

A Message On the Occasion of the Baptisms of My Grandchildren
Adapted from Wallace H. McLaughlin's We All Believe in One True God.

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Text: Luke 18:15-16: *“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”*”

Dear Friends,

Last Saturday morning I was privileged to be present during a most wonderful event, the birth of my first grandson, Layron.

Now this might not seem to be so special an event to some. After all, babies are born every day. But this was no ordinary event. It was, from I observed, an act of faith in God.

What do I mean?

Is it that Kim (Mom) and Aaron (Dad) had decided to have a home delivery, with no professional medical persons in attendance?

Although, home delivery of a baby under these circumstances is relatively rare in the U.S., this is not why I believe what I observed was an act of faith.

I believe the delivery of Layron was an act of faith, because of two specific things I observed that assured me Aaron and Kim had placed their trust in God that He would sustain them and Layron.

One was the fact that Kim was personally led by the Holy Spirit before the birth to offer prayer to God to sustain her and the second was Aaron's spontaneous exclamation of “All glory to God!” at the moment Layron was delivered.

That this is evidence of Kim and Aaron's faith in God is clear to me and we, here too, give all glory to God for their faith and for Layron's birth.

So too, today we are witnesses to an act *produced* by God-given faith.

Kim and Aaron are bringing Layron and Hailey to baptism, not as a human work, but as a fruit of their faith in God. Theirs is a complete reliance upon God's promise in His Word Alone and corresponding obedience to God's command in Scripture, where Jesus tells us: "*suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.*"

That Holy Baptism is not a human invention then, but a divine ordinance to be observed until the last day, is plainly taught by Holy Scripture also in Matthew 28:19, 20, where Jesus commands His disciples of all times: "*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;*" and also Mark 16:15, 16: "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

Only if we hold fast the truth that Baptism is a *divine* ordinance, a command of God, do we recognize that, though it is performed through men, it is *God Himself* who deals with us in Baptism.

The fact that both children and adults are to be baptized is plainly taught by Scripture.

Infant Baptism was the rule in the Christian Church from the beginning, since Baptism took the place of the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision, according to St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, where Baptism is called "the circumcision of Christ."

We read Colossians 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.*"

That children are to be baptized is also implied in the record concerning the Baptism of whole families (For example in Acts 16:15: where Lydia and her household are baptized and in Acts 16:33: where the jailer and all his family are baptized.)

Now, there are some that assert that infants and children have no need of baptism, because according to their human reasoning infants and little children are innocent or “not accountable” for sin.

But the Bible teaches that we are all sinful from our conception and that this is the result of *Original Sin*.

Speaking of *Original Sin*, Scripture tells us in Romans 5:12: “... *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*”

And The Psalmist declares in Psalm 51:5: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*”

The NIV states it this way: “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*”

And in Romans 6:23 we learn: “... *the wages of sin is death...*”

The further assertion by some that children cannot not believe, and so should not be baptized, contradicts the Word of God in First John 2:13; “*I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*”

and in our text and also in Mark 10:14: “*And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*”

And finally, the fact that Christ commands us to baptize “all nations” in Matthew 28:19 is surely sufficient to prove that infants are to be baptized, for we dare not make a restriction that God does not make in His Word.

So now that we know our Lord has commanded us to baptize infants, children, and adults, *What is Holy Baptism?*

The *visible elements* of a Scriptural Baptism are water and its application to a human being.

From Scripture we learn that the application of the water may take place by immersion, by pouring, or by sprinkling, since the Greek word “baptize” in the usage of Scripture not only means immersion, but denotes every kind of washing.

This is evident, for instance, from Mark 7:3,4. In Mark 7:3 the Greek verb “wash” is used, and in verse 4, the Greek verb “baptize” is also used, as the “baptisms of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and tables” are mentioned.

And in Luke 11:37, 38 the Pharisee marveled that Jesus had not first “baptized” before eating.

This does not refer to any immersion or bathing before the meal, which was not a Jewish custom, but to the customary washing of the hands, as referred to in Mark 7:3: “The Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not.”

But more important than the *manner* in which the water is applied, is that which makes Holy Baptism “not simple water only” but a Means of God’s Grace – God’s Word.

It is God’s Word, that is, *God’s command to baptize and His promise of the remission of sins connected with it* that makes the application of water a Means of Grace, ...a means of the forgiveness of sin ... or, as Luther puts it in his Small Catechism, ***“Baptism is not simple water only, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word.”***

God’s Word is, as it were, the container whereby the application of water becomes a purification from the guilt and condemnation of sin.

