

# **FIRST CLASS:**

## **Module 7**

### **The Means of Grace: Baptism**

#### **Review of Module 6: The Holy Spirit and the Church**

Here are the summary points from Module 6. If you have any further questions and want to dialogue, please contact one of Trinity's pastors!

- \*From the beginning, God's design for human life was a design rich in fellowship. God did not create us to live in isolation from other human beings. We are designed for mutual companionship. This is a basic, foundational truth for life together on earth. Life is a society.**
  
- \*The Holy Spirit—the Third Person of the Triune God—brings the people He calls through the Gospel to faith into a very special society, a community called the Christian Church. We confess the Church is “a mystical body,” that is a divine work of God and so somewhat invisible and hidden to human reason and perception. It is also by faith that we believe in “the Church.”**
  
- \*The Church was created and instituted by Jesus Christ Himself, and it is made up of all true believers, that is, the people whom the Holy Spirit has gathered to Christ.**
  - Christ is the Head of His Church, and this is why we call it the Christian Church**
  - The Church is **one** because Christ Himself unites all people who are members in it there is only one Lord (ruler, Head, i.e. Jesus), one saving faith (way of salvation), one truth (doctrine, teaching), and one Baptism.**
  - The Church is **holy** because its Head, Christ, is holy, and He gives to the people of the Church, as a free gift, this holiness or righteousness of His through the forgiveness of sins.**
  - The Church is **catholic** (universal, global) because in every generation, in every geographic place on earth, in every human language, all the people who believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior, are in this Christian Church.**
  - The Church is **apostolic** (founded on the body of teaching—the doctrine—that Jesus gave to His twelve apostles, whose witness to His teaching, preaching, work, death, resurrection, and ascension is preserved in the Holy Scriptures.**
  
- \*In His Church God, through Jesus Christ, freely gives His people the gift**

that human beings need the most—forgiveness of sins.

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**\*In theology we call this great work of forgiveness justification. It is a legal, forensic term from the very courts of divine justice in heaven. The just punishment and the fitting sentence for sin is death, both physical and eternal. But God, in His love and mercy for sinners, that is the whole of His created human race, sent His Son to become human in order to set Him up as a substitute defendant who, though completely innocent of sin, willingly took our penalty and punishment and exchanged with us, our sin and guilt for His perfection, our death for eternal life and immortality. That's one unimaginable curse for Him, and one blessed exchange for us. We were justified by grace (solely because of God's love; that's the motive and impetus) through the gift of faith (a divine gift that enables us to receive and believe this amazing gift and exchange).**

**\*This work of God is the Gospel. The Gospel is all that God has done for us to save us, to reconcile us to Himself, through Christ. The Gospel is a message that can only be received and believed by faith.**

**\*By God's own design He distributes the forgiveness of sins (the Gospel) through means He has also instituted for all time in and through His Church. These means of grace are His Word (preserved in the Bible and proclaimed and taught) and His Sacraments—Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These means of grace are the marks of the Church, so called because they identify for us the places where God Himself in His Word has promised to always be present with us.**

**\*In His Church Christ has also instituted the office of the holy ministry (the pastoral office) for the purpose of servant leadership in the Church and of good order. In the Bible requirements for the men who serve in this office are clearly laid out. Pastors and people of the Church work together to carry out the ministry and mission of Christ, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, works through them to proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness.**

**\*Because we live in a fallen, sinful world culture; because the devil is still at work in this fallen world; and because all people are sinners with a sinful nature, and even we Christians also remain sinners with a sinful nature within us. . .the members of Christ's Church bring sins into the fellowship of the Church, sins such as false teaching and divisions. This is why the Church on earth does not appear at some times and in some places to be either united, holy, global, or apostolic.**

**\*Jesus promises His Church will persevere until the end of time!**

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**In this lesson we will take a closer look at God's gift to us of His Sacrament of Holy Baptism.**

**In your Catechism, the Explanation section, read pages 285-305.**

**(Some further notes to consider:)**

**The term "sacrament" does not appear in the Bible anywhere. "Sacraments" are defined and applied in different ways even in the different churches who insist they are means of grace, such as Roman Catholic Christians, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Anglican and Episcopal Christians, and Lutheran Christians. Many Protestant Christians deny the miraculous nature in Baptism and Holy Communion, and consider them symbolic rituals rather than means of grace.**

**The word "sacrament" is derived from *Sacramentum*, a Latin word originally used in the Roman Empire as a military oath of commitment to the Emperor, excluding any other primary allegiance or loyalty. The early Christian Church borrowed this word to describe Holy Baptism, especially to that part of the baptism liturgy that renounced the devil and all idolatry and pledged sole allegiance to the Triune God. Shortly thereafter the term was also used to describe Holy Communion. (The church father Tertullian calls both "sacramentums" @A.D.200). The Latin word had three meanings: something to be kept sacred; a secret; and a mystery. When the church leader named Jerome, who translated the Greek New Testament into Latin, used this word "sacramentum" for Baptism and Communion, he was translating the Greek word *mysterion*. Some of the New Testament passages he was studying were Ephesians 1:9; 3:3,9; 5:32. . .Colossians 1:26-27. . .1 Timothy 3:16. . .and Revelation 1:20; 17:7. Church historians have long noted how Jerome understood the word *mysterion* ("sacramentum") in two senses: in the wider sense--all the saving truths of the Gospel, and in the narrower sense, Baptism and Lord's Supper.**

