

The Cloud

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The Baptism Issue

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of the Cloud)

Nothing is more important to Lutherans than their baptisms. When you have grandchildren, “When’s the baptism” is one of the first questions you ask your child. The Bible says a lot about baptism, and so do Lutheran pastors. The articles in this issue are meant to be practical. Pastor Buchs positively and wonderfully lays out what the baptismal looks like in lieu of Romans 6. I answer why a pastor might decline to baptize someone. Pastor Hollingsead tells us why we baptize babies (hint: it’s biblical). Pastor Timm answers why we don’t re-baptize anyone. Then we close with a book review by yours truly of *Shepherds for Sale* by Megan Basham.

3 Reflections on Romans 6 and the Baptismal Life

By Rev David Buchs (Concordia Fairhaven, CV)

#1 Paul wants you to think of your life like the life of Israel.

It's an Exodus story; deliverance from slavery. Let's recap what has happened to you so far. You were a slave to sin, which meant that, although you were beaten and abused by your master, you did what he said. You had no way out. He fed you and clothed you and housed you just enough so you'd stay put while you made the bricks that would form the monuments to Pharaoh, who fancied himself a god. But at the end of the day, the reward for your dutiful service was death.

There's nothing attractive about that. Then, in a terrifying, and downright apocalyptic moment, God sent you a Moses, who brought you through your Red Sea and gave you the Triune name and promised you freedom in a new home.

That moment was your baptism. And in that moment, once and for all, your enemies were drowned, you were set free from sin, and you were given the promise of a new home. You now belong to God, and your reward is holiness and eternal life. And so here you are today, somewhere between Egypt and the promised land.

But there's the problem. It used to be that you were bound to sin. But now that you're free, trekking through a wilderness, sin has a way of making itself look attractive. Like the allure of old, familiar things, when time has dampened bad memories and exaggerated the good ones. Like the people of Israel in the wilderness who only remember one thing about their time in Egypt – the food. And so occasionally we find ourselves posing this question. Jesus has destroyed sin and death, right? They can't hurt me anymore, right? So, there's no harm in sinning now and again, right?

That question makes Paul crazy! He answers it as strongly as he can: by no means! Think about the Exodus! Look – it's true that Egypt has no real claim on you. Pharaoh's dead and all his army drowned. But if you go back and do the things that slaves do, then what's the difference between freedom and slavery?

Here's the thing – when you were set free, you weren't set free just to wander the wilderness on your own. You were set free to pursue righteousness – that is, you were set free so that you could finally live the wonderful, beautiful, holy, and loving life that God has wanted you to have from the beginning. You couldn't do it before – you had to obey Pharaoh, the devil. But now you can. It's not just a dream or a vague hope or an empty promise. It is a gift that is given to you again and again at the altar in the flesh and blood of our Passover Lamb who was sacrificed. And so here's what you should do when sin is attractive. Eat and drink your freedom. Taste and see how much better life is than death. And then go and sin no more.

#2 Cinderella may be the most recognizable princess in the Disney cast.

It's interesting, however, that when she shows up at the ball, all decked in her magical gown with her glass slippers, her step mother and step sisters do not recognize her. There is something familiar, but she's so beautiful that they think they've never seen her before. And of course, it is her stunning beauty that attracts the attention of Prince Charming.

It would be a different story entirely, wouldn't it, if Prince Charming stumbled upon her and fell in love while seeing her scrub the floor, all covered in soot and wearing rags. Maybe we don't really know if he's all that charming after all. (I'm not trying to spoil Cinderella for you.)

It is interesting to contrast that story with, for instance, the romance in the book of Ruth. Ruth is a foreigner, a widow, and impoverished. Clinging in loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, all she can do is glean from the fields what is left after the harvest. She's a beggar. She has nothing to commend herself and nothing to offer a potential husband. In fact, as a widow, she's a liability, because any man who would marry her is obligated to bring up children for her dead husband and not for himself. All that she has on her side is the mercy of God, which she trusts.

Enter Boaz, a worthy man, with everything to commend him. He sees her trust in God's mercy and he redeems her, to no advantage of his own. He brings her out of her widowhood and poverty, and everything that is his belongs to her. And her lack becomes his own.

I read recently that it's becoming increasingly unlikely for Americans to marry across class lines. Isn't that interesting? You'd expect the opposite. With the emphasis on equality, you'd think that class differences would play less and less of a role in marriage.

