



September 2012

Pastor's

"As Long as They're Christians" Do Denominational Differences Really Matter? Part III: Holy Baptism, Faith, and Reason



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Last month we continued our discussion of Holy Baptism by showing the difference between the Biblical/Lutheran doctrine of original sin and the unbiblical teaching of mainstream American Evangelicalism (AE) of an "age of accountability." Part II ended with, "The Bible says that all are sinful and are destined for hell apart from God's gracious washing away of sin(s) through faith." In this article we will examine the Biblical answer to the problem of "all are sinful." In short, the answer is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." AE's actually agree with the preceding verse; but we will see that they are not only operating with a totally corrupted definition of *original sin*, but also *believing/faith*.

AE's believe that faith is a conscious choice to believe or accept Christ. As stated by the *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, "Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior...There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord."¹ For them, faith is necessary for salvation, yet only those old enough and able to reason can make a decision to believe. What about sinful babies? So, not only do they teach that babies aren't sinful until they are old enough to choose to sin, but they also teach that there is not salvation apart from faith; and that babies can't have faith until they are old enough to rationally choose to believe in Jesus. When you deviate from the clear words of the Bible, messy inconsistencies arise and you have to create doctrines not found in Scripture.

Those of us who uphold Biblical (infant) Baptism properly confess that a sinful baby needs and can have faith. Faith is not an adult, conscious, and rational decision. As we confess in the *Small Catechism*, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel..."² Also, as it says in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." The Holy Spirit in the Word of God creates faith in sinful man by grace alone - no man-made decision/work is willing or able. But is this true for babies too? The Bible says yes, that infants need and can have the miracle of faith, just like a dead-in-their-trespases adults.

One example of an infant having faith is John the Baptist in the womb.³ Biblically, faith is more than a correct adult understanding of God, which even the demons have (James 2:19 and Luke 4:41). Faith is not exclusively an adult belief and understanding of the doctrines found in the Bible. Jesus teaches that children are the example of faith and adult fallen logic is actually an obstacle to believing. Mathew 18:2-4 says, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Hear Jesus dealing with children on another occasion in Luke 18:15-17, "Then they also brought *infants* to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." The Greek word used here is *brefe*, which precisely means infants.

Faith of a helpless infant is the example Jesus uses, not that of a reasoning adult. In fact, it is a miracle that

¹ www.sbts.edu

² Luther's Small Catechism Triglota Electronic Version p.245

³ Luke 1:15, 41-44.

the Holy Spirit in the Word of God creates faith in spiritually dead adults and infants. Yes, the faith of a child is the example Jesus uses, not that of a reasoning adult. Adult reason has trouble understanding the kingdom of God. Hear the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Jesus tells Nicodemus the truth that man is born sinful and needs to be born again by water and Spirit, but it makes no sense to Nicodemus' human reason. Faith is not the same as reason. Fallen reason actually hinders faith. Reason says, "How can these things be?" Reason then tries to change and interpret the Word of God in a way that makes sense. But the Gospel does not make sense. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." Reason thinks the Gospel is foolishness. Reason thinks it foolish that a baby can have faith and enter the kingdom of God via God's Word with the water of baptism. But Scripture is clear that you must have faith in order to enter into the kingdom of God. And Scripture is clear that infants can have faith. In fact Jesus warns against causing the little ones whom *believe in Him* to stumble. Mathew 18:6, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Scripture must be allowed to reign over fallen human reason.

Is Baptism (water and the Spirit) then a means of grace that the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in cute little sinners? To be continued...

Pastor

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Mark 16:16





Happy Birthday to all the active members who have September Birthdays!!

Sharon Sahr	9/1
Rosie Hoepner	9/5
Kelly Hunt	9/5
Carol Gale	9/10
Kristy Heisinger	9/12
Roderick Hurt	9/12
Jan Fischer	9/16
Tom Bowe	9/18
Bradley Blake	9/20
Scott Ziebarth	9/20
Jack Welke	9/21
Christy Welke	9/26
Carol Evenson	9/28
Eugene Neumann	9/29
Herman Sahr	9/29



Happy Anniversary to:

Steven & Patricia Taylor 9/11/1976



We ask you to remember in our prayers the homebound members:

- Mavis Berry
- Emma Bollom
- Loretta Erickson
- Lorraine Heidtke
- Helen Hempelman



PRAYER REQUEST

If you would like a prayer on Sunday morning, please contact the secretary during the week. If it is last minute, you can also catch pastor before service.



