

## Luther and Lutheranism

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Martin Luther was saved as a monk in the Roman Catholic Church. The truth of Scripture about faith alone in Christ alone for justification, a righteous standing before God, struck a cord in his heart and he was gloriously saved. Romans 1:17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." This is the verse God used to save Luther. As a result, Luther began preaching the truth of Scripture and on October 31, 1517 Luther posted 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany outlining his objections to the sale of indulgences other abuses in the Roman Catholic Church. Others joined in Luther's protest and this sparked the Protestant Reformation, which was a protest against Roman Catholic excesses and in some cases a protest against Catholic doctrine. The Reformation was an attempt to reform the catholic state and tradition.

*Although Luther left the Catholic Church he never really intended to go that far away from historic Catholicism.* He did not oppose all Catholic Doctrine – only its excesses and abuses. Luther did not go far enough away from Catholic Theology. Others wanted to go much further and radically change the doctrine of the church. However, this was not the intent of Luther. Martin Luther was saved by hearing and believing the truth that only faith in Christ saves a person and that grace is transferred into one's life through faith alone. However, when expressing this truth to others he muddied the waters and confused the clear message in regards to what faith is and salvation by grace alone. Being stooled in Catholic Theology for so long he mixed together baptism and the Lord's Supper as necessary requirements for salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

In many ways it was hard for the Reformers to break away from the long established roots of Roman Catholicism. This is why Martin Luther stressed the necessity of baptism as a sacrament or agent to receive God's saving grace. If Luther had shared the clear message of faith alone in Christ alone for salvation (without baptism) there would not be so much confusion in the Lutheran Church today. But he did not. Luther taught that water and the Lord's Supper are the

*tangible objects* a person needs in order to express faith in Christ and that these sacraments became the *channels* of grace or the way to receive grace into a person's life.

Webster's definition of a sacrament: 1. a rite considered to have been established by Christ as a channel for grace: the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox sacraments are baptism, the Eucharist, the anointing of the sick, confirmation, holy orders, penance, and matrimony; the Protestant sacraments are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

### **Luther's Sacrament of Salvation**

Luther may have understood his own theology about faith alone in Christ for salvation but the way he portrayed it to others was very confusing. His emphasis on baptism as a necessary requirement for salvation brought confusion into Lutheran Theology and the Lutheran Church Doctrine, which still exists to this day. Luther wrote in his Large Catechism (1529): "Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized for we shall not be saved ... To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save ... To be saved, we know is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever."

#### Scriptural Rebuttal:

- A.** Baptism is not part of salvation (Acts 16:31; John 1:12, 3:15-16, 36, 5:24, 6:47; Romans 10:9; Eph. 2:8-9). This means baptism is not a sacrament through which the grace of God is transferred into your life. *A sacrament implies something that saves us.* Baptism is merely an ordinance of the church. No apparent contradictory verse could ever destroy this overwhelming evidence of truth. \*Baptism is not necessary for salvation. It is necessary for obedience.
- B.** Baptism follows salvation (Acts 2:41, 8:35-38, 10:44-48, 16:14-15; 18:8, 12). This is important to understand. Since faith precedes salvation this would mean that faith and baptism should never be construed together. The analogy looks like this: faith – salvation – baptism. The two (faith and baptism) are not linked together to

bring salvation into a person's life but are separated from the salvation experience. ***Baptism is not part of a person's response of faith in Christ but actually comes after faith has been placed in Christ.*** In other words, baptism occurs after a person has already responded to Christ through faith alone. To construe baptism with a person's faith is to bring great confusion of what it means to place faith alone in Christ for salvation.

- C. Baptism is for those who are already believers (Acts 8:12-13, 36-37, 16:14-15, 18:8, 19:5).
- D. There are dozens of New Testament passages where salvation is said to be by faith alone in Christ (John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 6:47; Acts 16:31; 20:21; Romans 10:9; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8). Let us always remember that the Bible is consistent with itself. No verse or two could ever contradict the plain and clear teaching of the Scriptures on this matter. There are no contradictions in the Bible. One should always interpret the Bible in the light of clearly revealed truth, which is easy and unmistakable to understand. All other obscure verses should be interpreted in light of the clear passages. Although there are those who teach that without the ritual of baptism no one will ever be saved, our salvation is not dependent upon baptism. It is dependent upon grace (Eph. 2:8-9).
- E. The thief on the cross had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Luke 23:43). Likewise, Cornelius and his household, as well as Martha, all had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Acts 10:43-48; John 11:25-27).
- F. The Savior is not stated to have baptized anyone, a strange omission if baptism is essential to salvation!
- G. The apostle Paul was thankful that he baptized only a few of the Corinthians. This is a strange cause for thankfulness if baptism is to be an expression of our faith in Christ or if baptism has saving merit (I Cor. 1:14-17).
- H. To include baptism as part of salvation would contradict the Gospel (I Cor. 15:3-4) and would make "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). There is no mention of baptism in the clear statement about

the Gospel. The Gospel is what saves a person. The Gospel message is free from baptism (1 Cor. 1:17).

