



The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

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A Christian's Baptism is the most important moment in their life. However, the meaning behind a Christian's Baptism is often defined incorrectly or believed to be open to an individual's interpretation. To the Southern Baptist Convention, "[Baptism] is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith."¹ The Assemblies of God affirm the water Baptism, but include a "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" where a believer is expected to, "earnestly seek the promise of the Father... with it comes the endowment of power for life and service, and the bestowment of the gifts for work in ministry."² In short, they demand an active "manifestation" from a Christian to prove their faith. In Roman Catholicism, baptism is the door of the Church – which is a limited but fantastic definition. It holds the place of a door because it is often the first Sacrament and also because the reception of the other Sacraments depends on it. For Rome, baptism is how a person becomes a member of the Church.³ However, as Confessional Lutherans we place a more important emphasis on baptism. In its simplest definition: Baptism is liberation from death.⁴ It is simply the moment when a spiritually dead infant, child, adolescent, or adult is brought to life, delivered from sin, Satan, and death, and is delivered into the Reign and Rule of the Father. All of this is done by God the Father, who connects the individual to His Son Jesus Christ under the mystery of and by means of the Holy Spirit. In the following pages four areas of baptism will be explored: the gifts of Holy Baptism, the proper practice, the Baptismal Service, and the effects on a believer who is baptized.

The Gifts of Baptism:

Baptism is a Means of Grace where the Triune God promises to be found. We know this because Scripture tells us that God alone works in it. Paul says in Colossians chapter 2:

Having been buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with [Christ] through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.⁵

Paul writes again of baptism in Romans 6:

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 the newness of life.

¹ "Basic Beliefs of the Southern Baptist Convention" www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp Accessed 5.8.2014

² "Foundational Truths" http://ag.org/top/beliefs/statement_of_fundamental_truths/sft_short.cfm Accessed 5.8.2014

³ "The Sacrament of Baptism" http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Sac_Baptism.htm Accessed 5.8.2014

⁴ Schlink, Edmund "Theology of the Lutheran Confessions" 1961. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis, MO. Page 149.

⁵ All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2011 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Peter also writes of baptism in 1 Peter 3:

Baptism, which corresponds [to the flood of Noah], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God.

Chrysostom summarizes, "It is through baptism that we received remission of sins, sanctification, communion of the Spirit, adoption, and life eternal."⁶ Simply put, in Holy Baptism, God creates and strengthens faith. It is contradictory to the Gospel Message (in which Christ Jesus assumes and accomplishes all of the work of salvation) to place the imperative and work of Holy Baptism on an individual. In our baptism we are also put under the authority of God. When we remember and meditate on what occurred in our baptism it allows God to be God, with the result that because we are baptized we are assured that God has chosen us, claimed us, and saved us.

Baptism not only puts us under the authority of the Living God, but it also marks our identity as heirs (Gal. 3:23-29) and members of Christ's Church. Christ gives baptism to the Church to distinguish it from other nations and peoples.⁷ In the book *The Lutheran Difference* a concise definition of this identity can be found:

We can direct a fellow Christian struggling with his or her identity to God's unconditional love. Christ's righteousness covers us. We can direct friends who are searching back to their Baptism, where they were adopted into the family of God. Those who have put on Christ in Baptism are truly children of God. They not only wear Christ, but their identity also comes from Christ.⁸

The idea that Christians can find their identity in their baptism is also supported by Scripture. In the Gospel of John, Jesus addresses this identity, specifically calling out that one is spiritually born through Holy Baptism. From chapter three:

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 the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

This is further shown by Martin Chemnitz, "Far from being diverted from Christ by Baptism, we by it, as by the ordinary means, are led to Christ and grafted in Him."⁹ It is this "grafting" into the body of Christ that leads us to the conclusion that we are brought into the chosen people, the Church. Robert Kolb in his book "The Christian Faith" picks up on this:

We were dead in the foolishness and disobedience of sin, led astray into passions, pleasures, malice, envy, and hatred. The washing, God's Word and the water together, have given us new

⁶ Chrysostom *Homilies on Acts* 14.3 (PG. 60.285)

⁷ Melancthon, Philip "The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559 2nd Edition" Translated by J. A. O. Preus. Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO. 2011. Page 267

⁸ Engelbrecht, Edward ed. "The Lutheran Difference" Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO 2010. Pg 367

⁹ Chemnitz, Martin "Ministry, Word, and Sacraments" Translated by Luther Poellot. Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO 1981. Question 233.