MISS A BIBLE CLASS OR SERMON?

Audio of the most recent Bible classes and sermons are on our website. Click the "Education" tab for Bible class or the tab for "Sermons."



CD'S OF SERMONS & BIBLE STUDIES

CD's of Sermons and Bible Studies will be made available for those who request them. Contact Brian Schweisthal with any requests. Brian's cell phone is 715-529-8342 and his email address is brians8881@gmail.com.



RADIO & FLOWERS:

If you would like to furnish altar flowers or sponsor a radio broadcast for a special occasion please call the office. **Altar flowers** are **\$30.00** at Gordys if **you pick up** yourself or **\$40.00** if you would like them **delivered** to the church. You also may bring your own flowers. There is a flower chart in the church on the left of the door as you enter from the education wing. Sign your name by the date you would like to furnish flowers. **The radio broadcast is \$76.00.** Call the office if you would like to furnish a broadcast or have any questions about flowers or the broadcast. You may pay in the church office or put in the offering plate & write "for flowers."

The Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day - Continued
<http://www.gloriachristi.org/id41.html>

WHY DID COMMUNION CELEBRATIONS GET DOWN AS LOW AS FOUR TIMES A YEAR OR ONCE PER MONTH IN MANY PLACES AMONG SOME LUTHERANS?

While the Lutheran Confessions, *the Book of Concord*, are quite clear that Lutherans celebrate (offer) the Lord's Supper every Sunday (Lord's Day) and on festival (feast) days, and that we make no laws about making someone receive this gift, we may well wonder why some of us may remember Lutherans celebrating the Lord's Supper infrequently – such as once per month or even four times a year. Why have some grown up with the idea that this is what Lutherans intended or saw as ideal, when such isn't really the case? *History teaches us better who we are.*

WAR, PIETISM, AND RATIONALISM

In the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, a partly religious war in Europe from 1618-1648, teaching suffered and some pastors were conscripted into military service. Catechesis and liturgical practice suffered much during this time. In reaction to a high concern for teaching and practice prior to and during the Thirty Years War, Pietism arose as a movement which internalized religion and emphasized feelings and our works. Soon after this rationalism arose during the "Enlightenment" which sought to put human reason, philosophy and science above faith or theology. This, too, affecting church teaching and liturgical/sacramental practice. A.B. Bougher writes:

"... pietism stressed inward religion. Later on, it became opposed to the "outward" or "formal" worship. Its effects are still felt today. Both the preached Word and the administered sacrament were put in subjection to one's "heart" and Christianity became for many Lutherans a sentimentalized religion with the **right emotions** being more important than the right belief, or the proper hearing of God's Word and the receiving of His sacraments. With this attitude, a person through his or her own belief and religiosity made himself or herself right and didn't need God's means of forgiveness in the sacrament. Pietism became, in fact, a new "works-righteousness" which Luther had tried to get rid of two centuries earlier." [Pietism eliminated many practices – frequent communion, confession & absolution, chant, sign of the cross, historic vestments].

FRONTIER CONDITIONS IN AMERICA, FEW CLERGY, AND CONSEQUENTLY INFREQUENT SERVICES

A.B. Bougher writes: *"During the 17th century, European wars destroyed many cities; churches were in ruins, pastors were dead or drafted, and therefore were not able to celebrate communion on the old schedule in many places. Some people were not able to receive the sacrament for long periods of time. And, those emigrating to the new world found no pastors to give them the sacrament [or teach]. Thus, Christians devoid of weekly opportunities for Communion became accustomed to infrequent reception of Communion."* And subsequent generations thought of this as normal rather than exception or bound by the unusual circumstances and limitations of early frontier America.