But in marriage, you share everything: for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. That's a lot easier for folks to stomach if you're at least starting in the same place.

Okay. What does this have to do with Paul and Romans and Baptism and death and resurrection? **"If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5).**

The word "united" there isn't explicitly a marriage word, but it is a very organic word. It means joined together closely, like two things that were separate and they grew together so that now they're inseparable like one plant grafted into another.

The key part of this baptismal unity is that Christ found you scrubbing the floor, covered in soot and sin that you could never get clean and wearing filthy rags of unrighteousness. He found you like Ruth, with nothing to commend her and no advantage to offer a husband. And He joined himself to you so that what's yours is His, and what's His is yours. Your sin, death, condemnation, and hell become his. His grace, life, and salvation become yours. He died your death to sin, and you live His life to God. It gives new meaning entirely to those promises of for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

It means that you have something far better than a fairy tale romance, you have a husband far better than Prince Charming. You have a Boaz, a Redeemer, a Savior. And He never says, "till death us do part" – death no longer has dominion over him.

#3 Economics says that we live in a world of scarcity.

There's not enough stuff to make everyone happy. There's not even enough stuff to meet everyone's needs. So we do economic things: assign prices, pay wages, exchange and trade. The hope is generally to come out on the better end of a deal – to ensure that, in a world where there's not enough to go around, we at least have what we need. Sin has produced scarcity.

In fact, notice how Paul even talks about sin in these terms: **"The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).** He's talking economics: you have sin, and in exchange for your sin you get death. It's a trade, it's payment. When the books of justice have balanced, you're getting a fair deal.

Romans 6 is all about death and life. When we think of death and life, we tend to think of them simply as opposites. You were dead, now you're alive. You were a slave to sin, now you're a slave to righteousness. You were united with Christ in a death like his, so that you might also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

But I don't think that seeing these things simply as opposites quite captures what's going on. Listen to what Paul says: **"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ" (Rom 6:23)**. Yes, it was death before, and now it's life. But even more – it was an exchange before; now it's a free gift. It was economics before, and now it's grace. There was scarcity before; now there is abundance.

This is why we're called to compassion and mercy, to give alms and feed the hungry. It's not because by doing so we can somehow overcome the problem of scarcity in this world. It's because we are living in Christ, and in Christ we always have enough and more than we need.

At the altar, you're reminded again what life looks like in Christ. When you eat and drink His body and blood, you don't have just a little bit of Jesus, just a dose of forgiveness, or just a fraction, You have Jesus in His entirety – body, blood, soul, and divinity. All of Jesus is yours. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over is placed into your lap. In Christ, there's more than enough to go around.

Saying No to a Baptism

By Rev Joshua Reber (Faith, St. Cloud and Trinity, Clear Lake)

As far as pastoral duties go, there's nothing that brings a pastor more joy than baptizing. On St. Michael's Day (Sep 29), by God's grace, I got to baptize a father and a son. Jesus tells us that the angels rejoice when the lost are found, which means they throw a party when someone is baptized. St. Michael's Day this year must've been quite the scene in heaven this year. On their day, the angels got to celebrate baptisms, and you bet I was celebrating with them.

So why would a pastor ever say, "No" when asked if he would baptize someone? Allow me to first describe what baptism is - it's a new birth, it's a cleaning of the house, and it's incorporation into the body of Christ. Second, let me describe the usual situation where a pastor declines to baptize. Like with closed communion, the ultimate goal is to say, "Yes", but often you have to say, "No" so that hopefully later you can say, "Yes."

What is baptism? Jesus tells Nicodemus that He must be born again, and clarifies after Nicodemus thinks he's got to crawl up into his mother's womb that being born again means being born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3). Being born is a miracle, and something to celebrate. But being born is only the start. After you're born, you have to live the life given to you! Lutherans are really good at describing the beginning of the Christian life - the Holy Spirit gives faith, it's His doing, not ours. We've been a little weak on what happens after birth. What does the Christian life look like? If we're going to baptize someone, we need to make sure that they continue to get fed. You would never give birth to a baby in a hospital and then never feed them again. So, if someone says they want to be baptized but have no intention on going to church, then you're giving birth to someone and then they'll die soon after because they're not attached to the vine (Jn 15).

