded in John 20:23, that whatever sins they forgive are forgiven. It is clear that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are given to Jesus' church. Jesus has given the church the authority to forgive sins on earth.

In Matthew 19:16 there are two words that are the key to understanding what Jesus is saying. The first word is "bind." This word means to lock. Therefore the meaning of this is that Jesus has

## The Fall into Sin

After the ministry of Jesus his life, death, bodily resurrection and his ascension, St. Paul begins his apostolic ministry. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes the following: **"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned . . . (Romans 5:12)"** According to Paul sin was not part of God's good creation. Sin entered into the world through 'one man'. That person was Adam.

In Genesis 2:15-17 God told Adam not to eat of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden or he would die. Adam ate of the fruit along with his wife Eve. At that point man had disobeyed God and sinned. The consequence of that sin would be death. At this point the process of death began for man, male and female, for all of God's good creation and the entire universe. All that God had created **"very good"** has been affected because of sin.

In Romans 5 Paul also writes:

- **"For if many died through one man's trespass . . . (Romans 5:15b)"**
- **"For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation . . .(Romans 5:16b)"**
- **"For if, because of one man's trespass, death resigned through that one man . . .(Romans 5:17a)"**
- **"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners . . .(Romans 5:19a)"**

St. Paul not only says that man has been affected by sin he also states that the entire creation has been affected by the destructive consequences of sin. Paul writes the following in Romans 8:18-23:

**"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the**

**children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we our selves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”**

Since the fall into sin all of God’s creation is in the process of dying and death. Sin has destroyed all of God’s good creation.

### **Genesis 3 - 11**

A brief review of Genesis 3 - 11 is important as we study Baptism. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve fall into sin. In Genesis 4 Cain kills his brother Abel because God did not accept Cain’s offering. In Genesis 6 sin involves the **“Sons of God”** and the **“daughters of man.”** Whatever this sin truly was God became so angry at the sin of man. The writer of Genesis writes:

**“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:5-8).”**

God was so angry because of man’s sin that he decided to destroy all that he created and yet at the same time acted in grace to save Noah and his family. What comes next is the account of God causing his entire creation to come under the waters of the flood. God saved Noah and each kind of the animals that he created.

After the flood God’s creation including the human race continued to multiply. However, man was still sinful and the entire creation of God was still under the curse of man’s original sin. In Genesis 11 the account of the Tower of Babel occurs and at the end of Genesis 11 man and all of God’s creation is still under the

### **Fourth**

#### **What Does Such Baptizing With Water Indicate?**

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

#### **Where is This Written?**

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:4)

### **Confession and Absolution**

As baptized Christians declared righteous in the eyes of God we still are to confess our sins before God and others. The Psalmist writes the following: **“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up iniquity; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:5).**” In confession we are to acknowledge our sinfulness. Confession of sins is to come from the heart of the believer.

Another Psalmist writes: **“Have mercy on me O God according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment (Psalm 51:1-4).**” Many believe King David wrote this Psalm after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. This is a personal lament from King David, if he wrote this Psalm, after his great sin. Not only did he commit adultery he also ordered the murder of Bathsheba’s husband.

## Second

### What Benefits Does Baptism Give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

### Which Are These Words And Promises of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

## Third

### How Can Water Do Such Great Things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying." (Titus 3:5-8)

curse of sin and God now begins his plan to redeem sinful humanity and restore his good creation. (See Unit 3 - 10 for how God redeemed sinful humanity.)

### 1 Peter 3:20-21

The account of Noah and the flood has been debated for years. Many today deny that the worldwide flood at the time of Noah ever happened. Debating the flood is out of the scope of this study. However, St. Peter's uses the worldwide flood at the time of Noah to support Holy Baptism. We believe that God inspires the Scriptures and therefore it is 100% reliable and truthful. According to Peter, who was inspired by God, the flood actually occurred and supports the teaching of Baptism.

Peter in his first letter writes the following:

**"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water (1 Peter 3:18-20)."**

Peter is clear that only Jesus can atone for the sins of the world. The bodily resurrection of Jesus assures us that God the Father has declared the sins of the world forgiven. Peter goes on to say that Jesus descended into hell to proclaim to those who died at the time of the flood his victory over death and all the forces of evil. Jesus does not offer those in hell a second chance. Jesus is there to proclaim the victory of God over sin, death and the devil.

The flood is a figure of Holy Baptism. When Noah and his family were in the Ark they were saved from judgment of God. The world was 'cleansed' from the curse of sin through the waters of the flood. For Peter baptism 'cleanses' sinful men and women and saves them from eternal death. Martin Luther writes: "Now baptism is by far a greater flood than was that of Noah. Baptism drowns all sorts of men throughout the world, from the birth of

Christ even till the Day of Judgment. Noah's flood was a flood of wrath, that is a flood of grace." (Luther's Works, American Edition 35:32)

### **John 3:1-8**

**Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:1-8)**

During the ministry of Jesus a Pharisee named Nicodemus approached Jesus at night to discuss what Jesus was doing. Nicodemus knew by the works that Jesus was doing he was from God. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night because he was afraid of what the other Jewish Council members would say. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person cannot be born of God unless he or she is born again. The Jews believed, as did Nicodemus, that person was a child of God if he or she was born through a Jewish mother. Jesus rejects this view and says that all are to be born again or they will never see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus is totally confused at what Jesus is saying. Many today are confused by what Jesus is teaching about being born again.

Jesus says, "**Unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**" The Lutheran Study Bible states the following: The preposition 'of' governs both nouns.

**circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."** Baptism gives new life for all.

When God rescued Israel from Egypt he saved them from the Egyptian army through water. God parted the Red Sea and Israel escaped, but the Egyptian army was destroyed by water (Exodus 14). Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians writes the following about crossing the Red Sea: "**For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).**" As God delivered Israel through water, God also delivers sinners through the waters of baptism.

### **Martin Luther's Explanation of Baptism**

#### **First**

#### What Is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.

#### Which is that word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

when he says: **“but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:6).”** Jesus says that little ones can believe in him.

Another argument made is that a person, child, must first understand and make a personal commitment to Jesus before Baptism. However, Paul says that the mind of sinful man is hostile to God. He writes: **“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot (Romans 8:7).”** Since there is no age limit then this is true for adults and children, including infants. All people are born enemies of God and baptism is what gives new life. Because of our sinful nature we are born enemies of God and slaves to sin. In Baptism our sinful nature has been crucified with Jesus Christ. Paul writes: **“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6).”**

One final argument against infant baptism is that baptism only symbolizes the washing away of sin. However, according to Paul baptism produces a new life in the baptized. Read and study Romans 6:3-5.

### **Scriptural Importance of Baptism**

Water has always played an important role according to God. In Genesis 6 - 9 we read of the devastation of the flood. In 1 Peter 3:20-21 the New Testament speaks of the flood in connection with baptism (see above). The flood shows God bringing his punishment on sinful humanity who corrupted his very good creation. Peter speaks of the blessing of salvation that God provided to Noah and his family because the Ark lifted them up in water. God saved Noah and his family and gave them new life.

In Genesis 17 God instituted circumcision as the sign of the covenant for all the male children of the Israelites. Paul compares baptism to circumcision in Colossians 2:11-12. Paul writes: **“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the**

‘Water’ and ‘Spirit’ therefore belong together and point to Christian Baptisms. The reason Baptism brings new life is that all humanity is born of flesh. The flesh is corrupted by the power of sin. Therefore the sinful flesh needs to be born again, or born from above to have new life.

### **Benefits of Baptism**

In the Book of Acts Peter has completed his sermon on Pentecost. His sermon centered on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the promise of new life. The Jews who were listening to Peter said the following: **“Brothers, what shall we do (Acts 2:37)?”** Those listening to Peter were Jews. They were sons of the Covenant. Peter responded and said to them: **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:38-39).”**

Peter connects repentance and baptism together for the forgiveness of sins. With baptism for the forgiveness of sins, a person also receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is clear from Peter is that baptism is also for the entire family including children. If children are included then baptism is also for infants. Therefore baptism is one of the ways that he personally brings to a person, no matter what age, the forgiveness of sins since all people are corrupted by sin.

One of the benefits of baptism is the forgiveness of sins, however baptism does even more. Paul in his letter to the Romans writes the following: **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).”**

According to Paul baptism personally connects us with the sacrificial death of Jesus. In his death on the cross he would bear the sin of the world and pay the price for the sins of all humanity.

Therefore, in baptism we are personally joined to the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. In the waters of baptism we are buried with Jesus as he was buried in the tomb. As Jesus rose bodily from the tomb on the third day, those who have been baptized also rise to a new life—sins forgiven and now the image of God is being restored in sinful men and women. In baptism we now are enabled to walk in a new life as God’s image is being restored.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians writes the following: **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).”** In the waters of baptism God makes the baptized one with Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus is now the life of all the baptized. It makes no difference what the person was before baptism. In baptism all are now in Jesus Christ.

Baptism also gives eternal salvation. Paul writes to Titus: **“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing or regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).”**

The salvation of all people is nothing that they can do for themselves. Salvation is a gift that comes from the loving and goodness of Jesus Christ. Our forgiveness and salvation depends solely on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. The **washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit** seem to be a clear reference to baptism. Therefore, it is clear that baptism brings salvation to those who are baptized.

### New Life in Baptism

Baptism bring new life to each believer. The new life is the life God is restoring in his image. All people are born with a sinful nature. Paul writes that each person is: **“to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22).”** To put off the old self means that each baptized Christian is to daily confess his or her sins. Paul writes: **“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).”**

Through baptism, the old, sinful nature is being drowned daily. Through daily repentance the baptized believer is going to battle against the power of sin. In the early church of the first three centuries Christians were all naked when they were baptized. Immediately after baptism they were clothed with a white robe. This was a visual picture of the sinful nature being drowned and removed and then being robed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

### Baptized into Christ Jesus

In the last couple hundred of years there has been a debate in Christianity over infant baptism. Many Christians reject the idea of infant baptism. Let’s take a brief look at if infants should be baptized.

One of the arguments against infant baptism is that children are not accountable for their sins until they reach the age of accountability. Many say that the age of accountability is around age twelve. If a child would die before the age of accountability their sinfulness is not accounted against them and God saves them.

However, the Bible says something different. Paul writes that **“For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).”** Sin brings spiritual and physical death. Therefore, even infants are sinful because they can and do die. Infants are subject to death just as adults are. The Bible never mentions an age of accountability. Instead Paul writes: **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God (Romans 3:19).”**

Another argument that many make is that there is no command to baptize infants in the Bible. This is true, however, the Bible gives no age limits or requirements for baptism. The Bible is clear that all people, men and women are sinners before God. All people are conceived and born in sin. The Psalmist writes: **“Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalm 51:5).”** The Bible is also clear that even infants can receive faith because faith is a gift from God. If faith is a gift from God then God can give faith to anyone he chooses, including infants. Jesus says that infants can believe