life. It justifies us – it makes us righteous – in God’s sight and therefore makes us heirs in the sure hope of eternal life... It is clear that Jesus is insisting on a new birth, and that new birth comes from above. He combines that Word with water, and Baptism becomes the water-sack (like the womb) from which new life emerges, as those who were dead in sin are born anew, as God gives new life from above. Only in this way can one enter God’s kingdom; only in this way can God’s children become members of his family.¹⁰

While it has been alluded to above, we must also confess that in Holy Baptism – and in one’s meditation on the new identity given – one receives the forgiveness of sins. In Titus 3:5-8, St. Paul writes:

[God the Father] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to *his own* mercy, by the washing of 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.

In this crucial passage we can see the entire picture. No work that we do can save us or make us righteous. It is only by the mercy of God the Father, shown through Christ Jesus, and given by means of the Holy Spirit that can save us. This work is given (literally poured on) to the individual by a washing – the washing done in Holy Baptism. This work of God justifies us and ushers us into the Father’s Reign and Rule. It does so by also giving the baptized the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Acts, St. Peter addresses the crowd on the day of Pentecost by proclaiming the salvation narrative and good news about Jesus Christ. The crowd responds after being “cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”¹¹ St. Peter’s response is, “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.” This gift of the Holy Spirit is not only given to those who have heard the Word and been baptized, but St. Peter makes clear that this gift of the Holy Spirit is given to those children “who are far off”¹² in subsequent generations. God desires to call everyone and give the gift of his Spirit through his Son’s Word and simple water.

Proper Practice:

In our baptism, the minister puts us under the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The minister, using this formula, witnesses that the sins of the person are washed away and that they have been reconciled with God – the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – so that He might forgive the newly baptized’s sins and begin the new obedience and eternal life through the Holy Spirit. Because the sum of the Gospel is contained in this act, we have the

¹⁰ Kolb, Robert “The Christian Faith” Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO 1993. Pg 217

¹¹ Acts 2:37 ESV

¹² Acts 2:39 ESV

fullest of consolations.¹³ Therefore, we *stress* that baptism is necessary for salvation, and we warn those who despise or attempt to neuter baptism.

This statement usually sparks a variety of questions, so as Christians we must walk in a tension. We use the term “stress” to put the imperative on Christians to receive the gifts that Christ instituted and the Father desires to give you through the Holy Spirit. Assuredly it is possible for an individual to be saved by God through faith in Christ Jesus apart from Holy Baptism. However, we would raise objection to a person who believed they were saved by their faith in Christ, yet refused the clear command of Jesus. Why would a believer in Christ *not* want to receive the freely given and gracious gifts from the One they believe in?

The other side of this situation is a more tragic scenario. Rather than confronting a Christian who objects to the efficacy of Holy Baptism, we encounter the reality of this broken creation. In the case of a miscarriage or death before this Sacrament can be performed, we take solace in God’s grace. Jesus promises that he hears and knows his flock (John 10:27), that he receives and answers prayer (Matthew 21:22), and that he alone is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The individual who dies before they are baptized has had many believers surrounding them, praying for them, interceding on their behalf, and we can be sure that our gracious God will answer the prayers of those praying. In this situation, salvation is achieved by the pure proclamation of the Gospel. It should also be noted that in emergency situations where a minister is not present, any and all Christians (regardless of age or length of time as a believer) can administer this Sacrament. It need only be done with water and the invocation of the Name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To put more clearly, to the person who asserts that baptism is worthless we would speak what the Scripture says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,” (Mark 16:16a). However, to anyone who wonders whether it is absolutely necessary to be baptized in order to be saved, we would assure them that the answer is no, with the promise of Christ to the insurrectionist on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise,” (Luke 23:43). This, however, is not grounds for delaying or withholding Holy Baptism from an infant, child, adolescent, or adult in desperate need of it. The command of Christ and the benefits Baptism offers are clear throughout all Scripture.