- I. If baptism saves, then a man on his deathbed, taking his last few breaths of air, could not be saved.
- J. When grace is mixed with baptism then grace is canceled out and law (works) becomes the way to attain salvation (Rom. 11:6 – “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work”). Grace cancels out what man does and what man does cancels out what grace wants to do which is to bring salvation into a person’s life (Titus 3:5 – “not by works of righteousness which we have done”).
- K. Baptism is an outward testimony of a believer’s faith that he has already placed in Christ for salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:35-38, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 18:8, 19:5; I Cor. 1:12-17).

Baptism was designed to be a visible demonstration and testimony that an individual now wants to become an obedient follower of Christ and be identified with New Testament Christianity. The key thought of baptism means *identification* with Christ and Christianity. When a person was baptized it meant that they were identifying themselves with Jesus Christ and becoming a follower of Christ (see Matt. 28:19-20 – note the connection between “baptizing them” and “teaching them” to become obedient followers/disciples or learners of Christ’s ways. This baptismal identification with Christ and His cause brought persecution and even death to the lives of early believers (1 Cor. 15:29-30).

### **Luther’s Confusion**

Martin Luther may have very well believed that his own faith was directed to Christ alone for salvation but the teaching of Luther down through the years has confused people and eventually led multitudes to put their faith in their baptism instead of in Christ for salvation. Luther taught that a person’s faith must be channeled to God through the physical substance of water. Luther did not believe that an *invisible work of faith in the heart* would work in saving the soul. People needed to have something tangible for people to see and feel.

Luther again wrote: “Faith must have something to believe – something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be Baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life ...” Luther taught that the truth of God’s Word about faith in Christ must be combined with water to bring salvation into a person’s life. It’s very clear that Luther taught what the majority of Lutherans still believe today – *baptism is the agent by which salvation or grace is transferred from God to man.*

Scriptural Rebuttals: First, we do not need *tangible objects* to verify our faith in Christ or transfer our faith to Christ. This becomes a weak faith and a faith that is not solely channeled to Christ alone for salvation. God sees our invisible faith or trust in Christ as sufficient to save our souls (Acts 16:31, John 3:15-16). God looks at our *heart* and knows our heart (Rom. 10:10 – “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness”). Therefore, there is no need to express faith in Christ through tangible objects such as baptism. In doing this faith rests in a tangible object to save us instead of Christ. This is why most practicing Lutherans look back to their time of baptism as the means of their salvation. Their faith rests in the tangible object of baptism instead of in Christ alone (Gal. 3:26). We are told to only look to Christ for our salvation and Christ alone (John 3:14-15; Isa. 45:22 – “**Look unto me, and be ye saved**”). When we use baptism as a channel of our faith we are misdirecting our faith. We must channel our faith only to Christ.

Second, baptism is not an *agent* or *channel* by which man receives grace or salvation from God. Faith only in Christ is the channel or pipeline that brings salvation and grace into a person’s life – not baptism (see Eph. 2:8-9 – “**for by grace are ye saved through faith**” – faith alone is the channel to receive God’s grace – see also Rom. 3:25; Gal. 3:11, 14). *A person is saved by grace through faith plus nothing!* Whenever we add baptism or any other tangible object to express faith in Christ for salvation then faith no longer trusts in Christ alone for salvation. This is proven by talking to most Lutherans today. Their faith is a faith that rests in an act of baptism instead of in Christ alone for salvation. Take the Lutheran’s baptism away from them and they have no tangible object to cling to for their salvation. The Bible believer will only cling to Christ for salvation and can rest in Christ alone for salvation without baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or any

other confirmation. No other visible channel is necessary. It is only to be “faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:26) and “your faith in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:14; 2:5; 2 Tim. 3:5). Never is there any mention of baptism with the faith of a person. This is because faith is only to be directed to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Luther sidestepped the objection that he was teaching salvation through works by defining baptism, not as a work of man, but as a work of God. He convinced himself that God’s participation in baptism was the element that produced salvation for man. Luther again wrote: “Now, these people are so foolish as to separate faith from the object to which faith is attached and bound on the ground that the object is something external. Yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart...”

