

Lesson 18: The Meaning of Baptism

“These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of Baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions must continue in us our whole life long.”

- Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: Baptism

Thesis:

In Baptism our old nature is put to death, and we are given a new nature which comes to life.

Key question:

What is the meaning of Baptism?

Catechism:

Sverdrup's Questions 355-357

Accompanying Bible Story:

Acts 9:1-19 – The Baptism of Saul of Tarsus

My questions:

If there was ever an example of the difference between an old nature and the new nature, the Apostle Paul is it.

Earlier in his life, the Apostle Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus. He had moved from Tarsus in southern Turkey to Jerusalem where he attended what we might call the University of Jerusalem. He belonged to the religious political party called The Pharisees. He was studying to be a religious leader in Israel under the famous Professor Gamaliel.

We first meet Saul when he was standing guard over the coats of the men who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death. After Stephen's death, Saul began a persecution of Christians. Luke, the author of The Acts of the Apostles, wrote, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Notice the words “breathing threats and murder against the disciples.” Saul, at that time in his life, was a perfect example of the old nature in rebellion against God.

On his trip to Damascus, Saul had a personal encounter with Jesus. The flash of a blinding light from heaven knocked Saul off his horse. Then he and Jesus had a conversation. Jesus told Saul it was He whom Saul was persecuting. Jesus also gave Saul instructions that would result in the death of Saul's old nature and the birth of his new one.

Because Saul had been blinded by the light, he was led by the hand to Damascus where he stayed at the house of a man named Judas on Straight Street. God sent another man, this one named Ananias, to proclaim God's message to Saul. Ananias objected to God's sending because he had heard about Saul and was afraid of him. God told Ananias that Saul had been given a new purpose in life and that there was nothing to fear.

Saul did not hesitate when he heard the message Ananias brought him. Ananias laid hands on Saul and prayed for him to have his sight restored and receive the Holy Spirit. Luke concluded, “And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized...” As Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, later retold the story, Ananias had told him to “get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

From the rest of Paul's story in Acts and from Paul's own letters we learn how, from then on, he lived in the new nature God gave him.

* Copy from your Lutheran *Small Catechism* the answer to the question “What does such baptizing with water signify?”

* Copy the verse from Romans 6 that Dr. Luther quoted in your Lutheran *Small Catechism* to answer the question “Where is it so written?”

* Read Romans 6:1-14. In Romans 6, we are primarily told why we Christians should not sin deliberately. The reason has to do with what happened to us in Baptism. According to verse 3, what did Paul hope we already know?

Using verses 3 and 4, list the things that happened to Jesus that happen also to us in Baptism.

* Read Ephesians 5:25-27. What did Christ do for the Church through the washing of water with the word?

* Read Acts 18:24-28. What was missing from the message Apollos was preaching?

How could his message have been corrected?

* Read Acts 19:1-5. How did the Apostle Paul correct what was missing in the message that had been received at Ephesus?

As we come to the end of our study on Baptism, it is important that we also take a moment to talk about one of the main differences between how other Christians and we Lutherans practice Baptism. If you grew up in a Lutheran congregation, you most likely were baptized as a baby. We call this practice *infant baptism*. We do admit that there is no verse in the Bible that specifically tells us to baptize our babies. However, there are some key beliefs in our understanding of Baptism that allow and direct us to do so. Look back at numbers II, III, and IV under Baptism in your Catechism. We believe that in Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins and new life. We believe that Baptism is effective only because it is what is promised by God in His Word. We believe that what actually happens in Baptism is our death and new birth because it is our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is nothing we deserve. There is nothing we can earn. It is all God. It is all a gift that God gives to us. We then conclude that if all God gives to us is a gift, there is no age limit either in youth or in maturity that can limit God's giving. We bring even our infants to God so that God can give His gift through Baptism to them, too.

What did I learn in this lesson (three or four sentences)?