It is because Baptism holds such weight that the Church takes very seriously how Baptisms are performed. It should be noted that Pieper tells the Church to be cautious, “bear(ing) in mind that these customs are adiaphora (not prescribed by God), so that Baptism loses none of its validity if several or even all of these ceremonies are not used.”¹⁴ However, Pieper does lay some things that must be present to perform a Baptism:

¹³ Melancthon, pg. 262

¹⁴ Pieper, Francis “Christian Dogmatics: Volume III” Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO 1953. pg. 282

For Baptism water is essential; Scripture acknowledges no substitute for water. The use of another element is therefore inadmissible, and one so “baptized” is to be regarded as not baptized. Baptism can be performed by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, because “βαπτίζειν” merely denotes the application of water, without any implication as to the way it is applied.¹⁵

Water is necessary to perform a baptism. In addition to water being necessary, it is also necessary to use the names of the persons of the Trinity – The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – as water is being poured onto the candidate.¹⁶ This is in agreement with Scripture, Matthew 28 states, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It is the combination of the Word with the water that provides the gifts of Baptism in the believer’s life. It is the Word of God delivered in, with, and through the water that accomplishes this work. Without the Word, the water is plain water.¹⁷

Therefore, as long as a baptism is performed with water and the name of God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – is spoken over the baptized it *is* a valid baptism. The Lutheran Church does not require Christians who were baptized in a Trinitarian formula to be rebaptized upon entering into membership. An inquisitive Christian can take heart that Lutherans, the Orthodox, Rome, and the many Reformed denominations all practice Trinitarian baptism. However, special note must be taken that other congregational bodies like Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) reject the Trinity. Therefore, any congregational body that performs a rite of baptism but discards the Trinity or the Trinitarian formula does not give the gifts of God and that person must be legitimately baptized.

The Baptismal Service in the Lutheran Church:

While all that is necessary to perform a true baptism is water and a believer to administer the water, the Lutheran Church has composed a liturgy¹⁸ to bestow God’s richest blessing and also to strengthen the faith of those in attendance. The liturgy included below is the standard for the congregations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. It points to the work that God accomplishes in baptism, the enrollment of sponsors (or godparents), and serves as a reminder to those baptized that they are still and forever God’s children.

The Invocation:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

¹⁵ Pieper pg. 256

¹⁶ Commission on Worship of the LC-MS “Lutheran Service Book Agenda” Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO 2006. pg. 17

¹⁷ Kolb, Robert and Wengert, Timothy “The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church” Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2000. pg. 359

¹⁸ Liturgy by definition is the order of service or worship.

The Baptismal Service begins by invoking the name of God – The Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. The pastor purposefully draws the congregation into the remembrance of their own baptism which was done in the name of the Triune God, as well as reminds them that God is present everywhere and the promises¹⁹ of God are present where His name is.²⁰

The Opening Exhortation:

Dearly beloved, Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 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.” In the last chapter of Mark our Lord promises, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” And the apostle Peter has written, “Baptism now saves you.”

The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.²¹

The pastor speaks the words of institution and the promise that comes with baptism. The emphasis is always on Jesus and the work he does. Norman Nagel writes: “No line may be drawn across our Lord’s mandate: ‘all nations.’ His mandate runs as far as his authority. No line may be drawn excluding some because they are Gentiles, Jews, male, female, infants or slaves.”²² Baptism is shown to be a gift that is given to all of humanity. Our liturgy backs this up with a brief summary of Scripture’s teaching which makes clear that humanity did indeed fall, that we are predisposed for damnation, that we cannot work salvation for ourselves, and that Christ has done all of the work for us. This is a gift for all people at all times and it is solely the work of God in Christ Jesus under the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

The Public Naming and Prayer of Intercession:

How are you named? [How is this *child/person* named?]²³

“Name.”

Name, receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Let us pray.

¹⁹ John 10:13

²⁰ Matthew 18:20

²¹ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod *Lutheran Service Book* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 2006 pg. 268 (Henceforth: *LSB*)

²² Precht, Fred L ed. (Overseen by the Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod) *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 1993 pg. 262

²³ Note that the text appearing in brackets is used when the one baptized cannot speak for his/herself.

Almighty and eternal God, according to Your strict judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to Your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. You drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led Your people Israel through the water on dry ground, foreshadowing this washing of Your Holy Baptism. Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.

We pray that You would behold *name(s)* according to Your boundless mercy and bless *him/her/them* with true faith by the Holy Spirit, that through this saving flood all sin in *him/her/them*, which has been inherited from Adam and which *he himself/she herself/they themselves* has/have committed since, would be drowned and die. Grant that *he/she/they* be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers and serving Your name at all times with a fervent spirit and a joyful hope, so that, with all believers in Your promise, *he/she/they* would be declared worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.²⁴

The name-giving is shown to be the practice of the Church as early as the fourth century.²⁵ Our name and our identity as a baptized child of God go hand in hand. So here we have the designation of a specific person by name and upon their name the name of the Triune God is placed with water in the Baptism. The Prayer of Intercession is spoken by the pastor in order to communicate to the baptized, their family, and the congregation how God has historically used water to purify and save his people.