Now, on the basis of Scripture we distinguish between a natural knowledge of God, which all human beings have and the *Christian* knowledge of God.

That there is a natural knowledge of God, derived from the works of creation and from the Law of God written in man's heart, is plainly taught in God's Word.

For Scripture tells us in Romans 1:19&20: "*Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the visible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse.*"

And in Romans 2:14-15 we read: "*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another*

But the natural knowledge of God does not *and cannot* go beyond the simple knowledge that there is an eternal, almighty, and holy God, who rewards good and punishes evil; and so the result of this natural knowledge of God is only a troubled conscience, since man becomes aware in his conscience that he has violated the Law of God and that God is rightly angry with him and must be appeased because of it.

The *Christian* knowledge of God, on the other hand, is derived from the revelation of God in His Word, and has as its content, the truth that the One True Eternal God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But more than that, Scripture not only teaches that in the True One God there are three Persons, but also that God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to be the Savior of the world, that the Son of God did not refuse to suffer and ultimately gave His life unto death on the Cross to make complete satisfaction for sin and cancel the guilt of men; and that it is the purpose of God the Holy Spirit to work faith in the forgiveness of sins obtained by the Son of God, within the heart of man through the Word and Sacraments.

The result of this God-given knowledge and faith is the answer of a clear conscience before God. For, because of what Christ's has done for us, God no longer counts our sin against us, but is pleased with us.

When we apply this to Baptism we rightly say that we have in *Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*, an expression of the faith and confession whereby the Christian religion is distinguished from all non-Christian religions.

It is true then, that Baptism is a work, **not** which we offer to God, but in which *God baptizes us*, and in which God offers and presents the remission of our sins.

That this statement of our Christian faith is Scriptural we see from Acts 2:38:

“Then Peter said unto them, 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.

The same is clearly witnessed to by other Scripture passages.

In Acts 22:16, Ananias says to Saul, whose hands are stained with the blood of Christians he persecuted, having delivered so many of them to be put to death: “Be baptized, and wash away thy sins” —

And this “washing away of sins” Baptism does, not only in individual cases, but of the whole Christian Church in general, Ephesians 5:25, 26: *“Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.”*

Therefore, just as the *spoken word* of the Gospel offers the forgiveness of sins and is thereby a means of regeneration, so also it is the case with Holy Baptism, according to Titus 3:5, where we read: *“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”*.

Furthermore, because Holy Baptism offers the forgiveness of sins, it is also an instrument of the Holy Spirit for creating and strengthening faith, as we read in John 16:14: “*He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*”; for implanting into the Christian Church, as we read in First Corinthians 12:13 “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*”), and for granting the sure hope of eternal life as we read in John 3:5: “*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*”

Anyone who denies the clear teaching of Scripture that Holy Baptism is a means whereby God works the forgiveness of sins, creates and strengthens faith, makes of Baptism, so far as he is concerned, only a human work.

In itself, of course, Holy Baptism remains until the end of the world what Jesus Christ has made it, a true ***Means of Grace***, an instrument which God employs to bring about conversion, bestow justifying faith, and produce the sanctification of the believer.

Now, concerning the relation of faith to this ***Means of Grace*** we may summarize as follows:

First, without faith there is no salutary use of Baptism.

Secondly, whoever bases faith upon faith instead of upon the means of grace, (the Word and Sacraments) falls away from Christianity. This is because such a one believes God to be gracious, ***not*** upon the basis of the forgiveness of sins which Christ Alone gained for us through His suffering and death, but upon the basis of some imagined good quality in himself or good work he has performed.

In the case of infant Baptism, the faith that relies upon God’s grace bestowed in Baptism, is not the faith of the parents, nor the faith of the person through whom God is performing the baptism, but it is the faith created by the Holy Spirit in the Baptism itself. To deny that little children and even infants can believe, is to deny the almighty power of God.

One final note: Baptism is a *permanent* covenant established with us by God Himself. Therefore, a person's baptism is not to be repeated.

However, as Christians we ought to reflect upon our baptism often throughout our lives for spiritual comfort and for daily sanctification, as we read in Galatians 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.*" and First Peter 3:21: "*...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.*"

And as Christians we should always remember, as we read in Romans 6:4: "*... we are buried with him (**Christ**) 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.*"

And now may the Peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.