Scriptural Rebuttal: God does not participate in baptism to bring salvation into a person’s life. God has already participated in the work of salvation by sending His only Son into the world to die for lost mankind (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4). The issue is the Son of God – not baptism – “What think ye of Christ” (Matt. 22:46). God looks at the supreme and final sacrifice of His Son as the only means of salvation for the lost sinner (Heb. 10:10). God’s participation or part in bringing salvation into a person’s life has to do with the shedding of Christ’s blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19) and not baptism. God also participates in convicting and drawing people to salvation (John 6:44: 12:32) through the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). In no instance in Scripture do we see God participating in a person’s baptism to bring them to faith and salvation in Christ.

### **Luther’s Infant Baptism**

Luther actually believed and taught that baptism alone could save infants even when they could not believe in their young age. He wrote: “We are not primarily concerned whether the baptized person believes or not, for in the latter case the baptism does not become invalid ... Baptism is valid even though faith be lacking ... Even if infants did not believe ... still their Baptism would be valid and no one should rebaptize them.” Luther wrote in one large catechism: “Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be

baptized or we shall not be saved.” This proves his emphasis on baptism as a necessary requirement for the salvation of all people, including children. Luther upheld infant baptism, teaching that although infants are unable to exercise faith, God, through His prevenient grace, works faith in the unconscious child. He based the baptism of infants on the command to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19).

Scriptural Rebuttal: There is not one shred of evidence in Scripture that Jesus baptized children. Jesus blessed children but He did not baptize them (Mark 10:15-16). The Lutheran emphasis on baptism as a requirement for salvation is simply a rehash of Catholic Theology, which Martin Luther could not abandon. The Lutheran way of thinking is to look back to their infant baptism as the means of their salvation. This is why there is such a heavy emphasis on infant baptism in the Lutheran Church. Most Lutherans simply look back to the time when they were baptized as a child and construe this to be the actual time that their salvation occurred. Their faith rests in a ritualistic act of baptism for salvation instead of Christ.

Furthermore, the idea that baptism replaces the Abrahamic sign of circumcision is also a fallacy. This is the teaching of Reformed Theology. These theologians teach that water baptism has replaced ritual circumcision as a sign of the Covenant of Grace, which God has with man. They also teach that baptism is equivalent to the Old Testament ritual of circumcision and is the means by which an infant becomes a member of the covenant community. This of course is blatant error. Baptism does not bring salvation into a person’s life.

**Note:** Actually, it’s the sign of the **New Covenant** that should be practiced today, which is the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:20). This supper is to be practiced as a memorial of the death of Christ. It has no sacramental value attached to it.

We must remember that people become members of this new and distinct community today called the church, through the merits of the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). No childhood water ceremony is involved in becoming part of this New Testament church of Christ, which completely replaces the old community of Israel. Water does not join a person to the church – the Holy Spirit does (1 Cor. 12:13) through a

definite act of a person's faith in Christ (John 1:12). Children are covered and overshadowed by God's grace during their early years of life (Matt. 19:14; 18:10) and do not need any water to confirm God's grace to them. When they grow to the age of understanding and accountability (Jonah 4:11) before the Lord they are then responsible for placing faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ like any other person in the human race (Rev. 22:17). There is no need for infant baptism and no Biblical support for it.

"There is not a single instance in the Scripture which gives the slightest support to the doctrine of baptizing infants."

M.R. De Haan

### **Luther's Sacrament of the Altar**

Luther rejected the Catholic teaching that there were seven sacraments. He only viewed baptism and the Lord's Supper as the sacraments or the *channels* by which we receive God's grace and the forgiveness of sins. This was the problem. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not sacraments by which we receive God's grace but *ordinances* that Jesus taught His disciples to observe after they were already saved.

Scriptures to Consider: Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-28

Just as baptism was an object of faith to Luther, so was the bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper. Luther believed that baptism was the agent of the new birth (regeneration) and the Lord's Supper was the agent of cleansing from the sins a person commits on a daily basis. He said, "We go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins ... The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself..."