EXTERNAL NON-LUTHERAN INFLUENCES AND ANTI-“CATHOLIC” BIAS IN AMERICA

Rev. Dr. C.F.W. Walther, first president of the Missouri Synod, wrote in an essay, indicating the challenge that Lutherans often faced in being accused of being “too catholic”:

We refuse to be guided by those who are offended by our church customs. We adhere to them all the more firmly when someone wants to cause us to have a guilty conscience on account of them. The Roman anti-christendom enslaves poor consciences by imposing human ordinances on them with the command: "You must keep such and such a thing!"; the sects enslave consciences by forbidding and branding as sin what God has left free. Unfortunately, also many of our Lutheran Christians are still without a true understanding of their liberty. This is demonstrated by their aversion to ceremonies. It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won't accuse us of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist, who perverts the saving Word, or be ashamed in the matter of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them?

It may give us pause to remember what Martin Luther actually wrote the “four times a year issue”: *Whoever does not seek or desire the Sacrament at least some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is no Christian, just as he is no Christian who does not believe or hear the Gospel; for Christ did not say, This omit, or, This despise, but, This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, etc. Verily, He wants it done, and not entirely neglected and despised. This do ye, He says (Sm. Cat.).*

Conclusion about Weekly Communion by Pastor Stark: I pray that you have found the preceding article and articles the last several months instructive. In these articles, in my preaching, and in our Bible classes this past year, I have tried to commend to you the wonderful benefits of weekly communion and answer any questions that you had. With this issue, and all others, please come talk to me if you have any questions. It is my desire, and I believe yours too, judging by 100% positive support that I have received on this issue, to resurrect the Biblical and Lutheran practice of offering the wonderful gift of Holy Communion at least every Sunday for those desiring to have their faith strengthened and sins forgiven. I, with the support of the Board of Elders, am planning on resurrecting this practice starting in Advent, which is also the beginning of the church year. “Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord.” A Blessed New Year indeed!

Motivation: Church Attendance [And Bible Class]

November 2008 Newsletter Article

for St. Paul's Bancroft and St. John's Lyons - Nebraska

By Rev. Phil Hale

As a child my Father forced me to eat ice cream. I can understand parents trying get their children to eat vegetables, meat, and healthy items, but a desert? I did learn to like ice cream, but I never crave it. I enjoy it at times, but I certainly do not love it. People don't eat desserts for health reasons, but because they like them. That's an important distinction---the motivation is significant. My father did get me to eat ice cream, but he didn't cause me to love or desire it.

We often treat church attendance in the same way---we try to get people to love it by cramming it down their throats and guilting them into coming. That is not really want we want. Church is not about what we do for God, but about Him feeding us and forgiving our sins. Church is about relief and comfort from God's Word---this is something we love. Church is meant to be a sanctuary and refuge for weary sinners---the godly escape from sinful world. It is about joy and comfort---it should not a be a menial chore. That is the wrong motivation. God is not pleased with someone going just to be seen or to make an appearance. We go to church to be fed by our shepherd Jesus. We go because we want to.

While we are deeply saddened by those who do not choose to attend church regularly, we cannot force them to *want* to come. Only our Lord can give this godly motivation. Besides praying for them, we can encourage them and lovingly support them. But we cannot cause them to love hearing God's Word any more than we can make them believe. We cannot make someone love something---even something good.

Perhaps we need to look at our own hearts and repent of wrong thinking ourselves. Do we rejoice and seize the opportunity to come to church or do we neglect God's Word and make it a tedious chore? While someone who doesn't want to attend church is at the least weak in faith, we cannot make them love God's Word. We are only truly responsible for ourselves and the children under our care.

The church doesn't need you---you need the church. Our faith depends on the Gospel proclaimed there. We want to attend and set good attendance habits because there God is at work to direct, guide, comfort and bless us. We truly *love* to hear God's Word because we *want* to hear more about God's love in Christ and to be further assured of our salvation.

