

DID MY BAPTISM COUNT?

*FOR MY FIRST GODSON CALEB,
NOW SERVING IN THE U.S.A.F.*

DID MY BAPTISM COUNT?

FROM MARTIN LUTHER'S
*LETTER TO TWO PASTORS
CONCERNING REBAPTISM*

Translated by
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FOREWORD

“Why should I baptize my baby?” “Should I wait until my child knows what is going on before I have him baptized?” “Should my relative, who is joining a new church, allow herself to be baptized—even though she was baptized as an infant?” These three questions have, somewhat unfortunately, become common nowadays within Lutheran congregations.

I suppose that the question “Why?” should be discussed a bit here, as in, “Why are such questions asked at all?” Even fifty years ago, the birth of a child signaled the baptism of that child soon thereafter; and it was generally understood (among Lutherans at least): One baptism is enough—even if a person leaves Lutheranism for another Christian denomination.

One answer to the question as to “Why?” may be that the theology of baptism, and especially infant baptism, had ceased long ago to be formally taught, for since cultural pressure still drove young married couples to the baptismal font with their newborn children (multiple times!), and such a joyous occasion was accompanied by significant celebration of extended family, all seemed good and right within the Church. Why teach what so often was practiced before the congregation? If parents were bringing their children for baptism, what more

needed to be said?

Changing demographics within the United States, however, have somewhat altered this situation. In that farms have increased in size from the once standard 80 acres per family to thousands of acres per family, the chances of the children of farm families staying in their communities to raise their own families have decreased. In large cities, the suburbs teeming with young families in the 1960's and 70's have become suburbs of the retired. Finding no housing for their own families, the children raised there moved outward to form new suburbs. But unfortunately, with the postponement of marriage, and the reticence among married couples to give birth before their late twenties or early thirties, the frequency of trips to the baptismal font in newly formed suburbs does not match the rate of that of the older.

The frequency of single-motherhood and other forms of parenting has also affected the cultural understanding of baptism. With single-mothers, the challenge becomes the baptism ceremony itself. Although they have the best of intentions, the awkwardness of their new situation frequently causes the parent to avoid some sort of public baptism—especially one that takes place in a church service. Of course, the opposite does occur as well, with the single-mother and live-in boyfriend insisting that the baptism take place within the service of the church (thus somehow legitimizing the entire situation). Here then, the congregation finds itself feeling awkward. Why? Although members certainly rejoice that a child is baptized, and are willing to forgive the action leading

to the child's birth, a baptism within the service of the church can give them the feeling they are being asked to approve of an ongoing situation (adultery) which they cannot.

The break-up of families has also affected baptism as an event occurring with regularity in the Church. Couples with young un-baptized children who divorce can find themselves viewing the baptism of the children as just another bone of contention. When will it occur? Who will stand up at the baptismal font? Who will be the sponsors? Where will the reception take place? Who will be responsible for the spiritual life of the child? A result can be that the baptism of a child is simply put off until custody matters are settled, a second marriage occurs, or some sort of stability is reestablished.

Related to this situation somewhat is the baptism of children of non-members. Although the Church should and does baptize all children, all nations, that are brought to it, the challenge of baptizing the children of non-members is that of parental guidance in spiritual matters. Is it not simply hypocritical on the parents' part to bring a child to baptism with the full intention of never stepping foot in the Church again? What meaning then remains to the pledges of parents and sponsors to train-up the newly baptized child in the way in which he should go?

Some congregations, realizing the inherent problems with such a situation, have even begun distinguishing such baptisms from baptisms of Church members by calling them "community baptisms." A "community

baptism” as it was described to me, is a baptism done by a congregation in which the congregation itself does not then take on the spiritual responsibility for the one baptized. In other words, the child is baptized, but is not made a member of the congregation.

In promoting such a practice, however, a congregation unwittingly approves of what the parents are doing by, for all intents and purposes, doing the same thing! What is even worse, by denying membership in the congregation to the one baptized, the congregation is publicly denying what has indeed happened, and that is, the child has—in spite of everything—been made a member of the one holy Christian and Apostolic church.

Even more tragic, however, and befuddling, are instances in which an adult relative of a child (uncle, aunt, grandmother, etc.) seeks to have the child baptized against the wishes of the parents. Certainly the adult relative is doing the right thing by seeking such a baptism. Not being the parent of the child, however, an issue of authority and responsibility is raised.

Yet, in spite of all these challenging issues of pastoral practice, perhaps the main reason why more and more questions like “Why should I baptize my baby?” and “Should I be baptized again as an adult?” are being asked today is due to the rise of Evangelicalism. What is Evangelicalism? Evangelicalism is not a specific church body or denomination, but a movement within church bodies and denominations. According to a recent article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Evangelicalism in the state of Minnesota now claims more membership than

all other mainline Protestant denominations (except Lutheranism) *combined*.¹ A list of church bodies which are members of the *National Association of Evangelicals* include 50 groups/associations from a vast spectrum of (mostly) the Reformed tradition: Assemblies of God, Baptists, Brethren, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of God, Church of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians, Four-square Gospel, Pentecostal, Reformed Episcopal, the Salvation Army, the Worldwide Church of God, and the Wesleys.² Although a movement comprised of so many different traditions, to consider oneself an Evangelical Christian, one must simply: 1) have a personal relationship with Jesus; 2) believe in the accuracy or truth of the Bible; 3) have some kind of conversion experience; 4) possess a personal need to talk about faith with others in order to convert them.³

The absence of baptism, and especially infant baptism, as a plank in the theology of the Evangelical movement is a bit disconcerting. It is, after all, Jesus Christ Himself who proclaimed: “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved!” (Mark 16:16) and also “Go therefore 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). From the inception of the Church, baptism—including the baptism of infants—has been central to its worship and life. The German theologian Joachim Jeremias in his seminal but brief work *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962) has demonstrated on the basis

partially of inscriptions on ancient tombstones that the question at least of infant baptism in the early church was not one of when it began, but when the attempt was made to stop it! (A more accessible treatment of this question is found in A. Andrew Das' *Baptized into God's Family: The Doctrine of Infant Baptism for Today* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991)).

It is not as if baptism is completely absent from the Evangelical movement. Strangely enough, many such churches "bless" infants, meaning supposedly, that God can affect them in some sort of beneficiary way—even though the wishes of the baby in this regard cannot be known. Granted, some churches within the movement still practice infant baptism. By and large, however, the mega-churches associated with the Evangelical movement stick to infant blessings, and the baptisms of adults they conduct are not part of their weekly worship services. With the popularization of the theology of Evangelicalism among the members of other Christian traditions via radio stations dedicated to its dissemination, a cultural emphasis upon baptism in general seems to have decreased, and thus a general understanding of baptism among Christians, especially infant baptism, lost.

This brings us then to the work printed here. Interestingly enough, a number of the denominations listed above are direct theological descendants of those in Luther's day, who insisted that infant baptism was invalid and that the only baptism of any significance is believer's (or "believers" or "believers'") baptism. What

is believer's baptism? Believer's baptism is the practice of baptizing those only whom, as consenting teenagers or adults, come forward to have themselves baptized—even if they were baptized already as infants.

Why did such a practice become popular in the 16th century? I suppose two causes could be forwarded here, both somewhat speculative: 1) Since every person within the Holy Roman Empire was baptized as an infant, a lack of piety as an adult was believed to prove the ineffectiveness of an infant baptism; 2) Since baptism to a certain extent brought one not only into the Church, but into the government as well, the baptism of infants become somewhat subtly a question of governmental authority. To put it another way, by allowing oneself to be baptized again as an adult, one was rejecting the authority of both the Church and the state.