Scriptural Rebuttal: The blood of Jesus continually cleanses us from daily sins and maintains our justified standing before God (1 John 1:7, "... and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"). It's the blood of Christ that continually cleanses us and



maintains our righteous standing before a holy God. Because of this we can come to God and confess our sins to Him (1 John 1:9) and receive forgiveness. Jesus Christ is our advocate or lawyer before God (1 John 2:1) – not baptism. The forgiveness outlined in the beginning of John’s epistle is related to our fellowship with Christ – not our salvation. We go to the blood of Jesus Christ for it’s here that we receive our “great treasure” – not baptism.

### *The Mystical Meaning of the Elements*

The Catholic Church taught Transubstantiation (the elements of the Lord’s Table become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ) but Luther taught Consubstantiation (the elements maintained their literal substance but that Christ was spiritually present in the physical elements). This is a very *small distinction* because with his understanding of the spiritual presence of Christ in the elements Luther wrote: “Therefore it is absurd to say that Christ’s body and blood are not given and poured out for us in the Lord’s Supper and hence that we cannot have forgiveness of sins in the sacrament.”

Luther’s emphasis on forgiveness through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper has brought confusion to Lutherans today causing many to believe that salvation is maintained through eating the Lord’s Supper. This is why most present-day Lutherans believe that taking communion saves them. They simply view the elements as conferring grace to their lives. The spiritual presence of Christ in these elements supposedly communicates God’s grace and forgiveness to their lives. In other words, the benefit of forgiveness will be applied to their lives thought eating the Lord’s Supper. Luther’s teaching is simply Catholic Theology in disguise.

Scriptural Rebuttal: The Lord’s Table is a *memorial service* that contains no saving merit or forgiveness (see 1 Cor. 11:24-25 – note what Jesus said about the bread: “this do in remembrance of me” and the wine – “as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me”). Luther rejected this truth. In other words, Luther did not view the Lord’s Supper as only a memorial service but as Christ becoming spiritually present in the elements to transfer the grace of forgiveness into a person’s life. But Jesus never said His supper had any mystical

presence of Himself. It was simply a memorial service (Luke 22:19). I will believe what Jesus said over what Luther said on this point.

### **Luther's Confession and Absolution**

Webster: absolution 2. a. a remission of sin or of the punishment for sin, esp. as effected by a priest or bishop in the sacrament of penance.

The Catholic Church had enslaved its people by requiring them to confess every specific sin to a priest on a regular basis or face the prospect of going to hell. Luther rejected this. But again, he did not move far enough away from Catholic Theology. Luther still believed that it was necessary for a man to confess his sin to another man and receive forgiveness by the mouth of a man. Luther said, "Confession consists of two parts. The first is my work and act, when I lament my sin and desire comfort and restoration for my soul. The second is a work which God does, when he absolves me of my sins though the word placed in the mouth of a man."

Luther taught that sins, which needed to be confessed, were those sins that deeply troubled the soul. Today the confession of these sins is to be made to a Lutheran pastor through prayer rituals and formulas such as this: "Do you believe that this forgiveness is the forgiveness of God? Be it done for you as you have believed. According to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, *I forgive you your sins* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace." Although Luther believed that the forgiveness man received was from God he nevertheless taught that man needed a human mediator. This again brings great confusion concerning the way to receive forgiveness, which is through Christ alone.

Scriptural Rebuttal: Jesus is the only mediator (go-between) between God and man – not some Lutheran pastor declaring that he has the authority to actually grant forgiveness (1 Tim. 2:5). No earthly man has the authority to declare the actual forgiveness of sins. *This centers a person's faith in a man's declaration of forgiveness instead of in Christ and what God's Word has already declared.* God's Word in Romans 4:7 is "Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are

forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” Colossians 2:13, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” 1 John 2:12, “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.” I need no other declaration than the declaration of what God’s Word tells me.

Let us also remember that Jesus is the only way into the Father’s presence (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). This means that no man acting as a priest, mediator, or vicar (replacement of Christ) has any authority to grant the actual forgiveness for man’s sins. Only the One who is the actual mediator has the authority to grant forgiveness and declare a person forgiven – (see Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; 7:48). Even the Pharisees understood that only God could grant forgiveness of sins (Luke 5:21 – “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”).