Enrollment of Sponsors:

From ancient times the Church has observed the custom of appointing sponsors for baptismal candidates and catechumens. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church sponsors are to confess the faith expressed in the Apostles' Creed and taught in the Small Catechism. They are, whenever possible, to witness the Baptism of those they sponsor. They are to pray for them, support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith, and encourage them toward the faithful reception of the Lord's Supper. They are at all times to be examples to them of the holy life of faith in Christ and love for the neighbor.

Is it your intention to serve *name of candidate(s)* as sponsors in the Christian faith?

Yes, with the help of God.

God enable you both to will and to do this faithful and loving work and with His grace fulfill what we are unable to do.²⁶

²⁴ LSB, pg. 268, 269

²⁵ Precht, pg. 283

²⁶ LSB, pg. 269

The pastor then gives a brief exhortation to those selected sponsors regarding their task. Readers and hearers of this service should note that this is not a matter to be chosen lightly or for political reasons (e.g. it's family tradition to always select siblings, but said siblings are living unrepentant lives or do not show the fruit of faith). The chosen sponsors should be those who are mature in the faith, have an active life and membership in Church, can be trusted to pass on the true body of doctrine, and can encourage the newly baptized in the Christian life. In all things, they are to rely on the God who has saved both the newly baptized and themselves.

The Lord's Prayer and Blessing:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Lord preserve your coming in and your going out from this time forth and even forevermore.

Amen.²⁷

The congregation then prays the prayer that the Lord has taught with certainty that the words they pray are about to be visibly accomplished in the act of baptism. Truly our Father in heaven will bring his reign and rule to the person being baptized and adopt them – making them his own. Truly as we beg for forgiveness we will see the visible sign of forgiveness through the water and the Word – given as a sign and performed by the power of God – as the person is baptized. Again, the full participation of the Church is present receiving God's gracious gifts as their hearts and minds are drawn to the moment when they were baptized – when they were snatched out of the darkness of this world and into God's hands.

The Confession:

[Because this *child/person* cannot answer for *himself/herself*, we shall all, together with sponsors and parents, faithfully speak on *his/her* behalf in testimony of the forgiveness of sins and the birth of the life of faith which God our Father bestows in and through baptism.]

Name(s), do you renounce the devil?

Yes, I renounce him.

Do you renounce all his works?

Yes, I renounce them.

Do you renounce all his ways?

Yes, I renounce them.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

Yes, I believe.

²⁷ LSB, pg. 270

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead?

Yes, I believe.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?

Yes, I believe.

Name, do you desire to be baptized? [Who brings this *child/person* to be baptized?]

Yes, I do. [We do.]²⁸

The confession of faith is then made. It is either made on behalf of the child or by the soon to be baptized. If it is made on behalf of the child it is made by the congregation. The parents, sponsors, and congregation all make a vow before God and one another that they will see to the proper education of the child, so that they may be brought up to believe the one true faith. If it is made by the soon to be baptized, then it is made in the assurance that they do indeed believe the one true faith. They also are making a vow before God and one another that they will continue firm and steadfast in this faith in God's community.

The Baptism and Blessing of the Newly Baptized:

Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting.

Amen.

In Holy Baptism, God the Father has made all of us members of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We have been received in Jesus' name as brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we all might hear His Word faithfully, receive His gifts worthily, and proclaim the praises of Him who called all of us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Welcome our newest *brother(s)/sister(s)* in Christ.

Amen. We welcome you in the name of the Lord.²⁹

This is the heart of the baptismal service. Here the miracle is performed where a sinner is made a saint, where the dead are made alive, and where a person is reconciled before God through God's own working. This marks a change of identity in a person. The pastor speaks this gospel word to the congregation as he reminds them of their change of identity. The entire

²⁸ LSB, pg. 270

²⁹ LSB, pg. 270, 271

Church then together is united by their affirmation that God's work was done³⁰ and the newly baptized is welcomed into God's reign and rule.

Concluding Collect:

Let us pray.