The occasion for the following work was a letter Martin Luther (1483-1546) received from two pastors asking him about the practice of baptizing a Christian a second time. Luther's response, written at the end of 1527 and the beginning of 1528 addresses the issues raised by the pastors and in so doing, provides a nice summary of the theology of baptism in general, and infant baptism in particular.

¹ "Evangelical Christianity comes of age," Martha Sawyer Allen, *Star Tribune*, Sunday, March 2, 2003, p. A20.

² "NAE Member Denominations", *Star Tribune*, Sunday, March 2, 2003, p. A20.

³"Q: What makes someone an evangelical? A: At least four criteria must exist: Having a personal relationship with Christ. Belief in the accuracy and truth—some would say inerrancy—of the Bible. Some kind of faith conversion experience often called being “born again.” A personal need to talk about faith with others, to convert them to one’s faith.” Martha Sawyer Allen, “What makes Evangelical Christians who they are,” *Star Tribune*, Sunday, March 2, 2003, p. A20.

1

NOT ON FAITH, BUT PROMISE

There are those nowadays who refuse to baptize infants and also re-baptize adults who were already baptized as infants. This practice is based upon the passage “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). According to this passage—so they conclude—a person may not be baptized unless he first has faith.

This seems a bit rash, for how can the faith even of adults who are to be baptized be known? Do those who practice baptism in such a way insist that the faith of an adult be known with certainty? But how can anyone

know that? Have they become gods so that they can examine the content of people's hearts?

Now, if they cannot possibly know who has faith and who doesn't, how can they insist that a person have faith before a baptism is performed? Since they then too baptize without the knowledge of whether or not the person they are baptizing truly has faith, aren't they really, by refusing to baptize infants, arguing against themselves?

Would baptizing someone whose faith is uncertain be any better than baptizing someone who has no faith? Both such baptisms would not be in accordance with the passage, "Whoever believes and is baptized."

I know, you argue that adults are able to confess their faith. But the passage does not read, "whoever confesses...", but "whoever believes." A person may

***A person may indeed know
someone's confession with
certainty, but never his faith***

indeed know someone's confession with certainty, but never his faith. "All men are liars" (Ps 116:11); "God alone knows the

heart" (1 Kings 8:39).

Knowing what someone says is not the same as knowing what someone believes. So if a person whose faith is unknown is never to be baptized then no one must ever be baptized. You could baptize someone a hundred times a day and still never know of his faith with certainty.

So how can anyone baptize an adult who has been baptized as an infant with the idea that a knowledge of

faith must be certain? The very same passage, “whoever believes...” stands powerfully against such a practice. It speaks of a certain faith. Yet the content of the heart is hidden, even for those who would practice what is called “believer’s baptism.”

This even applies to cases where the person himself is uncertain. Suppose a person wonders if he possessed faith when he was baptized as a child. So he concludes he must be baptized as an adult just to be sure.

But now, what happens, if, the very next day, the devil attacks his heart so that the faith upon which he was baptized as an adult comes into question? He says to himself, “I know I have a genuine faith today, but I’m not sure about yesterday. I will be baptized again; the first two must not have taken.”

Do you think the devil can’t do this? Learn to know him better. He can do far more than this.

And then, what if the devil goes after the third and the fourth baptisms in the same way? He would love it.

He has done this very thing to me and many other people in the matter of the confession of sins. We could never sufficiently confess

our sins, so we sought one absolution after another, one father confessor after another. There was no rest.

***What will this lead to?
Continuous baptisms with
no end in sight***

We wanted to make everything depend on the completeness of our confession.

These people who practice believer’s baptism want to base everything on a certain knowledge of faith. What

will this lead to? Continuous baptisms with no end in sight.

So this line of argumentation is hopeless. Neither the person baptizing nor the one being baptized can ever have certainty if a baptism is valid only with faith as a precondition. The passage “whoever believes” is actually more strongly in opposition to those who re-baptize adults than against those who practice infant baptism.

Still some insist on believer’s baptism. They don’t want to believe witnesses,¹ since they are human. Yet they believe themselves, human as they are. And what they believe—the existence of faith—cannot even be known. They have become more than human and capable of seeing the heart as if their own faith were a more certain thing to them than the witness of Christendom.

So if those who practice believer’s baptism really want to use this passage “whoever believes,” then they must condemn even more strongly the practice of baptizing adults who were baptized as children. A person cannot know of faith with certainty. The one baptizing can’t, nor can the one being baptized.

This is especially true in trial and danger. Sometimes a person who thinks he has faith has none, while someone who doubts and believes himself especially weak stands strong.

This passage “whoever believes” simply does not compel us to determine who does and who doesn’t possess faith. All it does is make clear that if one is to be saved he must truly have faith and not be a hypocrite.

He is not to think he can place his trust in his baptism

while rejecting faith. It doesn't, after all, say "Whoever knows that he has faith," or "If a person knows that someone else has faith," but "Whoever has it..." Whoever has faith, has faith. A person must have faith, but this is not something we can know of another person with certainty.

¹ Another argument made for re-baptizing adults, and addressed by Luther earlier in a section of the work not included here, is that people who witnessed an infant baptism ultimately could not be trusted. Thus later in life, when the only evidence remaining for an infant baptism was the word of the witnesses to the baptism, how could anyone be sure that they had ever been baptized?

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1. Why do some Christians refuse to baptize infants and re-baptize adults who were baptized as infants?
 2. What conclusion do such people draw from Mark 16:16?
 3. Can we know for certain that anyone has faith?
 4. Can a person's confession be known with certainty?
 5. To what will baptizing on the basis of a certain knowledge of faith lead?
 6. Does the statement "whoever believes" compel us to determine who does and who does not possess faith?
 7. What then does the statement "whoever believes" compel us to do?

2

INFANTS CAN INDEED HAVE FAITH

Besides this, no one can show that little children do not possess faith. The practice of baptizing children has been received from the early church. So why should anyone change it, especially on the basis of such a doubtful principle?

If someone wants to alter or abolish an ancient practice, he ought, at least, to show that it is against the Bible. Christ said that what is not against us is for us (Luke 9:50). We ourselves have abolished the sacrifice of the mass, monastic life, and clerical celibacy. But we have done this by showing how they are contrary to clear

and certain scripture. But lacking that, we certainly ought to have allowed them to continue.

How can they prove that infants are not able to have faith? What portion of the Bible can be the basis for

What portion of the Bible can be the basis for this belief of theirs?

this belief of theirs? They think it is true just because infants cannot yet speak or think like adults. But this is an unsure principle, no, an

entirely false one. It is nothing on which to base belief.

Meanwhile, we can produce all sorts of scripture to show that infants can indeed have faith. The Bible shows that they can have faith even when they can neither think like an adult nor speak. For example, we read that the Jews offered their sons and daughters as sacrifices to the false gods (Ps 106:37-8). In doing this, they were said to have poured out innocent blood. Now, if it was innocent blood, then the children must have been pure and holy. But how could they be pure and holy without faith and the Holy Spirit?

What about the slaughter of the innocents? The children Herod slaughtered were not more than two years old. Clearly, they lacked adult intellect or language. Yet they were holy and eternally saved.

Furthermore, Christ says in Matthew 19:14 that the kingdom belongs to little children. John the Baptist, even while yet in his mothers womb (Luke 1:41), was able to have faith. At least it certainly seems so to me.

Now, you might say that John the Baptist was a special case. You might believe that his situation does not prove

that all infants, when baptized, can have faith. But I'm not trying to show that all infants can have faith. All I have to show is that the basis for this re-baptizing is false.

That basis is that it can be proven that infants "cannot" have faith. But if John the Baptist, not yet born and without speech or thought, could have faith, then it must be directly contrary to the Bible to say that this is not possible.