### **Luther’s Conclusions**

Luther believed in the Gospel record and understood that man was a sinner, condemned to hell, and that man could not restore his relationship to God without a person coming to faith in Jesus Christ, who bore their sins upon the cross and paid for their judgment. Luther gave God all the credit for the work of salvation. He said that man could not do good works to obtain salvation and that a man must be justified solely on the basis of faith through the work of Jesus Christ. He taught that baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Confession is not the work of man that saves, but the work of God. This was an important distinction that Luther made in his theology. ***However, this point has been greatly lost by those Lutherans who follow his teachings today.***

Today Lutheran’s actually place their faith in their sacraments (baptism, Lord’s Supper) to save them since they are viewed as the way to receive God’s saving grace. If you ask most Lutherans if they are saved they point to the time of their baptism as the assurance of their salvation since the official teaching of the Lutheran Church is essentially ***baptismal regeneration***. This means that a person is born again or receives God’s life through the act of baptism. Baptism is upon the lips of most Lutherans but not the actual saving work of Christ. Thus, in reality a Lutheran’s faith is not being directed to Christ

for salvation but to physical elements that have no saving value. *The average Lutheran has a misplaced faith.* Lutherans may claim that they are expressing faith in Christ alone for salvation but then why do they always point to their child baptism as the time they were saved? The message of the Reformation (“faith alone in Christ alone”) is lost behind the ritualistic reception of sacraments and placing faith in these physical objects for forgiveness of sins and the authority of a Lutheran pastor to declare actual forgiveness.

The difference between Luther’s doctrine and what fundamental Bible believers teach is not in the definition of the Gospel but in the *means* by which the Gospel (Christ’s death) is applied to a person’s life. This becomes the heart of the matter. And it’s a matter of spiritual life and spiritual death (John 3:18; :36).

The simple Bible fact is this. **The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin - not the waters of baptism (1 John 1:7; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 1:5).** “What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus!” Furthermore, God’s grace is only transferred to our life through faith and faith alone in the death of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). **When you look at baptism as the agent through which salvation or regeneration is transferred from God to man, then you no longer have your focus on Christ.**

The object of a person’s faith must only be in the person of Christ (Acts 16:31). *Many people feel that they need to believe in some tangible object in this world that they can see and feel, such as water, so that they can channel their faith up to God through this particular object.* The serious problem of expressing faith through an outward tangible object is that the person’s faith becomes shifted to the wrong object. **The person’s faith becomes water-centered instead of Christ-centered!** There is to be no faith connected with the sacramental waters of ritual baptism. This kind of faith is placed in the wrong object. Our faith must only rest in Christ (Rom. 3:22).

If baptism is a work or act that one must do in order to be saved, then the person’s faith rests in the act of baptism, instead of the act of Christ’s death for salvation. A person’s salvation becomes based upon something else other than Christ and His sacrificial death. It
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cannot be the work of water *and* Christ (Gal. 2:20). Which will you choose as the basis of your faith – water or Christ alone?

### Lutheran Salvation Verses

Mark 16:16

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Please notice that this verse does not say that if a person refuses to believe and refuses to be baptized that he will be damned. It only says that if they refuse to believe, they would be damned. This proves that baptism is not being viewed as necessary for salvation in this verse. If this were true refusing to be baptized would be emphasized. Baptism in this verse is viewed as a *testimonial* and *token* of a person’s salvation that they already have before God. A person “shall be saved” who believes and is baptized in the sense of proving the genuineness of their salvation before others. Jesus links baptism with belief in this passage to talk about the proof of a person’s salvation and not the actual means of cleansing for a person’s salvation. A person will be known to be saved and express his belief and salvation to others through his baptism.

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.”

Acts 22:16

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

These verses are not teaching salvation by baptism. They once again are referencing the reality that salvation has already occurred in the lives of these people. When they were baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) it means they were baptized for the purpose of demonstrating, outwardly confirming, and verifying their forgiveness and salvation before God. Baptism became an outward confirmation or token of their salvation. This was true at Paul’s baptism. At the time of his baptism he could “wash away his sins” in a *testimonial*

way proving that he was already saved. He also washed away his sins in a *pictorial* way demonstrating the cleansing and washing that he had already received. Please note that Paul was already a brother in Christ in Acts 22:13 so the baptism in Acts 22:16 could not teach salvation by water baptism.

Such verses as these should be regarded as a **witness** or **picture** of forgiveness and salvation rather than the **means** of bringing them about. *Baptism is a symbol – not a sacrament.* It is a *picture – not a personal means* of salvation. Baptism is salvation's symbol or picture. It is not a sacrament through which a person receives salvation. Furthermore, baptism in these texts can be viewed as the **testimonial and token** of a person's salvation – not the way of his salvation. Baptism is the **proof** of a person's salvation but not the **means** of his salvation. Both these concepts explain the correct understanding of these misunderstood passages.

