

*What the Bible
says about the*
Lutheran Church

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Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, Alabama 36117-2752

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ISBN: 978-0-932859-83-9

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication

Kyle Butt, 1976 -

Baptist Book/Kyle Butt

Includes bibliographic references

ISBN 978-0-932859-83-9

1. Comparative religion. 2. Christian theology. I. Title

280—dc22

2005926366

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	What is in a Name?	1
Chapter 2	Is the Bible Enough?	7
Chapter 3	Baptism	15
	The Necessity of Baptism	15
	What is Baptism?	19
	The Candidate for Baptism	23
	Infant Baptism	27
	How Should Baptism be Carried Out?	31
Chapter 4	Church Organization	33
	Pastors, Bishops, and Elders	33
Chapter 5	Conclusion	39
Appendix A	What About the Thief on the Cross?	43
Appendix B	Do Babies Go to Hell When They Die?	49
References	53

Introduction

Few and far between are those brave individuals who have the fortitude to swim against the swelling current of mediocrity and the status quo. Most are content to sit by, occasionally complaining about this situation or that, never making bold, decisive moves in an attempt to make their world a better place by standing for what they think is right regardless of the cost. Martin Luther was not “most people.” He was a daring, courageous man who wanted the general mass of people to experience what he considered to be the true grace of God, free from the oppressive practices that were then taking place in the Catholic Church. In 1517, the nail he drove through his 95 theses simultaneously drove a separating wedge between his followers and the Catholic Church. Recognized as the first leader of a protestant denomination, Martin Luther became the pioneer who blazed the trail for many of the mainstream protestant denominations that would later arise. Lutherans, who obviously take their name from this brave soul, trace their roots back to 1517, and can accurately maintain that they are the oldest protestant denomination in existence.

Not only is Lutheranism the oldest protestant denomination, it is also one of the largest. Worldwide, the Lutheran Church maintains about 66 million members. “Of these, 36 million live in Europe, 13 million live in Af-

rica, 8.4 million in North American, 7.3 million in Asia, and 1.1 million in Latin American” (“Lutheranism,” 2004). In addition, Germany is predominantly Lutheran, while Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland maintain Lutheranism as the “official state church.” Of the citizens of Finland, approximately 81% are Lutheran (“Lutheranism,” 2004). With such a renowned traditional beginning and huge numbers of adherents worldwide and in the USA, the Lutheran Church remains one of the most influential forces on the religious scene today.

Through the years, the Lutheran Church has experienced the same types of divisions, splintering, and schism that most other denominations and religions have experienced. There are, however, several major church doctrines that are accepted by the majority, if not all, of the different Lutheran groups. One of those major doctrines concerns the denomination’s self-professed view of Scripture. According to the official Web site of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (or ELCA), “The New Testament is the first-hand proclamation of those who lived through the events of Jesus’ life, death, and Resurrection. As such, it is the authority for Christian faith and practice” (“Essential Questions”). The official Web site for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (or LCMS) says the following concerning the Bible:

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy

men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21.... We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged” (“Of the Holy Scriptures,” 2004).

From the above quotes, it is obvious that the Lutheran Church asserts that the Bible is the book by which all of the doctrines, teachings, and practices of any religious group should be measured. It is the goal of this book, therefore, to lay side by side, in a sincere and honest manner, the teachings of the Bible and the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Church. If, as the Lutheran Church states, the Bible is the guide that leads it in doctrine and practice, then the Lutheran Church should follow the biblical pattern for concepts such as church organization, baptism, and biblical unity. If, on the other hand, we find that the Lutheran Church does not follow the New Testament pattern as it claims to, then we must look elsewhere to find the true church that Jesus Christ established. Such a test is appropriate for every religious group claiming to provide a way for lost sinners to be saved through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that all those who read this book, regardless of their religious affiliation, will honestly open their hearts in a sincere attempt to find nothing more and nothing less than the Lord's church and His plan for the salvation of mankind.

[As a side note, the Lutheran Church accepts several documents as "true declarations" of the Lutheran belief system. Those documents include the *Apostles'*, *Nicene*, and *Athanasian Creeds*, as well as the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, the *Smalcald Articles*, the *Small Catechism*, the *Large Catechism*, and the *Formula of Concord*. These documents can be found in the *Book of Concord*, and will be quoted throughout the remainder of this book. This list can be found in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Church in America* in chapter two, as well as in Article II: Confession of the *LCMS Handbook*. In addition, the two frequently used abbreviations ELCA and LCMS are the generally accepted abbreviations for the two main divisions of the Lutheran Church in the United States: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.]

Chapter 1

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

Martin Luther was a visionary. He wanted and demanded change in the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church. People who had grown weary of the Catholic Church's "salvation by works," selling of indulgences, purgatory "soul-purchasing," and other non-biblical practices were drawn to Luther's personality as well as to his preaching. To say that he was one of the founding fathers of protestant denominationalism would almost be an understatement. He was the spark that started the flame, which grew into a fire that spread across the world.