***All I have to show is
that the basis for this
re-baptizing is false***

If it isn't against the Bible that an infant can have faith, but in fact, is in accord with it, then you have a problem: The very basis of this practice of re-baptizing, namely, that infants cannot have faith, must be the thing that is against scripture. This must be recognized from the outset.

If I have proven to you, with these scriptures, that baptized infants may indeed have faith, who will convince you otherwise? And if you are not sure, why be so quick to say that the baptism of an infant is worthless? You don't know. You can't know.

-
1. Can anyone demonstrate that infants cannot possess faith?
 2. When did the practice of baptizing infants begin in the Church?

3. On what basis should an ancient practice in the Church be changed?
4. Even though they cannot think or speak like adults, does the Bible demonstrate that infants can have faith? Where?
5. Even if the case of John the Baptist is considered extraordinary, how does it compel us to baptize infants?

3

IN BAPTISM, CHRIST COMES TO US

What if, in baptism, all infants not only have faith, but as much faith as John the Baptist had in his mother's womb? We surely can't deny that the same Christ is present and comes to us in baptism. In fact, the One who comes to us is the very baptizer who came to John in his mother's womb. He speaks just as well through the mouth of the priest now as he did through the mouth of his mother then.

Now, if Christ is present, if it is He that speaks and baptizes, then why should the Holy Spirit and faith not come to the infant? This is what happened with John

the Baptist.

The One who speaks and is present is just the same in John's case as today

in John's case as today. It is Christ, who acts and speaks. He tells us, through Isaiah (55:11), that his word does not return empty.

Now, marshal just one passage that proves infants cannot have faith in baptism. I have produced many that prove they can. The Bible may not set forth exactly how this happens. It is unknown. But it is certainly sensible to contend that it is so.

Besides, Jesus commanded that the little children be brought to him. He took those children up in his arms, kissed them, and said that the kingdom of heaven belonged to them (Matt.19:14). It is a remarkable stretch to argue that Jesus wasn't speaking of little children, but of humility. The text doesn't say they brought humble people to Jesus. It says they brought little children.

Furthermore Jesus didn't say "Let the humble come to me," but, "Let the little children come to me." So when He says "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," and "Their angels behold the face of my father," we have to apply these words to the children about whom he just spoke. The more so because he then says we ought to become like these children.

Would Jesus have given us an evil model to imitate? If children were not, by faith, holy, then he would not have said "you have to become as little children." No, he

would have said, “You have to be different than little children.”

So these super-spiritual people cannot turn these little children into the notion of humility without treating the text with complete arrogance. The words simply stand too obviously and powerfully there before the eyes.

A few will likely counter that the Jewish children were holy by virtue of being circumcised and thus could be regarded as holy when brought to Christ. But what if there were also little girls among these children? Little girls weren't circumcised.

Obviously, they brought both boys and girls to Jesus. The text doesn't specify that only boys were brought, so we have no right to exclude the girls. We have to let the word “children” stand, both boys and girls. These children were not called blessed just because they were circumcised. It was because they came to Christ.

They came from the Old to the New Testament. The words declare “Let the little children come to me, for of such is the kingdom of God.” In other words, the kingdom of God consists in the coming of these little children to Jesus. As they were brought and thus came to Christ, they were blessed, since he then took them up in his arms, blessed them, and gave them the kingdom.

Therefore, I will let rave whomever wishes. I hold yet, as in the sermons I have written, that the surest baptism is infant baptism.

For an older man may deceive and come to Christ like Judas did, and allow himself to be baptized. An infant, however, cannot deceive and comes to Christ in

baptism, as John the Baptist came to him, and as the little children were brought to him, that his word and work might come upon them, touch them, and make them holy. His word and work cannot return void, and here it is applied exclusively to an infant. If it would fail here, then it would fail everywhere and be useless, which is impossible.

It can't be denied that the psalmist was talking about little girls when he reported that the Israelites offered their daughters to the gods of Canaan (Psalm 106:37). He called the blood shed in that case "guiltless" blood. But, of course, those girls were not circumcised.

Moses also commanded, in Leviticus 12:5 that little girls, like the boys, were to be offered to God. Thus,

***But it is clear that
the infant girls were
nevertheless partners
in that circumcision***

they too were to be purified and redeemed. Infant boys were the ones circumcised, yes, but it is clear that the infant girls were nevertheless partners in that circumcision. God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:7,

"I will be the God of your descendants and circumcision will be a covenant between me and your descendants after you." Now, infant girls are also the descendants of Abraham. God is also their God, as this passage shows, even though they are not circumcised, like the boys.

Do you believe that in circumcision God received both boys and girls? Was he not the God of both? If so, why should he not receive our infants in the covenant of baptism? He has promised to be not only the God of

the Jews, but also of the gentiles (Romans 3:29).

In particular, he is the God of Christians, that is, of believers. If infants, both boys and girls, became God's children in circumcision, on account of the faith of Abraham from whom they were descended, then how much more ought baptism make each one God's child for the sake of Christ's merits? It is, after all, Christ to whom they are brought and by whom they are blessed. The foundation of these re-baptizers is everywhere unstable and they build upon it in a discreditable manner.

1. How does Christ speak through the mouth of the pastor?
2. If Christ speaks through the pastor, how is the baptism of an infant any different than the pregnant Mary's encounter with the pregnant Elizabeth?
3. Whom did Jesus command to be brought to Him?
4. How are Christians to be like little children?
5. Were the children brought to Jesus holy by virtue of their circumcision? Why or why not?
6. Who is more apt to deceive in matters of faith, an adult or a child?
7. Were infant girls also received by God in the Old Testament, even though they were not circumcised?
8. To whom is a child brought in baptism?

4

INFANTS ARE A PART OF “ALL NATIONS”

“But,” you say, “there are no examples of the baptizing of children in the gospels or epistles; and he has not specifically commanded that little children be baptized.” Well, he also hasn’t specifically commanded that old men or old women be baptized either, or anyone in between for that matter. I suppose we will have to baptize no one.

But he has commanded that “all nations” be baptized. He excluded no one. Thus, Matthew 28:19, “Go, therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them....” Now, infants are a significant portion of “all nations.”

We read, also, in Acts (16:15), and in St. Paul's epistles (1 Cor. 1:16), how the apostles baptized entire households. Now, infants are truly a significant portion of a household. It certainly appears that Christ, making no exceptions, commanded the apostles to baptize and teach all nations.

Infants are a significant portion of "all nations"

The Apostles, for their part, seem to have done exactly that, and baptized everyone present in the household. Nor did they neglect the possibility that someone like these super spiritual people might try to make a distinction between young and old. Thus, they amply answered elsewhere, making clear that there is no distinction or discrimination of persons among Christians (Romans 10:12). St. John (1 John 2:13) also clearly writes of how little children "know the father." It is obvious that infant baptism comes from the apostles, as St. Augustine also asserts.

These Re-baptizers treat everything so carelessly. They are unsure of their own argumentation and find themselves in direct opposition to such significant passages. They are forced to teach this distinction in the church between young and old, a distinction God has not made.

But even if they didn't believe in the complete sufficiency of these passages we have noted, they at least should consider how powerful they are, and ponder them. These passages strongly suggest that the whole foundation for re-baptizing is unsure. Now, if the

foundation is unsure, then the practice is false for in divine matters one must deal not with the unsure, but with the sure.

You see, a Re-baptizer knows that John had faith and was holy when Christ came and spoke to him through the mouth of his mother. If he is the least bit tractable, then he has to see that a little child also can have faith when he hears Christ's voice from the mouth of the one who is baptizing him. Christ himself is speaking. His word is not impotent.

So the Re-baptizer ought to acknowledge that it certainly is possible that this infant has faith. One cannot deny the possibility and scripture in no way speaks against it. So if the Re-baptizer does not have a good reason for denying it, then the very foundation of his re-baptism crumbles. It must, because he must first prove that little children are unable to have faith. Thus, it seems clear to me that such reasoning is unsure. It is more than unsure. It is arrogant.