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.”

The expression “born of water and of the Spirit” is not referring to baptism since the Jews did not practice baptism. Nicodemus was expected to know what the Jews taught in their Old Testament Scriptures regarding the water (John 3:10). What the Jewish Scriptures taught about water was that it referenced the symbolic spiritual cleansing of God (Ezek. 36:25-26). This spiritual cleansing coupled with the new birth from the Holy Spirit is what saves a man. A person must be born of the “water” (spiritually cleansed by God) and of the “Spirit” (receive the new life that the Holy Spirit imparts) so that a person can be prepared for the kingdom of heaven.

\*For a detailed study of those passages that are wrongly used to promote salvation by baptism, see the author's study, “Does Baptism Save” (A Study of Misunderstood Passages Dealing with Baptism).

The passages used by Lutheran pastors to teach baptismal regeneration violate the important hermeneutical principle known as “the analogy (similarity) of Scripture.” This principle states that no

passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture. **It must be understood that the interpreter of Scripture should always begin with the clear verses in the Bible and then interpret the less clear verses in light of the clear verses.** This is a very important hermeneutical principle of interpretation to remember.

The Bible is consistent with itself. The whole of Scripture unmistakably teaches that salvation is solely by grace (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 5:15; 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 2:7-9; Eph. 1:7; Titus 2:11; Gal. 1:6; Heb. 2:9) through faith alone in Christ without water baptism (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:25; 6:47; Acts 16:31; 20:21; 24:24; Rom. 3:21–30; 4:5; 5:1; 10:9–10; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9; Col. 1:4). In fact, approximately 150 passages in the NT state that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ. One or two verses could never contradict this overwhelming testimony. Those obscure verses that seem to be teaching something else should never be construed as overriding the clear teaching of Scripture on the matter of salvation by grace through faith – without baptism. *There are no contradictions in the Bible.* Grace plus baptism, or faith in water baptism, becomes a contradiction, when they are linked together in the salvation experience. This is because grace can no longer be grace if baptism is necessary for salvation (Rom. 4:4; 11:6) and faith can no longer be faith in Christ alone for salvation if baptism becomes part of the expression of faith (Rom. 3:27-28).

### **The Lutheran Faith Test**

- Can you be saved without baptism?
- Do you need to eat the Lord's Supper to receive forgiveness for your sins?
- Do you need to have a Lutheran pastor declare and validate your forgiveness?
- What if you had none of the above?
- Would you still be saved?
- Could you be sure that you would go to Heaven when you die if you were not baptized?
- Could you go to Heaven without being a member of the Lutheran Church?

If you strip all these things away from your life, and you lack the assurance of salvation, then your faith is *misplaced* and needs to be *transferred* only in Jesus Christ for salvation. Go ahead. Take all these things away and only see Jesus' death as sufficient to save you (John 12:21 – “We would see Jesus” – not baptism, the Lord's Supper, Lutheran pastors, or Lutheran churches). Will you express faith and faith alone in Jesus Christ for salvation? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Belief is a *personal response of faith* in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Jesus Christ died on the cross bearing all your sins (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18) and the judgment connected with those sins (Gal. 3:13) so you can be saved from hell. But salvation only comes to a person when they express simple faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Jesus said in John 6:47, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Are you ready to trust only in Jesus Christ for your salvation? Right now commit your faith to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only way to receive the forgiveness of sins, salvation from hell, and the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

### **A Soul-Searching Question**

Are you expressing faith in your baptism, church membership, taking Holy Communion, some experience or feeling you had, your good deeds, or have you committed your faith only to Jesus Christ for salvation? The Bible says we should only have "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), "faith in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:4), and that we become "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

So let's state it clearly. Belief in Jesus Christ involves a definite decision or choice of a person's will to commit his faith to Jesus Christ alone for salvation (“If thou believest with all thine heart” – Acts 8:37). With the heart (a person's will) they make the decision (choice) to believe or rely on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to save them and give them eternal life (“believe in thine heart” – Rom. 10:9).

Jesus said in John 6:47,  
“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”



How simple! How wonderful! How reassuring! Just place your faith in Jesus Christ alone and you will be saved. You can bypass baptism, communion, Lutheranism, and everything else, and still go to Heaven. The reason is simple. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone!

“Only trust Him, only trust Him,  
Only trust Him now.  
He will save you, He will save you,  
He will save you now.”