Life in Christ: Session Eight

Baptism: An Adoption

**OVERVIEW:** What are the “means of grace”? What is a sacrament? What is baptism? Is it significant? Is anything really happening in baptism? What gifts does God give in baptism? Is baptism something that a believer does or primarily something that God does? What are the three “F’s” of baptism?

**The Means of Grace**

The Church, the Bride of Christ, has been given two vocations on this earth: the first is to live in constant fellowship with God through Christ, and second is to bring Christ and His salvation to individuals, communities, and the world. The Divine Service is a chief means by which these vocations reach fulfillment. Because the Church has been equipped by its creator with certain gifts, enlightened by His Word, and given the Holy Spirit, members may realize in their persons the fruits of the Holy Spirit; especially in the assembly of believers. “Amid complexity and confusion [in this life] their faith finds a simple, divine plan for humanity. Their hope looks beyond the veil for a glory yet to be revealed” (Reed 1947, 3).

Martin Luther spoke cogently regarding the Divine Service as the place and time to receive God’s grace. God can of course deliver His grace anytime and anyway He chooses, however, He has promised that through the means of grace that comprise the Divine Service He will faithfully deliver His grace to those who gather in His name. Luther makes this statement in the Smalcald Articles about God’s faithful delivery of His grace,

*We will now return to the Gospel, which does not give us counsel and aid against sin in only one way. God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world (Luke 24:45-47). This is the particular office of the Gospel. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, “Where two or three are gathered”* (*Matthew 18:20) and other such verses (especially Romans 1:12).* (Concordia 2005, 304)

**So, what’s a sacrament?**

The word “sacrament” does not appear in the Scripture but is a word that theologians use to express a sacred action. In other words, a sacrament is an action by God and is a way that God delivers His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life to people.

Let’s add clarity to this definition by contrasting it with another word: “sacrifice.” A sacrifice is an action done by people toward God. We can call portions of Sunday morning worship an act of sacrifice. Our tithes and offerings, singing, and even help given to others can be considered sacrifices. In the Old Testament, there were lots of different types of sacrifices, there were sacrifices given to God in order to: give thanks, receive forgiveness, and remove guilt. The sacrifices were an offering made to God with the death of an animal.

A sacrament is defined in the following way:

1. It is a sacred act instituted by Christ Himself.
   1. Matthew 26:26-28
   2. Matthew 28:16-20
2. It uses a visible/tangible element of means
   1. Baptism: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   2. Lord’s Supper: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. It gives the gift of forgiveness:
   1. 1st Peter 3:21
   2. Matthew 26:28
   3. Titus 3:5-8

By this definition, we limit the number of sacraments to two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Let’s take a moment to see what the Bible, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper have in common:

1. All three say to the individual, “Your sins are forgiven”.
2. The Bible declares this message with written (spoken) words.
3. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper convey this message with “visible/tangible” words.

Through the “means of grace”, God declares that sinful human beings are forgiven and He uses these means to help them believe and receive His forgiveness. He also uses these same “means of grace” to change and transform people from an old way of living to a new one. God wants us to stop being selfish and start living in ways that bless God and others.

**Baptism (one of two sacraments)**

* Galatians 3:26-27
* Titus 3:5-8
* Romans 6:3-5
* Ephesians 5:26
* Mark 16:16
* 1st Peter 3:21
* 1st Corinthians 6:11
* Acts 22:16
* John 3:5

**Baptism and the 3 F’s**

**Family:**

Jesus said in Matthew 28, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus commands us to place the Triune Name on those being baptized. We learn that we are made heirs of heaven in our baptism because we are made children of God in our baptism (Galatians 2:29). Only sons and daughters are heirs. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2 that we are made members of God’s household by grace through faith.

The first gift given in baptism is the gift of family – God’s family. We are made members of His family when He adopts us through the washing of rebirth and regeneration. We are made members of God’s household and therefore receive all the benefits of being children of God.

Children don’t choose to become members of a family, it is done without them evening knowing it. They certainly don’t become members of the family by earning a spot through obedience, achievement or success. Babies are fully members of their family, this is also true for members of God’s family.

**Forgiveness:**

Peter tells the crowd in Acts 2 that they were guilty of their sins. When they ask Peter how to be saved – forgiven – from their sins, Peter tells them to “repent and be baptized…in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.” Paul said in his letter to Titus that we are all sinners but that Jesus saved us, “not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

We need to be washed clean! We need to have our sins washed away. Paul wrote, “There are none righteous, not even one, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No one, absolutely no one has done the will of God. Oh wait, there was only one who completely did the will of God as was therefore sinless: Jesus!

**Faith:**

The third major gift that God gives in baptism is the gift of faith. God gives the Holy Spirit to the one being baptized. One of the primary tasks that the Holy Spirit does is the working of faith in people so that they will believe in Jesus Christ. So because of the Holy Spirit we have faith.

Remember what Peter said in his sermon on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized.” He went on to say, “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”



**The Old Testament Parallel to Baptism**

**Circumcision**:

1. Jewish male babies at 8 days old
   1. Genesis 17
   2. Leviticus 12:3
2. The child was brought by believing parents
   1. Luke 1:57-63
   2. Luke 2:21-39
3. A sign of the covenant
   1. Genesis 17
   2. Deuteronomy 30:6
   3. Romans 2:28-29
   4. Romans 9:6-8
   5. Colossians 2:11-12

**It is either something we do or something God does**