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1. Is any type of age limitation for baptism mentioned in the New Testament?
 2. Who is included in the phrase "all nations"?
 3. Is there a distinction or discrimination of persons on the basis of age practiced among Christians?
 4. Can an infant hear the voice of Christ from the mouth of the one baptizing him?

5

BAPTISM IS GENUINE FOR ITS OWN SAKE

But what if we were to concede that infants have no faith? This still wouldn't prove that they ought to be baptized a second time. What if it turned out later that they believed and confessed the faith?

So it really wouldn't even be enough to prove that infants don't have faith. It would also have to be shown why this fact should lead someone to baptize them a second time.

Someone will say that the infant's baptism is not genuine without faith. Why? It is a baptism. It is genuine for its own sake, even if it is not genuinely

received in faith. If the word of God is spoken and everything is done that belongs to a baptism, just as if faith were there, why is it not a baptism?

If a thing is genuine of itself, it doesn't have to be done again just because it was not, at first, genuinely received. If the reception of the thing is what is not genuine, then the reception is what must be changed.

The misuse of a thing does not change what the thing is. In fact, without the thing being what it is in the first place, there can't even be a misuse!

So if faith comes ten years after baptism, why should a person be baptized again? Hasn't the original baptism turned out to be entirely sufficient? Such a person now has faith. Isn't faith the very thing baptism advances?

Faith isn't for the sake of baptism, but baptism for the

Faith isn't for the sake of baptism, but baptism is for the sake of faith.

sake of faith. If faith is created, then baptism now has the very thing that belongs to it and re-baptism is pointless.

Consider this: A young woman marries a man but in her heart she has no love for him. She marries him for other reasons. She actually tells a lie when she recites her vows. Is she an honorable wife before God? Of course not. Yet, after a few years have passed, she develops for her husband a deep, abiding love. Now, tell me, should there be a new engagement, new vows and a new wedding? Will someone argue that the previous engagement and wedding were nothing? He would be thought a fool. Yes, the thing was wrong originally, but

it turned out well and the man whom she had married in secret dishonor, is now her beloved husband.

What if an elderly man allowed himself to be baptized under false pretenses, then, a year later, came to faith? Dear friend, do you really think that such a man should be baptized again? His was a genuine baptism, he just didn't receive it genuinely.

So does his lack of faith destroy the genuineness of his baptism? Is human misuse and evil stronger than God's good, imperishable ordinance?

God made a covenant with the children of Israel on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:10). Now, some of the Israelites didn't receive that covenant well. They received it without genuine faith.

Suppose those same people later came to faith? Should the original covenant God made be deemed invalid? Should God appear over and over again on Sinai, for each one, to make the covenant again?

God commanded the preaching of his ten commandments. Now, some people who hear them preached don't heed them. They listen, but they don't take them to heart.

So are the ten commandments to be regarded as invalid? Are they of no benefit? Should God keep giving new commandments instead of the first ones? Or is it not enough that people repent and obey the commandments God gave first?

It seems a peculiar thing that God's eternal word should change and become something new every time man's heart changes. No, it remains a single word, and

strong, precisely so that it can be a sure reliable rock to which fickle man may return.

Suppose someone swore an oath of obedience to an earthly Lord, but with the secret intention of killing him. However, after three days, he repented and committed himself to genuine heartfelt obedience. Should he now, in such a case, swear a new and different oath?

His allegiance is now from the heart. It was his heart's allegiance, not the oath, that was defective.

If this is the way it's going to be, then we will struggle continuously to baptize enough. We will never stop. I will have to take the passage "Whoever believes and is baptized..." and make it my rule. If I find a Christian, fallen or faithless, I will say "This man is without faith, so his baptism is invalid. I must baptize him again." And if he falls yet again, I will say, "Look, he is faithless, so that previous baptism must be invalid and we have to baptize him a third time."

And that's the way it will be. As often as he falls, or even doubts his faith, I will say, "He doesn't have faith, therefore his baptism is invalid. He must be baptized again both now, and as often as is necessary, until he never falls. He must satisfy the passage

***Tell me, what
Christian will ever be
baptized sufficiently?***

"Whoever believes and is baptized." Tell me, what Christian will ever be baptized sufficiently? Whose baptism will ever be certain?

But isn't it possible that baptism itself could remain sufficient and valid even if a Christian fell from faith, or

sinned, a thousand times in one year? Could it not be enough for him to repent and return to the faith, without having to be baptized again? Why should his first baptism not be valid and sufficient if, afterward, he became a genuine believer?

You see, when it comes to a lack of faith and baptism, it doesn't matter if the lack of faith happens to be before baptism or after it. It is still a lack of faith. It is the same situation either way.

According to the foolish reasoning of these Re-baptizers, it is the baptism that must be changed, not the person. This is how they understand "Whoever believes and is baptized."

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1. Is a baptism genuine without faith?
 2. Does the misuse of some thing somehow change what that thing is?
 3. Is faith for the sake of baptism, or baptism for the sake of faith?
 4. If an adult who has no faith is baptized, should he be baptized again when faith appears?
 5. Was God forced to appear on Sinai a second time because all of the Israelites did not initially receive His covenant in faith?
 6. Does God's eternal Word change and become something new every time man's heart changes?

7. Should a person be baptized every time he falls from faith?
8. Would not a Christian then, be forced to be baptized continuously?

6

MISUSE DOES NOT DESTROY VALIDITY

So I say this: Even if the Re-baptizers could prove their impossible contention, namely, that children are unable to have faith, what would they have really proven in the end? Only that there is a misuse of the valid baptism that God gave. They wouldn't have proven that the baptism itself lacked validity.

So if something is to be changed, it is the misuse, not the valid baptism. Misuse does not change the essence of a thing. Gold does not become straw if a thief steals

***Misuse does not change
the essence of a thing***

it and misuses it. Silver does not become paper just because a usurer gains it in some dishonest way.

These Re-baptizers are, therefore, actually acting against God, sense, and nature since they fail to distinguish between baptism and its misuse. They only try to show its misuse. They want to change it just as heretics do with the gospel. The heretics understand the gospel falsely and therefore misuse the hearing of it. So they rush to change it and make a new gospel.

When one attempts to correct these Re-baptizers, they act poorly, blaspheme and shame God's own ordinance. They call it an invalid baptism either due to human misuse or impiety, though they are unable to prove either.

There is this devilish spirit of human works within them. It may talk about faith, ***It may talk about faith, but it means works*** but it means works. It compels poor people, under the name and appearance of faith, to trust in what they do.

It is just like under the papacy when we were compelled to attend the Lord's Supper for the sake of obedience, as though it were our own work. No one was moved to attend by a desire to taste of faith. Yet, in the sacrament, the work had been done and completed for us.

These Re-baptizers are also compelling works. They want a person to trust in the fact that his baptism was correctly conducted.

In truth, though they outwardly praise faith, they really don't deal with it at all. For as we already mentioned,

they could never baptize anyone if they actually demanded certainty of a person's faith as a precondition.

As to those being baptized, if they were not actually trusting in their own works, or if, at least, they earnestly sought faith, they wouldn't allow themselves to be re-baptized. Why? Because the same word of God was present in the first baptism. That spoken word remains and stands firm. It is there for them to trust. Water was already poured over them. Of this, also, they can be certain.

These realities are present to be grasped in faith. Even if the same words were spoken one hundred times, they would be the words already spoken the first time. Their power is not from constant repetition, nor from speaking them anew, but from the command they be spoken once.



