

Baptism: The Water of Death and Life

Romans 6:1–11

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear Christian Friends,

Water preserves life, and water can take life away. Without it, we would all die of dehydration, but if we are buried in it, we drown. Water can rescue, and water can destroy. It can put out fires, but it can also cause floods that destroy property and lives. Water can carry healing medicine, or deadly poison. Sometimes water can bring death and life at the same time. With water, God destroyed the world because of the great sinfulness of man, but with those same waters, He saved Noah and his family. By water, Israel escaped from the clutches of their Egyptian taskmasters, but those same waters destroyed the Pharaoh and his army. If we consider all the things that water can do, and remember the ways which God has used water in the past, we should not be at all surprised that He ordains that it is by water and the Spirit that a man be born again, and enter into the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus instituted Baptism, and ordained that it is by this means that man should be born again, and be made into His disciples. We gladly have obeyed that command of Jesus, as we baptized Daniel Nathan Houck, and we look forward to bringing our children yet unborn to baptism, because our Lord Jesus has attached such wonderful promises to these waters.

Baptism is a water of death and a water of life. The death and life that water brings to the physical world is therefore mirrored in our spirits, by the promise of Jesus, for these waters are death to our old man of sin, and life to our spirits. We are buried, with Christ, through baptism into death, so that just as Christ died, and was raised from death, so too in Baptism, we die unto sin, and live unto God.

In our Lutheran catechism, we ask the question, “How can

water do such great things?” We ask the question, because the things which the Word of God ascribes to Water are truly tremendous. Here are just a few of the promises which God declares concerning Baptism. In our Epistle lesson, after mentioning how water saved Noah and his family, Peter says, “There is also an antitype [a corresponding thing] which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 3:21). Imagine that — Baptism is not just getting you wet, or washing your body. It does what no human work is able to do: cleanse the conscience from all guilt, for where sin is washed away, there is no longer any reason to feel guilty. Baptism does indeed wash away sin, even as Paul declared, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Paul was clearly a Lutheran, for he speaks of Baptism exactly the same way than we speak of it. Never mind how irrational it might seem, for it is God’s Word, and not men’s fancy, that calls it a water of life. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, 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” (John 3:5,6). New birth and new life. What remarkable power Jesus ascribes to baptism, the new birth by water and the Spirit of God.

How is it that water can accomplish all of this? Eph. 5:25f. answers: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” This water washes by the Word, and thereby makes the church of God glorious, without spots and wrinkles or warts and blemishes. So thorough is the water of baptism that every vestige of sin is gone! And the Baptists think that a baby only gets wet in baptism... well, as much as they might think we Lutherans praise baptism too highly, I dare say that no one praises Baptism more highly than God Himself.

But what about faith? Isn’t faith necessary for salvation? Indeed it is. Therefore Peter declared, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39). Our children also are to receive this baptism, and with it they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That means they receive faith, for how can they have the Holy Spirit without faith? If the gift of the Holy Spirit is theirs in baptism, then the gift of faith to believe in Christ is also there. Therefore baptism saves little children the same way it saves adults: by faith. Baptism saves no differently than every other form of the Gospel: By faith in the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ.

We have just learned from God's own Word the answer to the question, "How can water do such great things?" It is not the water that does it. It is the Word of God which is with the water, and it is faith which trusts this Word of God. Without God's Word, these waters would indeed do nothing but get you wet. But with God's Word, they grant life and salvation, because God's Word has that power. It kills our old man of sin, at the same time it grants new life to our souls.

Baptism is a water of death, and a water of life, for in baptism, we are joined to the body of Jesus. We take part in His death and in His resurrection. As often as we speak of the new life in Baptism, there is also that death which we might not want to think about, but without the death of our sinful nature, there is no life for our spirit. They go hand-in-hand. You cannot be raised from the dead with Christ, unless you first died with Him. Therefore make no mistake: You who are baptized *are* dead to sin. If you are dead to sin, how can you continue to live in it? Would you like to be a walking corpse? Certainly not! Your old sinful nature was nailed to the cross with Jesus. He died for your sins once, for all time, and by baptism, you died with Him. It is very good that the New King James here translates the phrase, "We are buried with Him *through* baptism, into death" rather than "*by* Baptism. Luther's German Bible also says *through*, and so does the Greek. There can be no mistaking what this means. Baptism is not something that we do, along side of being buried with Christ. It is the very means by which this is accomplished. I want you to note this point carefully, because our Lord Jesus was very wise and gracious in making Baptism not only the sign of our salvation, but the very means that it is applied to us.

Think of all the times in your life when you have failed to live as a Christian. Think of all your cursing and swearing when no one was around to hear you. Think of the things you have seen or done in private or secret, that you would be ashamed to admit. You did these things knowing full well that they are wrong, and that you had no excuse. You knew of the suffering of Jesus, as we can hardly fail to notice during Lent, yet you made light of His suffering, and added to it with your callous thoughts and works. An unbeliever might have an excuse. All he has is his faulty conscience to guide him, but you knew better. What hope is there for you? Maybe in spite of all that God offered you in the Gospel, your heart is just too stubborn or hard to truly believe and be born again. Even though the Word of God bids you to repent, and believe in Jesus Christ, and be forgiven, how can you claim to have repented, when you willingly commit your secret sins?

It is at just such a time, that God would have you remember your baptism, and not just that you were baptized, but what happened *to you* when those waters were applied in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Look at what God has declared about you: You were buried with Christ *through*

your Baptism. You were raised to a new born-again life *through your Baptism*. If you have any doubt, any doubt whatsoever, that your old man of sin was truly put to death, and that you truly have been given new life, then here, at the waters of Baptism you can put all your doubts to rest. You were Baptized. This was done *to you*. You could not have screwed up your own baptism, because it was not something that you did in the first place. God did it. God washed you. God killed you in the death of Christ, and God raised you from the dead in Him. *Through* Baptism this work of God was done in you. The power of God truly has accomplished what God has promised in you. There can be no doubt.

So now, when you stand there, plagued with the knowledge of the sin you have willfully committed, you can think of your Baptism, and look at your old man of sin, and say, "That man of sin died with Christ. He really is dead. That is not who I am anymore. He died, but I arose. I might not feel it. I might not have any reason to believe it, except for this fact, that I was baptized. Therefore, either God is a liar and His Word is false, or I am a new creature who is dead to sin and alive unto God. Christ Jesus died for me. I died with Him. My baptism proves it. I am no longer a slave of sin like I was before. Because Christ died unto sin once for all, and was raised again to ever live to God, I did also." With this knowledge, you no longer have to be afraid. Only believe what God has accomplished in you by the death of Christ. Stop looking for proof in your flesh, and believe what God tells you. Then, by the power of His Spirit, you are more than conquerors over every temptation which can come at you. Baptism removes every obstacle and excuse to believe this, which Satan or your flesh tries to put in the way.

What a precious treasure Baptism is! A water of death, and life, not only when you are a little child, but when you are old, and ready to depart this life. All life long, there is your Baptism, joining you to Jesus. It is for this reason that in addition to parents, we have witnesses who can testify to our little children when they are older, that they were indeed baptized, according to the command of Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You parents and witnesses of this holy rite have a grave responsibility for this child as he grows, to testify to this child of his baptism, so that in the hour of trial, he can hold firmly to the promise of life which was given to Him by faith in Jesus Christ.

God bless this little child, and God bless you all who are baptized into the faith of Christ, with the comforting assurance that you are no longer slaves to sin, but are new creatures, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May these waters ever continue among us, welcoming young and old into the house of our heavenly Father. Amen.