Baptism is the cleaning of a house, meaning your body. Paul refers to our bodies as Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20, Eph 2:21). Here's a teaching of Jesus from Matthew 12 (also found in Luke 11) -

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first” (Matt 12:43-45). Baptism gets rid of unclean spirits. It cleans house. That unclean spirit then goes through waterless places, meaning the unbaptized. After not finding rest, it goes back to the recently baptized, having found it all cleaned up for it and 7 of its buddies. This is what could happen if you “baptize and release”, meaning someone is baptized and then stops hearing God’s Word. Jesus says they’re actually worse off than they were when they were unbaptized.

Baptism is incorporation into the body of Christ, meaning you become a member of the body. It’s like a transplant! **“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... For the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Cor 12:13-14).** The church needs all her members. We need feet, eyes, tongues, etc. You can read in 1 Corinthians 12 how ridiculous it would be if the foot said he wasn’t happy because he wasn’t a hand. If body parts start fighting, we call that cancer, and we have to often remove body parts because they’re hurting the entire body. Jesus Himself says, **“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away” (Matt 18:8).** Jesus is saying to avoid sin, but I wonder if He also means that we can’t tolerate open, unrepentant sin among us, meaning we need to cut off members who won’t repent because they’re hurting the rest of the body. Paul certainly says that explicitly. **“Purge the evil person from among you [so that the body can continue to live]” (1 Cor 5:13).** When we baptize, we’re taking on new members into our body. That’s wonderful! But if we know it’s going to be a dead member on arrival, we should say no to baptism.

Which brings me to the most common instance where pastors deny to baptize someone. Here’s the situation: a couple who don’t ever go to church, who may or may not have some loose connection to the congregation, recently had a baby and want to have him baptized. If you asked them why, they’d say they wanted to give their child what their parents gave them. That’s great! But then the pastor asks, “Are you intending on bringing this child to church often?” If the answer is, “Nope!”, then I can’t in good conscience baptize that child, and you can see all the dangers above - I’d be bringing a new baby into the world knowing he’d never get fed, I’d be cleaning house for the demons to just come back, and I’d be bringing a member into the body who would soon have to be cut off.

My hope is that the parents would say, “Yes, that’s right. Okay, we’ll bring our child to church often.” If that’s the case, awesome, let’s get the baptism on the calendar and start preparing the party with the angels!

Infant Baptism: A Mature Childlike Faith

By Rev Ben Hollingsead (St. Paul’s, Eden Valley)

Last year, I sat with three other pastors at a BBQ restaurant in downtown Milwaukee. An amiable waitress approached our table, welcomed us to the restaurant, and asked what had brought us to Milwaukee. We explained we were in town for a Lutheran Convention that was taking place that week. She then asked if we were pastors. After informing her we were all four pastors, she responded, "Oh, I have questions for you guys!" After taking our drink order, she shared her joy and hope as she and her husband were expecting their first child and celebrating their first anniversary the following week. She

then asked if we did "Baby Baptisms." We shared that we did. She then shared that she thinks her baby should be baptized, but she and her husband started going to a church that doesn't baptize babies, and her husband doesn't believe babies can have faith. So, she asked the question that many who are resistant to infant baptism ask, "Can a baby truly have saving faith?"

The quick answer is yes. Infants can have faith, and God tells us this throughout the Bible. Remember John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb! (Lk 1:14). In Psalm 71: 5-6, we don't just hear about infant faith we even hear of faith from the womb when the Psalmist writes: **"You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You."**

Our Lord Jesus tells us that not only can infants have faith, but infant faith is the exemplary model for mature faith! **"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" (Lk 18:15-17).**

Whether we are baptized as infants or as adults we all are to have infant faith because it is a mature faith according to Jesus. We all know it is wrong to steal candy from a baby, but it is far worse to rob a child of baptism. Our Lord even warns of grave punishment if someone would be the of cause one of little ones, to fall away when He says **"But whoever causes one of these *little ones* who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (Matt 18:6-7)**

Many Christians think baptism and faith are personal decisions to prove one's worthiness or sincerity of being a Christian. They are wrong because the Bible tells us that faith is a gift from God that comes by hearing and not some work to prove one's righteousness before God. St. Paul explains this when he says: **"For it is by grace You have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8)** The gift of God is precisely the faith through which salvation comes. **"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).** **"You were raised with Him through faith in the working of God" (Colossians 2:12).**

God's grace is for all people because all people, whether infants, teenagers, or adults, and that's good news for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Everyone, whether young or old, needs God's grace from sin, death and the devil. This is why from the beginning of the Church Christians have practiced infant baptism as Peter preached at Pentecost, **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).**

The logical question is why so many have fallen away from the faith after baptism and confirmation. We've failed as parents as a church. Before our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave the Church

His great commission **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age*” (Matt 28:18-20)**. Our congregations have baptized many babies over the last forty years. Sadly, we have done a poor job of *teaching*, which is a part of Jesus’ command. Infant baptism has not failed; our instruction at home and in the Church has been generally lacking or absent. If a seed is not watered, it will never correctly grow as it should. Waiting to instruct our children until confirmation at age twelve or thirteen hasn’t been working. We must take up the responsibility of instructing our children with renewed vigor and commitment so that they’ll remain in the faith!