1. What should be changed, the validity of baptism or its misuse?
2. What are we doing when we fail to distinguish between baptism and its misuse?
3. By insisting on a second baptism, what is really being asked? In what is a person asked to put their trust?
4. Why would a person who does not trust in their own works, or earnestly seeks faith, not allow himself to be baptized a second time?
5. What is the source of the power of the words spoken in baptism?

7

RE-BAPTISM: A SUPERIOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

It is the genuine masterpiece of the devil to lure a Christian from the righteousness of faith to the righteousness of his own works. He did this to the Galatians and the Corinthians who had a proper faith and conducted their lives by it (Gal. 5:7). Now, he sees that the Germans have come to know Christ through the gospel. They have faith and are righteous before God because of it. So he rushes in to tear them away from such a righteousness and lead them to re-baptizing, as though it were a superior righteousness. In this way, he makes them deny the former righteousness as

unsuitable. Thus they grasp a false righteousness.

What can I say? We Germans are, and remain, true

The very act of being re-baptized speaks against the faith formerly held

Galatians. The very act of being re-baptized speaks against the faith formerly held. It is a condemnation of what was previously be-

lieved and declares it to be sin.

This is the most terrible of things. Paul said that the Galatians who allowed themselves to be circumcised were cut off from Christ. He said they were making Christ a servant of sin if they allowed it (Gal. 5:2).

Satan has us in mind with all of this. He wishes to call our teaching and spirit into question. Perhaps we were not genuinely baptized, he says. But a person can know a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:17,18).

Neither under the papacy, nor among the hordes, have we seen those who so powerfully set forth and handle scripture as do those on our side. This is by God's grace. And it's not the least of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:10).

At present, we are observing among these Re-baptizers a phenomenon that is a genuine fruit of the devil. Some of them are now abandoning wives and children, houses and homes. They don't want to live under any temporal authority whatsoever. St. Paul had something to say here: "Whoever does not care for his own family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim. 5:8). In 1 Corinthians 7:13 he taught that one Christian spouse ought not abandon the other even if an unbeliever.

Christ also taught that marriages ought to be preserved intact where there is no adultery (Matthew 19:9). Thus, we teach that such institutions should not only be allowed to continue, but must be upheld and honored.

We are to practice faith through love, and live in peace. This certainly causes no uproar and no one can fairly complain about our teaching in this respect. Yes, the papists do try to blame every calamity on us, but others can judge whether this is fair. Even the consciences of our accusers may well come to our defense.



1. Against what does the act of a second baptism speak?
2. How does a second baptism compare to the actions of the Christians in Galatia who allowed themselves to be circumcised?
3. Have some Christians, once they have come to faith, abandoned their wives and children, houses and homes? If so, why? What is the right thing to do?
4. What is the ultimate reason for such abandonment?

8

THE ONE BAPTIZING NEED NOT HAVE FAITH

We must also, at this point, discard a notion promoted in this connection, namely, that a baptism is not valid if the priest or someone else doing the baptizing, doesn't have faith. Even if St. Peter himself baptized someone, a person could not know whether, at that exact moment, St. Peter believed or doubted. No one can see the heart.

This same sort of thinking is what animated the Donatists in an earlier age. They, too, re-baptized people when they noticed that a few priests were not holy. They began to make the validity of the baptism dependent on the holiness of the baptizers.

Christ certainly didn't. He based it upon his word and command.

Actually, our Re-baptizers are tempted to take the position of those who reject the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. They claim that truth and scripture compel them, but it isn't so. It offends them that just any person, sanctified or not, may consecrate the elements in holy communion. They act as if everyone in the world is convinced that they themselves are pure and holy and have faith. Yet they are really knaves who rush to judge the holiness of others, not noticing the log in their own eyes (Matthew 7:3).

But we contend that St. John wasn't ashamed to hear the word of God from Caiaphas. He praised it as a prophecy (John 11:51). Moses and the children of Israel received prophecy from the godless Balaam. They regarded it as the word of God (Numbers 24:17). St. Paul made use of the heathen poets Epimenides and Aratus. He regarded their sayings as the word of God and praised them (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12). Christ commanded that the people heed and obey the godless Pharisees. They sat on Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2).

So we ought to let God judge an evil life, and not be

If a teacher is evil, it is he himself who is evil, not his teaching

turned away by it. On the other hand, when their word is godly, despite their godless life, it should please us. If a teacher is evil, it is he himself who is evil, not his teaching. If he teaches rightly, then we are rightly taught.

The pious Magi did exactly the same thing (Matthew

2:4 ff.). They heard the word of God as quoted from Micah. But it came through Herod, a wretched king. Herod, for his part, had heard it earlier from the godless chief priests and scribes. Nevertheless, on the basis of this word, the Magi traveled to Bethlehem. There, they found Christ. It did not hinder them in the least that they had heard God's word only through Herod, a man who wished to murder Christ.

So we have to confess that the Re-baptizers possess the word of God in other articles of the faith. Whoever hears these from them and believes will be saved. This would be true even if they were all unholy heretics and blasphemers of Christ.

It is no small grace that God gives his word also through evil and godless men. It is perhaps better than when he gives it through those who are holy. In such cases, it can happen that the imprudent fall away and rely more on the holiness of man than on the word of God. When that happens, men are elevated to a greater position than God and his word.

This isn't a danger when the preacher is Judas, Caiaphas, or Herod. Of course, this is no excuse for an unholy life, though God can certainly use such lives for his purposes.

Now, if someone who is godless can possess and teach God's word, and that word remain valid, why couldn't he baptize and administer the Lord's Supper and these also remain valid? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that it is a greater thing to teach God's word than to baptize. If the greater would be valid, despite a godless heart,

why not the lesser?

We have pointed out already that if one must know the faith of the person baptizing before the baptism is valid, then no baptism would ever be valid. So I ask, Have you been baptized again? Yes? How do you know that your baptism is valid now? The man who baptized you is a believer? How do you know? Have you seen his heart? So your position is as firm as butter in the sun.



1. Must the person performing a baptism have faith?
2. Upon what did Christ base the validity of baptism?
3. Can a person who is not a Christian speak the Word of God?
4. Does the goodness of what one teaches depend upon his own goodness?
5. From whom did the Magi hear the Word of God?
6. If we had to rely on the faith of the one baptizing for the baptism to be valid, would we ever be sure a baptism is valid?

9

CHRIST COMMANDS THAT BAPTISM OCCUR

Our teaching, on the other hand, is based on the strongest and surest possible foundation. God has made a covenant with the entire world. He will be their God. This the Gospel declares when Christ commands that the Gospel be preached to all the world. The prophets of the Old Testament made this clear in a multitude of ways.

As a sign of this covenant, Christ instituted, commanded and directed that all nations be baptized. Matthew 28:19 stands firm: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

etc.” This is just as God did when he made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. He promised to be their God and gave, as a sign of the covenant, circumcision. (Genesis 17:7,11)

Our foundation is solid and sure. We baptize not because we are sure of faith, but because we are sure of the command of God. We know he has both commanded baptism and wishes us to have it.

Even if we were never sure of faith, we could always be certain of the command of God. God has established

We baptize not because we are sure of faith, but because we are sure of the command of God

baptism. He has set it forth publicly before all the world. We cannot fail in this confidence because God’s command cannot deceive. On the other hand, he hasn’t commanded anyone to place

such confidence in his own faith.

It is, of course, true that a person ought to have faith when he is baptized. But he shouldn’t be baptized on the basis of the certainty of faith’s presence.

There is a big difference between having faith and making trust in its presence the measure of the genuineness of a baptism. Anyone who bases the validity of his baptism upon the presence of faith will not only be uncertain, but even an idolater, a denier of Christ. What he is doing is having faith in what is his own, namely, a gift given him by God, and not on the basis of God’s word alone.

Someone else might put faith in his own strength,

power, wisdom or holiness, which are also gifts of God. But it would be the same thing.