The Pro-Life Mask by LCMS Pastor Hans Fiene

Please visit this website:

<http://www.thehighmidlife.blogspot.com/2012/08/the-pro-life-mask.html?m=1>



SCHOOL KITS FOR LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF:

Thanks for so much support in gathering supplies for the 20 school kits. Still needed to fulfill our goal are: 19 70 count spiral notebooks, 8 #2 pencils, 2 30 centimeter rulers, 10 blunt scissors. We thank you for assisting in this effort. All donations can be put into the green tote at the back entrance.

*Mark your
calendar*



BACK TO SCHOOL BBQ:

All 6th-12th graders are invited to Pastor and Brianne's house for a back to school BBQ, Sunday, September 9th, from 3-6 p.m. (Families may stay too if they desire). Pastor plans to smoke some Texas style BBQ. Ladies please bring a soda to share. Gentlemen, please bring a bag of chips or a dessert to share. Please sign-up on the bulletin board by noon, 9/9.



SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER'S NEEDED FOR THE 2012 -2013 TERM:

We want to hold 4 levels this year and so need at least 2 additional teachers. *Speak with Pastor if you are willing to serve Zion, the children, and Our Lord in this manner.*



SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES RESUME SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2012:

Zion will hold classes for Preschool (3 & 4 year olds); Kindergarten; 1st, 2nd, & 3rd Grade, and 4th, 5th, 6th Grade. Meet in the front of church for Opening Devotions after Worship ends at about 10:10 a.m. each Sunday Morning. You may pick your children up at 11:15 a.m. at their classroom. There is no charge for materials. We do appreciate occasional donations of juice bottles and small paper cups, or juice boxes; snack crackers or fruit which we will serve the children as a snack during lesson time. It is a long time for those little tummies from breakfast until lunch. We hope to have the children singing and playing hand bells the third of each month during the Worship Services using their talents to the Glory of God. We will begin with an opening devotion by Pastor Stark; practice a hymn of the month and work on memorizing the Baptism section of Luther's Small Catechism before heading to the classrooms for a Bible story with their teacher. Students in 7th grade and above may attend the Adult Bible Study unless they would prefer being in the Sunday School classes. Parents you will have received a pre-registration form from the Board of Education, so we could prepare for how many students to expect in each class. If you have not returned this information as of yet please send them any way and we will adjust ASAP.



NOTICE TO CHOIR MEMBERS:

Choir practice will resume Sunday, September 16th at 8:15 a.m. in the choir room. Because of the tight scheduling, we will need to begin our practice on time. The plan is to sing for the Worship Service so that does require a hymn. New members are



Zion's Women's Society News

The Women's Society met on Thursday, August 9th at 1:30 p.m. at church. We were previously scheduled to meet at Lois Eichinger's home but that needed to be postponed until our September meeting. Thanks to Doreen Szedlak we had a very enjoyable afternoon. Ten members, eight guests and Pastor were present. Doreen had planned a program on a Christian woman's life. It was a style show of sorts minus the models. Baptism outfits, confirmation dresses, school uniforms, prom dresses, graduation gowns and wedding gowns were shown by some in attendance. Several hymns appropriate for the occasion were sung. We were treated to cake and ice cream during the childhood portion as a remembrance of birthday parties of our youth. Anita Dommer had brought several of the pillow case dresses she had made for underprivileged girls in Haiti. Thanks again Doreen for organizing this program. A good time was had by all. Good food and conversation was enjoyed by all.

In September, if all goes well, we will meet at Lois Eichinger's home at the Lake. The date is Thursday, September 13th. The time is 12:30 p.m. Those wishing to car pool should meet at church by noon. Lois will be furnishing everything so please call the church office by Tuesday noon on September 11th if you plan on attending. All ladies of the congregation are most welcome to join us.

A Message From The Fellowship Board

Sunday, August 5th, the Lord provided a beautiful day for our Worship in the Park and Potluck Picnic. We thank all who took part in this special fellowship opportunity. We hope you enjoyed all the good food that the members provided.

Sunday, August 19th, we joined Milly Hunt and her family in a special birthday celebration after the worship service. Milly enjoyed greeting family members and fellow church members as well. She turned a young 90 years of age on August 31st. May the Lord