Almighty and most merciful God and Father, we thank and praise You that, in this miracle, You graciously preserve and enlarge Your family and have granted *name(s)* the new birth in Holy Baptism and made *him/her/them* a *member/members* of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and an *heir/heirs* of Your heavenly kingdom. We humbly implore You that, as *he/she/they has/have* now become Your *child/children*, You would keep *him/her/them* in *his/her/their* baptismal grace, that according to Your good pleasure *he/she/they* may faithfully grow to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name, and finally, with all Your saints, obtain the promised inheritance in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Peace be with you.

Amen.³¹

As with the rest of the service the Concluding Collect gives all credit to God who works this miracle. The Church then intercedes on behalf of the newly baptized compelling God to continue to do what he promises, namely finish the good work that he has begun.³² It is also in this prayer that the Church is reminded that this is also not merely an individual manner – it is incorporated into the fellowship of believers. As Nagel says, “Incorporated in Christ we are incorporated into the rag, tag, and bobtail of his church, where sinners are forgiven and where they may faithfully grow by teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] has commanded.”³³ The service ends with the Pax Domini which draws the hearts and minds of those confirmed to the faithful reception of the Lord's Supper.

The order of the Service of Holy Baptism in Lutheran congregations lets the focus be on what God the Father is doing through His Son Jesus under the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit. The role the baptized person plays is to receive God's gracious gift. The role of the participants serves as a reminder to the moment where God snatched them out of this world and into his loving hands.

The Effects that Baptism has on a Believer:

Baptism is a gift from God, but it also has an outcome in the life of believers and in the Church. Basil the Great uses visceral language to describe baptism, “[baptism is] the ransoming of captives, the forgiving of their debts, the regeneration of the soul, the bright garment, the

³⁰ This is contained in the “Amen.” Amen means, “Yes, it is so.”

³¹ *LSB*, pg. 271

³² Philippians 1:6

³³ Precht, pg. 285

unassailable seal, chariot to heaven, the cause of the kingdom, the gift of adoption.”³⁴ These simple facts cause a change in how we experience life in this world. Chemnitz rightly says, “For just as God made with us a covenant of grace and a good conscience in Baptism, so we also, on the other hand, promised Him that we would die to sin and live to righteousness.”³⁵ Baptism is the crux of both Law and Gospel. It gives salvation and a newness of life, but it also compels believers to live a right life. The statement: “You are a baptized child of God,” works in two ways. First, it confronts us in our sin, reminding us that we are living witnesses to this world and disciples of Christ. Here, we are confronted with the Law and the weight of our sin. Are we behaving like a Christian? Second, it tells us that we are forgiven and in right standing with God. Our identity is not one of condemnation and death, it is one of forgiveness and life. Chemnitz walks this tension by writing:

It is therefore a horrible sin impudently to violate that covenant. For thus we hinder and destroy the work of the Holy Spirit, who works renewal in us. But all believers can, in fact should, confidently implore and entreat the Holy Spirit by a certain right of Baptism, as it were, to mortify the works of the flesh in them and cleanse and renew their hearts more and more.³⁶

By regularly meditating on and remembering our Baptism, we appeal to God to place us back in proper standing with Him – which He gladly does. We should both take heart and be wary of the fact that Baptism does not immediately produce a perfect life. Instead the renewal of life is begun in Baptism and grows daily. This is accomplished through the continual cycle of repenting of our sins and God graciously and continuously forgiving us because we are baptized and our identity is as his child. Baptism helps the believer to live a Christian life. Their identity as a child of God and a member of the Church is a comfort, assuring them that they should never doubt or fear for their belonging, but at the same time convicting behaviors that are not becoming of a child of God. Simply put, the promise and gifts of Baptism begin at the moment the Sacrament is performed and finished in the entrance of the life in the age to come.³⁷

The Great Commission:

All of the above leads to the question: “Who, then, should be baptized?” The Christian response is simply: everyone as soon as they can be baptized should be baptized.³⁸ Many other denominations teach today that Baptism is a “personal decision” or a “public declaration”, but those opinions have no firm basis in Scripture. Scripture affirms that an infant is conceived by their parents’ sin and born a sinner (Psalm 51:5), but it also gives hope that they

³⁴ Basil the Great *On Holy Baptism* 13.5 (PG. 31.433)

³⁵ Chemnitz, question 240

³⁶ Chemnitz, question 240

³⁷ Chemnitz, question 241

³⁸ Origen links infant baptism with the 12 Apostles, and in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius the Areopagite, in the first century, writes that the Apostles baptized infants. Sasse, Herman *We Confess Anthology: Sacraments* pg. 38 (translated by Norman Nagel) Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO 1999

can be cleansed and washed by God and made “whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7). Throughout the Old Testament infant males were marked as one of the God’s children in their circumcision which took place on their eighth day after birth. This made them a part of the covenant with the Father (Gen 17:9-14). This directly connected to their being forgiven (Ex 4:24-26). Paul directly links the Old Testament circumcision of infants with the gifts of Baptism. He writes:

“In (Christ) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the 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. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,” (Col 2:11-13).