But a person who is baptized on the basis of God's word, that is, on the basis of his command, even if faith is absent, has a genuine baptism. It is valid and sure because God commanded it.

Now, to be sure, it isn't a benefit to the one who lacks faith. It isn't a benefit precisely because he lacks faith. It is, however, a baptism. It doesn't become invalid, unsure, or nothing just because he lacks faith.

If that were the case, if everything not of benefit to unbelievers became nothing or invalid, there would be nothing at all that remained valid or good. Just think, the gospel is commanded to be preached to all the world. It doesn't benefit those without faith. So is it invalid? Unsure? Nothing? God himself is of no benefit to those without faith. So is there then no God?

Suppose, now, an elderly man asks to be baptized. "I want to be baptized," he says. So you ask him "Well, do you have faith?" This is exactly what Philip asked the jailor in Acts 8:37. We also commonly ask the same thing today. Now, should this fellow say "Oh my, yes, I can move mountains with my faith." No, he ought instead to respond:

***God himself is of no
benefit to those
without faith***

"I do believe, yet my faith is weak and unsure. I wish to be baptized because God has instituted it. He wants me to do this. I will do it because he has asked. In time, my faith will do as it is able. But if I am baptized on the

basis of God’s institution, then I know I am baptized. If, instead, my baptism were only valid based on the quality of my present faith, how would I know that tomorrow I would not be found faithless and thus unbaptized? What if tomorrow Satan were to attack me and says that perhaps I had insufficient faith at the moment of my baptism? No indeed. Since God has commanded it, that is certain enough for me. Of course, the benefit of baptism is surely bound to my faith and to me. If I lack faith, baptism is of no use to me. If I possess faith, then it is. But baptism itself is not invalid or unsure on this basis. It’s validity and certainty rests upon the certain word and command of God.”

A person, likewise, can say of his infant baptism:

“I thank God and am happy that I was baptized as an infant. What God has instituted has been accomplished. This is true whether I have faith or not. God’s institution gives validity to my baptism. Thus, it is valid and sure. God strengthen my faith, whether strong or weak this day, and make me sure with respect to it.”

But faith is always lacking, since when it comes to faith we have enough to learn for an entire lifetime. It can happen that a person can say ‘Look, faith was once present but is no longer.’ But baptism lacks for nothing. No one can say ‘Look, there was once a baptism, but it is no longer there.’ Baptism still stands because the institution of God still stands and what has been done according to his institution both stands and will remain.”

***But faith is
always lacking***

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1. What is a sign of the covenant that God made with the world?
 2. Do we then baptize because we are sure of faith?
 3. Should a person have faith when he is baptized?
 4. Why is baptism valid and sure?
 5. Does lack of faith make a baptism invalid?

10

INFANT BAPTISM IS INDEED VALID

In what we have written thus far, we have proven well enough that the Re-baptizers have no grounds for teaching that infant baptism is without value. They profess to be certain that infants are baptized without faith. Yet of this they cannot be certain.

No, there is no scripture which in so many words says “You shall baptize infants because they also can have faith.” If someone demands such a passage from us, then we must yield and concede the point. The matter is not set forth in the Bible like that.

But pious and discerning Christians never demand

such things. This is the sort of the thing demanded by quarrelsome, stubborn sects. They demand it so they can appear to be clever.

Yet they, for their part, can point to no scripture which says “You shall baptize old people but not infants.” We are convinced, though, that infant baptism is valid, that infants can indeed have faith, and this on the basis of many strong arguments.

Firstly, since infant baptism comes from the Apostles and has been observed since apostolic times, we are not at liberty to oppose it. We have to let it stand.

No one has ever been able to show that infants, in baptism, do not have faith, or that such baptisms are not valid. Even were I simply not sure, in conscience I would still have to allow them to be baptized. That would certainly be better than abolishing the practice in the case of uncertainty.

No one has ever been able to show that infants, in baptism, do not have faith

After all, if baptism is valid and useful and actually blesses children (as we believe), and I abolish it, I become guilty of the souls of those children lost without it. How dreadful and horrid is that!

On the other hand, if the baptism of infants is not valid, that is, pointless and useless, there would be no sin in infant baptism except that God’s word had been spoken to no purpose and his sign used to no purpose. But I wouldn’t be guilty of lost souls, only of the pointless implementation of God’s word and sign.

But God would easily forgive me for such a thing. I acted unknowingly, indeed, had to act from fear. I didn't invent the practice. It was passed down to me from the very beginning. I could not demonstrate with any scripture that it was not valid, or that I acted regretfully when I endorsed it.

Besides, it would be practically the same as when I preach God's word on the basis of his command. Among unbelievers, his word is often preached fruitlessly, as we read in Matthew 7:6. Pearls are cast before swine and holy things are thrown to the dogs. But what is one to do?

In preaching, I would, likewise, prefer to sin on the side of preaching fruitlessly, than not to preach at all. In fruitless preaching, I am guilty of no souls, but in not preaching at all, I may be guilty of many souls. And a single soul is too many.

I am saying this only to make clear what would be the circumstance if infant baptism were unsure, that is, if someone didn't know if it ought to be done or not. We did not establish it ourselves. It is a practice received from the time of the Apostles.

A person should not abolish or change what he cannot abolish or change on the basis of the clearest word of God. God is marvelous in his works. He bears witness with clarity to

***That against which
God has not born
witness, one should
leave alone***

what he opposes. And that against which he has not born witness, one should leave alone. It is his work.

As for us, we are without blame. He will not deceive us. It would be a nasty bit, would it not, if we actually believed infant baptism were to no avail, but we baptized babies anyway, like the Waldensians do. This is a mocking of both God and his word.

1. Is there a Bible passage which says “You shall baptize infants because they also can have faith”?
2. Is there a Bible passage which says “You shall baptize old people but not infants”?
3. What would be worse: to baptize infants even though such a baptism were not effective, or to refrain from baptizing infants, even though such a baptism were effective?
4. Does all preaching bear fruit?
5. To what does God bear witness with clarity?

11

INFANTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BAPTIZED

Secondly, we must give weight to this consideration: Heresies have never endured. Always, and in short order, as St. Peter says, they are exposed and brought to disgrace. It is just as when St. Paul referred to Jannes and Jambres and their sort (2 Timothy 3:8-9). In the end, their foolishness became evident to everyone.

Now, if infant baptism were really invalid, why would God have allowed it to go on for so long and to become so universally accepted throughout Christendom? He wouldn't. It would long ago have been disgraced before everyone.

The fact that the Re-baptizers now seek to disgrace it proves nothing. It remains a question yet incomplete and does not amount to its having been brought to shame before the world.

For God has so preserved Christians, that in all the world, they accept the Bible as the Bible, the Lord's Prayer as the Lord's Prayer and childlike faith as faith. He has preserved infant baptism in exactly the same way. He has not allowed it to be abolished.

***Such a miracle of
God demonstrates
that infant baptism
must have validity***

Yet, all during that time, one heresy after another has fallen, heresies far newer, far younger than the practice of infant baptism. Such a miracle of God demonstrates that infant baptism must have validity.

After all, God has not acted in such a way with respect to the papacy. It is a new thing which has, for that reason, never been accepted by all Christians in all the world, as have infant baptism, the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, and so forth.

Now, you might think such arguments don't really prove anything. They haven't demonstrated that infant baptism is certain because they don't rest on a specific passage of scripture. Fair enough. On such a basis, we will allow that a person would not be justified in instituting infant baptism now.

But at the same time, such arguments prove enough that no one today, with good conscience, can cast aside infant baptism or let it fall from use. God has not merely

permitted it, but preserved it from the beginning so that it has not been lost. When man sees the work of God, he has to yield and believe, just as when he hears God's word.