Because of Luther's magnetic personality and teaching, his following grew rapidly. Those who looked disparagingly upon the new movement called his followers "Lutherans." This name, meant originally to castigate and mock the adherents of the new movement, was soon adopted as a badge of honor. In fact, the name became

such a cherished possession of the new group that it has weathered the centuries, and is still the self-proclaimed name of those who profess to adhere to Luther's teachings (many of which are found in the *Book of Concord*).

While it may seem innocent enough to use the name Lutheran as a profession of one's doctrinal beliefs and church affiliation, Luther himself did not see the situation so. In fact, Luther did not want any person using his name in such a way. Luther himself said:

I beseech you, above all things, not to use my name; not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? The doctrine is not mine; I have been crucified for no one. Paul would not suffer the Christians to say: I am of Paul; or, I am of Peter; but, I am Christ's. How, then can the followers of Christ call themselves after the unsanctified name of a poor stinking mass of corruption... such as I am? **Let us blot out all party-names,** and call ourselves Christians, as we follow Christ's doctrine (as quoted in Stork, p. 289, emp. in org.).

Immediately following these words, Luther mentioned the papists, who were named after the Pope: "The papists have justly a party-name; because, unsatisfied with Christ's name and doctrine, they will be popish too" (Stork, p. 289).

According to Luther, He did not want any group of people to call themselves Lutherans. In fact, he alluded to a clear biblical reference in which the inspired writers spoke against the practice. When the apostle Paul wrote

1 Corinthians, the church at Corinth had several problems that needed a direct answer from the Holy Spirit. One of the primary problems was the fact that the church in that city was dividing itself into different groups. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Paul wrote concerning such division: “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” The various members of the Corinthian church were dividing themselves along the lines of who they thought the most influential leaders were. Paul confronted and rebuked this idea of division.

Martin Luther knew this Scripture well, and referred to it to implore his listeners to call themselves nothing but Christians. **Luther rightly asked how the followers of Christ could call themselves after the name of a mere man?** While it is true that the name “Lutherans” was at first applied to the followers of Luther in a derogatory manner, the name is now a self-professed, voluntarily used name by a group of people who call themselves Lutherans. Would Martin Luther be pleased with such? In light of his comments, the answer is a resounding no. But more important, is **God** pleased with this situation? From reading 1 Corinthians 1:12, it is clear that God wants no other name to be used for His followers than the name of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we find clearly depicted on the pages of the New Testament the idea of scriptural names for Christ's church, that is, names for both the church itself and names for individual members of that church. In Romans 16:16, we find the expression "churches of Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:2, we have a reference to "the church of God." In 1 Corinthians 3:16, we find "the temple of God." And in Ephesians 4:12, we have the phrase "the body of Christ."

These expressions are not intended to be technical or formal names for the church. They are descriptions. They are labels that describe Christ's church. Additional ones may be found as well. Most of the time in the New Testament, Christ's church is referred to simply as "the church." But the point is this: most of the names that people attach to denominations today are not used in the New Testament to describe the Lord's church. In the New Testament, the Lord's body or church is never called by a man's name other than Christ's.

The same thing is true with regard to the names that God wants individual Christians to wear. In the New Testament, we read that followers of Christ were called Christians (Acts 11:26). In Romans 1:7, we find the term "saints," and in Acts 5:14 we find the term "believer" applied to Christ's followers. In other passages, we find the word "disciple," or familial names like "brother." Yet, we never read of a person being called a Pauline Christian, or an Apollonian Christian, nor do we read that any

Christian was ever called a Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Baptist Christian. Does it not cast doubt on the legitimacy of a denomination when the names it uses are not names used in the New Testament for either the Lord's church or individual Christians?

Luther himself showed that the papists were incorrectly, sinfully, calling themselves after the pope. Following his reasoning, as well as that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:12, any person who is using a denominational name that focuses on anyone other than Christ is involved in an unbiblical practice and should stop it immediately.

New Testament truth on the matter of names is simple. While it is true that some denominations have taken the names of men and applied them to themselves and their churches (e.g., Lutheran, Wesleyan), and other churches designate themselves by a particular practice or doctrine (e.g., Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian), those naming practices are not sanctioned in the Bible. To be accurate and acceptable to God, we should be only Christians and Christians only, having no other names than those that are biblical, and being members of no denomination, but simply members of Christ's church. Martin Luther would be grieved to see that the church, which purports to be closely connected to his teachings, has denied him one of his most heart-felt petitions—that they would **not** call themselves Lutherans.

Chapter 2

IS THE BIBLE ENOUGH?

As was stated in the introduction, one of the major doctrines of the Lutheran Church concerns the denomination's view of Scripture. According to the official Web site of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "The New Testament is the first-hand proclamation of those who lived through the events of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. As such, it is the authority for Christian faith and practice" ("Essential Questions"). The official Web site for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod says this concerning the Bible:

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21... We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that

they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged (“Of the Holy Scriptures,” 2004).