This connection to circumcision, along with the promises and gifts that Baptism offers [i.e. the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 3), salvation (Titus 3), adoption as God’s children (Galatians 3), a regeneration and first-fruits of our original glory (Titus 3), the ability to believe (John 6), and above all reconciliation and restoration to the Father by being connected to His Son Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3, Romans 6, Mark 16)], allows us with confidence – and the entire history of Christ’s Church – to welcome infants and those of any age to the Baptismal font and receive the forgiveness and faith that the Father freely gives in His Son through the working of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, St. Cyprian gives Bishop Fidus the well-known advice that Baptism is not even to be delayed until the eighth day after birth.³⁹

All of this can be found in Jesus’ Great Commission: “Therefore, while going, disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁴⁰ This powerful pair of verses showcases a proper understanding of Baptism. It begins by showing believers what they are to do with an aorist participle followed by an aorist imperative. This describes the Christian life. A Christian is one who continuously proclaims, lives, and believes Christ and his promises while they go about their daily life. Christians are to work, play, sleep, eat, and live just as a human creature is expected to live and while doing that they are to disciple all nations. “All nations” is an inclusive collective that emphasizes the nature of God’s gifts and message.

Some Christians attempt to subvert the gift of Baptism to infants by citing that there is no Scriptural reference telling the Church to baptize infants. This is technically true, because nowhere does Jesus or St. Paul say explicitly, “Go baptize infants.” However, one could also argue that Scripture doesn’t say to baptize women explicitly anywhere. Nor does it say to baptize the rich explicitly, or the poor, or those of European descent, etc. Instead of being exclusive (as post-modern culture is prone to be), Jesus makes clear that the gift of Baptism is

³⁹ Sasse pg. 39

⁴⁰ Personal translation of Matthew 28:19, 20 emphasizing proper imperatives and coordinating participles

given to all nations. That is, all races, all ages, all peoples, of any size, any place, and anyone. This should not sound foreign to the Christian, because the same applies to discussions on the Law. The Law is inclusive. The Gospel is inclusive. Holy Baptism is inclusive.

Following this, one can parse both “baptizing” and “teaching” as present participles – meaning that they are coordinating participles. This demonstrates what makes a disciple. A disciple is one who is baptized and then taught the Christian faith, or one who is taught and then baptized into the Christian faith. Scripture and history shows both as effective. Finally, Jesus closes with the promise before ascending to the throne of his Father. He is with each and every baptized and taught believer forever – to the end of the age. By being gifted the Holy Spirit, a Christian is constantly being pointed to their Lord and Savior by means of their Baptism – which is exactly what Jesus says the work of the Holy Spirit is.⁴¹

With the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding them, baptized Christians should daily suppress their lusts and sins, and walk in holiness of life, doing that which is pleasing to God. It is their Baptism that daily gives them the power necessary to do the will of God.⁴² This includes parents, who at their child’s Baptism swear an oath before God and the Church to raise their children in the Church and teach them the entire Council of God. In this way, the gifts that were poured out on the parents are overflowing into the lives of their children and have been since the very time that Christ Jesus walked this earth with the first disciples.

To baptize a person, great or small, is to take very seriously the command of Christ to baptize everyone in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this Sacrament the Triune God works a miracle, through it he gives a newness of life, forgiveness of sins, and most importantly gives those baptized citizenship into the body of Christ – the Church. Baptism is done using both water and the Word. While baptism is not necessary for salvation, it is still commanded by Christ and should be taken seriously because of the gifts that it offers. Baptism offers the richest of gifts as well as convicts believers to fulfill the Christian life. Baptism is not an expression of an individual’s faith; it is a powerful work of God’s grace.

⁴¹ [Jesus said:] “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” – John 16:13-15 ESV

⁴² Laetsch, Theodore editor. “The Abiding Word: Volume II”. Concordia Publishing House. Saint Louis, MO 1975. pg. 414