So the burden of proof lies with those who would abolish it. These are the ones who ought to be compelled to point to plain scripture showing that we ought to flee it.

***So the burden of
proof lies with those
who would abolish it***

It is similar to the question of the papacy. We let it stand as a work of God, yet since scripture is against it, it must be seen not as a work of his grace, but of his anger, a work one ought to avoid. Similarly plagues are God's work too, works of his anger, not of his grace.

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1. Have heresies endured within the church?
 2. How long has infant baptism been practiced within the Church?
 3. Has the papacy ever been accepted by all Christians everywhere?
 4. What should we do when we see the work of God?

12

THOSE BAPTIZED AS INFANTS POSSESS SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Thirdly, it is clear that infant baptism is a work of God for this reason: God, throughout history, has given to many who were baptized as infants, many great and holy gifts. He has enlightened them and strengthened them with the Holy Spirit. He has given them an understanding of scripture and has done great things through them in Christendom. John Hus and his colleagues at the time, and so many saints before him, are examples of this.

God still does the same today. He doesn't urge all these people to be baptized again. Undoubtedly, he

would do this if he believed his institution of baptism were not being validly practiced.

God does not act contrary to himself. Why would he confirm disobedience to his institution of baptism by giving to people thus baptized such gifts?

Since God gives these gifts, gifts we must recognize as his own, it is obvious that he confirms infant baptism and regards those who are thus baptized as validly baptized.

So it is clear that the first baptism is valid; the second must, then, be invalid. Consider Acts 15:8-9. Here, St. Peter and St. Paul prove that God has accepted the gentiles and that these gentiles need not keep the law of Moses. How? By pointing out that God had given holy gifts to these very gentiles. We argue the same way.

Fourthly, if the first, or infant baptism, were not valid, it would follow that for over a thousand years there would have been no baptism and no Christendom. This is

***... it would follow that
for over a thousand
years there would
have been no baptism***

impossible. For if this were so, then that article of the faith which says: "I believe in the holy Christian church" would be false. In more than a thousand years, there has been almost nothing except infant

baptism. If all these baptisms were invalid, then Christendom would have existed for that exceedingly long period without baptism. And if she existed without baptism, then she would be no Christendom.

Christendom is the bride of Christ. She is subject

and obedient to Christ. She has his spirit, his word, his baptism, his sacrament, and all that Christ has.

If infant baptism were not common throughout the world, if, say, it had only been received by a few, as was the papacy, for example, then perhaps the Re-baptizers would have a point. In that case they could justly struggle against it just as we struggle against those spiritual individuals who have made of the sacrament an offering to God. They teach this, though it remains a sacrament to the laity. But since in all of Christendom, throughout the world, infant baptism has been practiced to this very day, there is no hint that it is invalid, but instead, a strong demonstration that it is valid.

Fifthly, the scriptures agree with this. Paul says of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 that he will “sin in the temple of God.” As we have heard, if it is God’s temple, then it is not a den of heretics, but genuine Christendom. If it is genuine Christendom, then it must have a valid baptism. There can be no doubt about its genuineness.

Just consider: In the land of the Turks, under the Papists, and throughout the entire world, we hear of nothing but infant baptism. Why? Because Christ (Matthew 19:14) beckons little children to come to him. He compels them to be brought. He even says that “of such as these is the kingdom of God.”

***Throughout the world
we hear of nothing but
infant baptism***

Furthermore, the Apostles themselves baptized whole households (Acts 16:15, 1 Cor. 1:16).

And beyond all this, St. John had faith, even in his

mother's womb (Luke 1:41) showing that infants can indeed believe. We have mentioned this already.

I am not bothered by the fact that a handful of raving spirits are not satisfied by these passages. It is enough if only these passages silence those who say infant baptism is nothing. Even if the result of considering them were mere uncertainty, this would be sufficient. In the face of uncertainty, infant baptism must be allowed to remain.

To us, however, these are sufficiently clear to demonstrate that infant baptism is not contrary to scripture. On the contrary, it is in perfect harmony with it.

Sixthly, God has established his covenant with all the gentiles through the gospel. He has established baptism as its sign.

Who will close the door on little children? If circumcision, the sign of the old covenant, made believers of Abraham's children, that is, if by it they were, and were called, God's children (Genesis 17:7), then this new covenant and sign must also be powerful, and make into God's people those who receive it.

On the basis of such a commandment (for no one is excluded) we baptize everyone. We do this confidently

***When we baptize, we let
Him worry about the
faith of those baptized***

and freely, excluding no one, except only those who set themselves against it, and don't wish to receive such a covenant. When, according to

Christ's universal command, we baptize, we let him worry about the faith of those baptized. Our work is to

preach and baptize.

No, we do not have a particular passage which speaks of the baptism of infants. But they, also, have no passages which command that the elderly ought be baptized.

What we do have is the command regarding a baptism that is common to all. We have a command about preaching the gospel, likewise, a gospel common to all. We are commanded to reach out to all. Under the word “all” infants must be included. We plant and we water, and let God give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

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1. Throughout history, what has God given to those who were baptized as infants?
 2. In what way do such gifts confirm infant baptism?
 3. How is this similar to what happened in Acts 15:8-9?
 4. Since Christendom is the bride of Christ, how does this affect the Christian’s relationship to Christ?
 5. In the face of uncertainty, should infant baptism be allowed to remain?

13

BAPTISM IS INSTITUTED BY GOD

To summarize, the Re-baptizers are brazen and shallow. They do not regard baptism as a Godly institution or commandment. They believe it is but a human invention, as were many other church usages under the pope. They think it is like the consecration of salt, water, and herbs. For if they regarded it as a divine ordinance and command, they would not so blasphemously and shamelessly speak of it while simultaneously misusing it.

Now, they hold the foolish opinion that to baptize is something like the consecration of salt, or the wearing

of hood and cowl. They go even further and call it a “dog’s bath,” “a handful of water,” and many other dreadful things.

Suppose someone holds the gospel for the genuine word of God. Will he lightly blaspheme it? No indeed. Even though there may exist many who do not believe it or receive it. Still others may falsely make use of it. This makes no difference to him.

On the other hand, a person who does not hold it as God’s word might easily cast it aside, blaspheme it, and even say it is a fable or a bunch of foolish nonsense and the like. But the person who believed it was God’s word would be willing even to dispute scholars who believed blasphemous opinions about it.

It should be clear that had the Re-baptizers sought initially to prove their contentions with good arguments, they would not have seduced so many people, nor enticed them into their counsels. For they have nothing firm or sure in their favor.

So their technique has been the following: They simply hurl enormous, pungent, blasphemous words against baptism. For the devil knows well that if the foolish mob hears these foul, blasphemous words, it responds in droves.

The crowds don’t bother to ask for the foundation or the source. For example, when they hear that baptism is a “dog’s bath” and that those who baptize are “false, mischievous bath servants,” they conclude “Well, then let the old devil baptize himself and God will bring to shame the false servants of baptism” etc.

That is their foundation: Invective. Upon this they stand. They have nothing more with which to fight.

Those who are willing to speak with me of such matters, when these bold blasphemous words, “dog’s bath,” “bath servant,” or “a hand full of

***This is their
foundation: Invective.
Upon this they stand***

water” and the like, are taken away, stand as shaven little men. Nothing stands behind all the talk; nothing with which they can defend their errors.

It is identical in every respect to the way the devil has also deceived the blasphemers of the sacrament. He senses well that he can bring up nothing certain to substantiate his lies, so he flails away and fills first the ears of the foolish rabble with enormous blasphemies. He says the sacrament of the altar is but a “flesh gobbling,” “bloodsucking,” and so on.

When such monstrous words are out, then all their artistry is also at its end. And they draw these conclusions regarding the sacrament of the altar on the basis of Christ’s ascension!