May we, the Church, see the present as an opportunity to first give thanks to our Lord for His grace and mercy, which have implanted in us an infant faith which is mature. Then, let’s do the work God has given us to do! Let’s bring children to church *and* teach them at home, always fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

No, I Won’t Rebaptize You

By Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud)

Parents bring their infant girl to be baptized at the local LCMS church. They faithfully bring her to Sunday School, make sure she goes through instruction and is confirmed. She attends youth gatherings and then heads off to college. She does not remain faithful. She departs from the faith, is sexually promiscuous, becomes pregnant, has an abortion, and messes up her life. Then she meets a devout Christian. They date, become engaged, and join a large non-denominational hyper-active church. During pre-marital instruction she confesses her many sins and receives absolution.

As a sign of her renewed faith the pastor encourages her to be re-baptized. He tells her that Scripture doesn’t speak of infant baptism but rather baptism always follows faith. The young woman then concludes that her first baptism didn’t work because she hadn’t come to a knowledge and understanding of God and herself. Now her faith is strong. Now she knows better. She is looking forward to living as a faithful Christian wife and hopefully mother. Being baptized again would mark a new beginning.

This all makes sense *if* you ignore the Scriptures on baptism. It is a reasonable conclusion if you think that Christianity is about what you do. That is why I won’t baptize you again. Your baptism didn’t fail you. You failed your baptism. God’s gifts from Christ have not left you. You left them. The gifts of Christ remain for you because Christ won them on the cross and delivered them to you in baptism. Your salvation is accomplished outside of you in Christ and delivered to you by the Holy Spirit in baptism. You can reject your baptism, but that doesn’t take away from what Christ won for you and the Spirit has given you. In his Large Catechism, Luther describes it this way, “For the ship of baptism never breaks, because (as we have said) it is God’s ordinance and not our work (1 Pt 3;20-22). But it does

happen, indeed, that we slip and fall out of the ship. Yet if anyone falls out, let him see to it that he swims up and clings to the ship until he comes into it again and lives in it, as he had done before.”

To understand those who rebaptize it is helpful to know the two general views of baptism in Christendom.

View #1) Baptism is a sacrament in which God delivers the forgiveness Christ won on the cross to sinners. Through baptism, the Holy Spirit also creates the faith to receive the gifts offered and given in baptism. This is called *paedobaptism* (*paedo* = child) or infant baptism. If God is at work to deliver gifts and faith in baptism, then it should be given to infants who are born sinful and in need of forgiveness and faith. The verses that support infant baptism are Matt 28:19-20, Mk 16:16, Jn 3:5, Acts 2:38, Acts 21:16, Rom 6:1-10, Eph 2:8-9, 5:26, Titus 3:9, 1 Pt 3:21. These verses proclaim that God works in baptism. He forgives, He saves, He washes, He cleans, He kills and makes alive. Infants are ideal candidates for baptism. They are sinful and need forgiveness. They are helpless and excel at receiving gifts and care.

View #2) Baptism is an ordinance, commanded by God. Once you believe in Jesus Christ you should get baptized because God has commanded it, and you should obey God. God does not work in baptism, rather baptism is a sign of your obedience to God’s Word. This is called *credobaptism* (*credo* = “I believe”). Those who confess this view believe that faith must precede baptism. They would support re-baptism for those who have fallen from the faith.

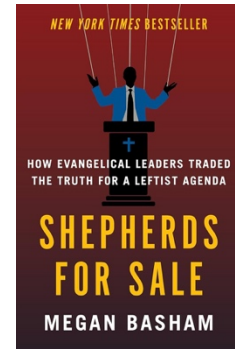
The chief Biblical argument for this view of baptism is that Scripture records no infants being baptized and those who were baptized in Scripture came to faith *first* and then were baptized. The weakness of these two arguments is that the former is an argument from silence and the latter fails to recognize the context of baptism in the New Testament. If we followed the same logic as the first argument, we shouldn’t give communion to women because there’s no record of a woman communing in the New Testament.