**From the time of Martin Luther, Lutheran Christians have admitted there are various beliefs and practices relating to the doctrine of the sacraments. Because the word "sacrament" is not an actual Biblical word, various groups have defined various doctrines concerning sacraments. But in one of the Lutheran writings, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, it is stated that "no intelligent person will quibble about the number of sacraments and the terminology, so long as those things are kept which have God's command and promise!"**

**While the authority of tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism**

mandates the sacraments in definition, number, and practice, the Lutheran Confession focuses on the concept of God working through visible, tangible, physical means to offer and convey His undeserved love to fallen human beings,  
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as a Biblical Truth at the very heart of the mystery of the Gospel. The God who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ now places His love within reach of our very senses in the water of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine of the Holy Supper. By such a focus, Lutherans established three requirements for their use of the word "sacrament." First, Lutherans distinguished very simply, but very sharply in their practice an "act" from a "sacred act." An act would be something the human believer did; the sacred act is something God does. On this basis a sacrament was defined as a "sacred act":

- \*instituted by God Himself;
  - \*in which God has joined His Word of promise to a visible element; and
  - \*by which He offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ
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## **SACRAMENT**

### **The Lutheran Definition**

#### **A Sacred Act**

##### **I. Instituted/Commanded by God**

##### **II. Visible Elements Present**

##### **III. Promise of Forgiveness of Sins**

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With this definition in place Lutheran Christians can then speak of the other rites or rituals in the Church that lack one or more of the above stipulations, and yet retain what might well serve the Church as a "human-invention" that does not contradict the Word of God and serves a useful purpose in the practice of the Christian faith. Thus, Confirmation, Marriage, and A Service of Commendation for the Dying were retained as practices in the Church, but were not given the status of a sacrament. Those practices such as penance and the orders of celibate monks and nuns were rejected as contradicting Scripture. Lutherans speak of two sacraments, while retaining private confession and absolution (without paying of penances and indulgences). Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians (the two largest Christian denominations in the world in numbers) still hold to seven sacraments.

What do you learn about Holy Baptism in the following Scripture passages?

**\*Matthew 28:18-20**

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**\*Acts 2:38-41**

**\*Acts 8:26-39**

**\*Acts 16:25-33**

**\*Acts 22:16**

**\*Romans 6:3-5**

**\*Galatians 3:27**

**\*Ephesians 5:26**

**\*1 Peter 3:21**

**\*Titus 3:5-7**

**Consider the following issues raised regarding this doctrine of Holy Baptism; how would you answer someone who asked you these questions:**

**\*The Issues of Infant/child Baptism**

**--“How do you know Jesus wants babies/children to be baptized?”**

***Thoughts:* Luke 18:15-17, although included in the Baptism liturgy, is not a proof passage that we should baptize children. Jesus is blessing the children, laying on His hands, not baptizing. But this passage does show Jesus’ compassion for children, both male and female. And here in the Greek, the word used for “children” refers to “nursing children” (Greek)**

**--“Show me a single Scripture that specifically says, “baptize a child, an infant, or a newborn!”**

***Answer:* There isn’t one. But neither is there one that says baptize any segment of the human population to the exclusion of others. Let’s look at them: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-41, Acts 16:25-33. . .I don’t see the word “infant” or “baby” or “child” and neither do I see the word “man” or “woman” or**

“adult over twelve years old,” or “bald-headed lefthander,” or “pious person,” etc.

May I continue my witness? If baptism is for sinners, are not babies born in sin? The Bible teaches us that we are all *conceived and born in sin*

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(Psalm 51:5, John 3:5-6, and Romans 5:12); therefore do we not need salvation from minute one! How can a baby be saved from sin, the devil, and death? Show me, in Scripture, where God says babies and children have such an amnesty.

And, begging a bit more of your patience, in fact, the Bible says babies can have faith and believe, even before they can cognitively know and understand it—see Matthew 18:6! Wow!

And finally, one more question for you: are we Christians not taking a serious risk (if one or more of these things are true), if we do not baptize our infants and children? Show me a Scripture that says, “Don’t baptize a baby; that is a false hope and would be a purely meaningless ritual.”

**\*The Issue of the Necessity of Baptism for Salvation--is it possible for a person who was never baptized to be saved and go to heaven?**

**Answer:** Yes. In the Bible the only thing that now condemns the human being is unbelief. Sin itself cannot do it anymore; Christ paid for all sin. Death for the believer has been transformed into the gateway to eternal life. Those are lost who are found to be without the gift of faith. It is possible for one to be given faith and believe the Gospel and die before being baptized; such a person is a Christian and is saved. However one who has become or has been a Christian will not deny or despise what Christ has promised in His Word about Baptism; such an unbaptized believer should not delay in getting baptized. To summarize with an old adage: baptism is necessary, but not absolutely necessary for salvation.

(note: the thief on the cross, Luke 23:39-43, is an example of one who comes to faith through the Word and is saved, but this is not a proof passage for this issue, since Christian baptism had not yet been instituted by Jesus)

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After studying the Catechism reading, do you better understand what Baptism is, what blessings are given in Baptism, what amazing power is in Baptism, how Baptism is a miraculous work of God each of the many, many times it is

administered, and what it indicates? Do you know better how to rightly “use” your Baptism in everyday life?

If you have further questions, please contact one of Trinity’s pastors!

Notes:

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Return your answers on this module to

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If you want to ask questions or enter into dialogue on any of the above questions or related issues, we’d love to engage in conversation with you:

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