The same is done by Jewish leaders to this very day. In order to preserve their children in their faith, they horribly blaspheme Christ. They call him Thola and lie about him boldly.

This terrifies an innocent tottering heart. It deceives that heart, as St. Paul says in Romans 16:18.

Thus, they have accomplished much. They have been able to lead the people with enormous blasphemy just as they wished. But have avoided having to show any

certain ground for their false beliefs. If they had first firmly and well set out to defend their position, then it would have gone the other way and their lies would have suffered reverse and been painted with more accurate colors.

But since we know that baptism is a divine thing, commanded and instituted by God, we pay no heed to the misuses of the ungodly. Instead, without fail, we look upon the command of God.

What do we see? That baptism, by itself, is a holy, blessed, noble, heavenly thing. It is to be held in all honor, fear and trembling, as are all the other commands

The fact that people misuse baptism is not the fault of baptism

and ordinances of God. What could be more fair and right?

The fact that many people misuse baptism is not the fault of baptism.

One could also blaspheme the gospel as a useless babble, given that there are many that misuse it. This would be equally senseless.

So what is to be done? Since the Re-baptizers have nothing I have seen or heard so far, except empty egregious blasphemous words, everyone ought to avoid them and protect themselves from them. As false teachers, they are the devil's certain messengers, sent into the world to blaspheme and reverse God's word and ordinance. This they do that people might not believe in it and be saved. They are the birds that gobble up the seed cast along the path (Matthew 13:4).

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1. What is the foundation upon which those who reject infant baptism stand?
 2. How are those who reject infant baptism like the birds that gobble up the seed cast along the path (Matthew 13:4)?

14

FAITH IS SUFFICIENT

Finally, there is this: What if someone had never been baptized because no one had ever spoken of baptism to him? Or what if someone, who had never been baptized in the first place, believed that he had been? His faith would surely be sufficient, wouldn't it? As he believed, so would it be before God. All things are possible to the one who has faith (Mark 9:23). Such a person could hardly be re-baptized without danger to his faith.

So how much less should those be re-baptized who know for a certainty that they have been baptized, whether at the time they had faith or not? Re-baptizers

are not able to be sure that even their re-baptisms are valid, since they base the validity of these baptisms on the faith of those baptized. But this cannot be known. So uncertainty attacks even their re-baptisms.

Now, it is a tempting of God, a sin, to be doubtful and uncertain in divine matters. People are lying when they teach uncertain opinions as though they were certain truths. They are lying as surely as those who speak directly and publicly against the truth.

Imagine, they are unsure but wish to have what they teach held for certain truth. If only they would found baptism on God's command and institution, they would soon recognize that there is no need for re-baptizing. The divine command in the first baptism was certainly sufficient.

Therefore, they blaspheme and deny both God's command and his work. The first baptism is God's institution. In that event, enough has already taken place.

Yet, they say it is invalid. It is a "dog's bath." What is this, except to say that God's institution and work are invalid and a "dog's bath"? They say this on no other basis than a desire to be certain of the faith of the one being baptized.

Yet they are never able to know this with certainty. So for the sake of an unsure opinion about someone's faith, they shamefully, lightly, deny and blaspheme God's certain institution.

What if I concede that the first baptism lacks faith? Just tell me, which ought to have first place, God's word, or faith? Isn't it true that God's word is greater than

faith? More fundamental?

God's word isn't built on faith but faith on God's word. Upon the word faith grounds itself. Faith is unstable and transitory but God's word remains forever.

Consider, if one or the other ought change, which should it be? Faith, or God's word? Faith fluctuates. God's word is changeless. So if one or the other is to change, is it not more sensible that it be faith as opposed to the word? Indeed, the word may well strengthen and alter faith. Faith, however, does not change the word.

So if an infant baptism lacks for faith, and not for God's word, it is not in need of a repeat of the word, but the addition of faith. So why don't they simply preach the need for faith and leave the word alone? Should the word of God have no validity just because it is not rightly believed? If this is the case, there will hardly be a valid word of God.

If they wish to do justice to their own strange idea, they ought to establish not a re-baptism but a re-faith. For baptism is God's word and ordinance and no repetitions or changes are permitted. But faith can change, namely, when it has not been present. So they ought to be Re-believers and not Re-baptizers if they wish to make right that which is yet lacking.

***So they ought to be
Re-believers and
not Re-baptizers***

To these devilish Re-baptizers, everything is uncertain. They will be found to be untruthful. They deceive and blaspheme God's very ordinance on the basis of doubtful opinion.

They make what is near, distant, and what is distant, near. They want to base God's word on human works and fickle faith. They seek re-baptism where they ought to seek faith. They are persuaded by their uncertainty in erring, convoluted spirits.

Pious Christians would do well to guard themselves from them for the sake of their own souls' salvation. May Christ our Lord help us. Amen.



1. Must a person be baptized to be saved?
2. When people teach something as certain which it is not, what are they doing?
3. Which is greater, the Word of God or faith?
4. Does faith change the Word, or the Word change faith?
5. Should a person be re-baptized, or re-faithed?

AFTERWORD

This work is a new translation from the German text of *D. Martin Luthers Brief an zwei Pfarrherren, von der Wiedertaufe* which appears in the *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), volume 17, columns 2187-2225. This edition of Luther's works was a revamping of the Halle edition published from 1740 to 1750, edited by Johann Georg Walch (1693-1775). According to Helmar Junghans, the General Editor of *Lutherjahrbuch*, the St. Louis edition was not simply a reprint of the Halle edition for "Newly printed writings of Luther were included, the translations from the Latin were double checked, and the German language was adapted to the usage of the late 19th century."¹ (The St. Louis edition has relatively recently (1986) been reprinted in Groß Oesingen, Germany.)

If compared to the translation of the letter as it appeared in the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (1883 ff., volume 26:144-174) by Conrad Bergendorff, printed in volume 40 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 229-262, the reader will immediately notice that the initial arguments of the letter have been omitted. This was done because the topics treated there (the validity of baptizing using the German language instead

of Latin; the dependability of the witnesses of infant baptism) are not currently at issue.

That which led me to pursue the translation and publication of this specific work of Martin Luther is Jonathan D. Trigg's *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* ((*Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, V. 56, Brill Academic Publishers: 2001) ISBN: 039104107X). A discussion of the theology of the letter and its place within the context of Luther's theology of baptism on the whole may be found there.

A word must be said here about the translation of specific terms. The word *Wiedertäufer* is normally translated in English with the word *Anabaptists*. Both terms mean "those who baptize again." Americans frequently assume that the term *Anabaptist* is just an older rendition of the common *Baptist*. This is not necessarily the case. Most Baptists today trace their theological heritage to 17th Century England. The relationship between the Anabaptists of Luther's Germany and the Baptists of later centuries is still a subject of research. In that we were more interested in the practice Luther was addressing, than equating that practice with a specific denomination today, we have used the word *Re-baptizers* to designate *Wiedertäufer*. We have also taken the liberty of translating *Kindertaufen* as *infant baptism* for although the term literally means "the baptism of children," what was at issue was the baptism of infants.

Thanks here go to my brother, James Strawn, for translating the text. Chapter divisions, headings as well

as study questions were added for clarity. Bethany Muinch read through an initial draft of the work and offered many helpful suggestions. Scott Krieger reformatted the entire text, and in general, saw the work through to its publication. Bible citations were standardized, when possible, using the new English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001).

This work, of course, is not without its flaws. But I hope that its publication in such a form will be of great benefit to those who study it and will promote the discussion of the theology of baptism among pastors and parishioners alike.

Paul Strawn, Spring Lake Park, Minnesota
November 2005

¹ “The History, Use and Significance of the Weimar Luther Edition,”
Lutheran Quarterly 17 (2003): 270.

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