While the Bible does not record any infant baptisms it does tell us that whole families were baptized. Families, especially in the 1st Century, meant infants. To understand the Biblical record and context we need to remember that Jesus had just risen from the dead when He gave the command to baptize all nations in the name of the Triune God. Everyone was hearing the good news of Christ’s resurrection for the first time. The command and promise of baptism were new to the world. It naturally follows that the Biblical record tells us that the people who were baptized heard the Word first and then were baptized.

It makes sense to get re-baptized if you believe baptism is something you do to show God you believe. If you believe baptism is your work of obedience, you will likely get baptized several times over your lifetime as you wander away from God and return.

If you believe that baptism unites you to Christ’s death and resurrection, delivers forgiveness to you, brings you to faith thereby creating a new man within you, (as the Scriptures declare) then your one baptism will last you all life-long. Daily you will return to that one baptism by dying to your sins

(repenting) and rising again in forgiveness (believing). God grant us faith to believe in His saving work more than ourselves, and in His gift of baptism over and against our faltering works.



Book Review by Rev Joshua Reber

Shepherds for Sale by Megan Basham (Broadside Books, 2024)

Rev Dean Bakken, a retired ALC/ELCA pastor who was a member of mine, gave me this book about a month before he died. I dedicate this review to him. To Dean - a faithful Christian, husband, father, pastor, Marine, and friend. I'll miss blasting communism and admiring Francis Schaeffer with you, but above all, I'll miss our conversations about the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Rest in peace.

Basham's book is sobering and alarming, but not entirely surprising. Anyone who's paid attention to *Christianity Today*, the publication started by the Southern Baptist Billy Graham, has noticed they've gotten away from Biblical teachings for at least a decade. That publication, and the Southern Baptist Convention, are the main organizations mentioned throughout this book, mostly because Basham belongs to a Southern Baptist congregation.

As much as Lutherans like picking on the Baptists, we're not immune to demonic (there's really not a better word for it) forces who want to change our teaching. The Baptists seemingly get attacked by the devil the most publicly, presumably because they're the biggest Protestant group in America. There are way more Catholics in America than any other denomination, but they don't receive too much attention in this book, other than the occasional reference to Pope Francis' unbiblical statements on sexuality.

The book is divided into 8 chapters with a thought-provoking introduction ("How Do You Solve a Problem Like the Christians") and a personal, emotional conclusion which shows why Basham cares so much about Biblical teaching (she's a repentant sinner - the unadulterated Word of God saved her life). The 8 chapters are areas where institutional drift to the left has been seen in American Christianity - climate change, illegal immigration, abortion, Christian media, COVID-19, race, #MeToo, and LGBTQ issues.

This isn't a stereotypical "let's bash the libs" book. Although, if you don't like Conservative Media because you don't like the Bible, then you will really hate this book. If this book is anything, it's well-documented. Every chapter has at least 60 footnotes, and the last chapter has 103. This is the book's greatest strength and weakness. I didn't analyze every resource cited in the footnotes. That would take months. But you know that Basham isn't just gassing off. She did her homework.

The main message of the book is that rich non-Christians (yes, George Soros among others) are actively funding organizations that target churches to change their doctrine. Basham is fair. She says that we can have a debate about climate change. "It is not wrong for pastors and Christian leaders to weigh [topics like climate change]. But it is wrong for them to make agreement on environmental policies a test of biblical faithfulness. It is wrong to make climate change activism a measure of one's commitment to the Gospel" (p 30).

Since that's the case, we need to put on the armor of God. The devil is going to throw everything at us, big money included. If we stay faithful to the Word of God, we'll be alright (more than alright - our inheritance is eternal life!). But if we fold, we'll become just like the world, and Judgment Day is going to be rough. So let's dust off those Bibles and unapologetically confess what it says. Jesus Christ has won, so those faithful to Him will win, too. Money disappears. The Word of the Lord endures forever.

Memes of Grace

Across

- 3. the Scriptures
- 4. elbiB backwards
- 5. where authority comes from
- 7. _____ Study
- 8. contains two testaments

Down

- 1. the Word of God
- 2. that's the book for me
- 4. composed of 66 books
- 5. title for this crossword
- 6. what we preach from
- 7. Greek word for book

Bible Crossword