From the above quotes, it seems clear that the Bible should be the “sole source” and “sole rule” from which all the doctrines of the Lutheran Church radiate. In truth, however, this simply is not the case. The Introduction to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* dated October 7, 2003, states: “These documents (the constitutions and bylaws—KB) govern our life together as congregations, synods, and churchwide organization.” If the Bible is the complete Word of God and able to thoroughly equip the man of God for “every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), why then would a group of people who claim that the Bible is their sole authority, need several hundred pages of additional texts written by humans to “govern” the life of the denomination?

In addition to the *Constitutions and Bylaws*, both the ELCA and the LCMS claim to view several other documents as “true declarations of faith” for the Lutheran Church. Some of those documents include the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, the *Smalcald Articles*, and Luther’s *Small and Large Catechisms*. In chapter 2 of the ELCA Con-

stitution, section 7, the text reads: “This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scripture and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.” The LCMS has this to say concerning the text listed:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod accepts the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and subscribes **unconditionally** to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a **true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture and as authoritative** for all pastors, congregations and other rostered church workers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (“Lutheran Confessions,” 2004, emp. added).

From the writings of the two major branches of the Lutheran Church in America, it is clear that the Bible, **along with** the writings found in the *Book of Concord*, are the binding, authoritative rules for all members and workers of the Lutheran church.

Several major problems arise from this situation. First, what happens when the Bible and the ecumenical confessions or Constitutions disagree? As will be shown in the later pages of this book, the Bible does not agree in all points with the other writings that the Lutheran

Church accepts as “true and binding.” If a group claims that different documents are “binding and authoritative,” and yet those documents contradict one another, then that group must choose which books or texts to follow. One of the two must be rejected, thereby putting the statements made by the Lutheran Church in hopeless confusion.

For example, in the New Testament, certain qualifications are given in order for a man to be appointed as a pastor (read 2 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). (Note that the terms elder, bishop, and pastor are used synonymously in Scripture to refer to the leaders who meet the qualifications mentioned by Paul—see pages 33-34). According to God’s Word, then, those men who meet these qualifications are eligible to be pastors. The *Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, however, in a “required section” for every congregation, puts forth a different criterion: “Only a member of the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or a candidate for the roster of ordained ministers who has been recommended for the congregation by the synodical bishop may be called as a pastor of this congregation” (Chapter 9, section 1). Notice carefully that God’s qualifications for pastors are supplanted by the Lutheran Church’s opinion of pastoral qualifications. The same situation occurs throughout the Lutheran writings. In the ELCA *Constitution*, Chapter 7.31, paragraph c, anyone who desires to be a pastor

must have “satisfactorily completed the requirements for the Master of Divinity degree from an accredited theological school in North American.” Here again, the Bible says nothing about a formal education requirement for pastors. In such situations, the Lutheran Church consistently disregard’s God’s qualifications and adopts other criteria written by men.

Second, several of the statements in the writings found in the *Book of Concord*, which the Lutheran Church claims to accept, are no longer followed—a situation that directly contradicts the “official” statements issued concerning the authority of the documents contained in the *Book of Concord*. [The section on the necessity of water baptism on pages 15-19 provides a good example of this. From Luther’s statement recorded on those pages, it is clear that he believed and taught that children were possessed by the devil and that they would go to hell unless otherwise saved from the devil through baptism. This position is no longer held by Lutherans, yet they still claim to accept as authoritative and binding all the ideas made in the various creeds and “declarations of faith.”]

Finally, we must take a brief look at what authority the Bible claims for itself. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the Bible states, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Notice that this passage declares that the Bible is suffi-

cient to equip the man of God completely. If that is the case, then why would other writings be included with the Bible as “binding and authoritative” for the Lutheran Church? It seems obvious that the officials of the Lutheran Church believe that the Bible is not a sufficient source of “rule and authority,” and must therefore be supplemented by other writings.

In Jude, we read an exhortation for Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In 2 Peter 1:3, we read that during Peter’s day, God had given the Christians “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” The Scriptures need no supplementation or additions to “help” a group of people follow God. In fact, from the first century on, people were following God according to His will without the writings found in the *Book of Concord*. What can be concluded from this fact is that the Bible produces Christians, while the confessions accepted by the Lutheran Church produce Lutherans.

If a person or group of people desires to follow God in the way He instructs them, that person or group should obey only the writings that come from God. When writings from the pens of mere men are included in the list of “authoritative and binding” writings for a group, then that group has elevated men to the same status as God. As Jesus told the Pharisees, they had begun “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). And as Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren: “But even if

we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

In the *Constitutions* of the ELCA, Chapter 5, section one, the text reads: “This church recognizes that all power and authority in the Church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, its head.” If the Lutheran Church truly believes that, why not do away with all the creeds and confessions written by men that are viewed as “authoritative and binding,” and rely solely on God’s Word for instructions. The New Testament produces New Testament Christians; when other writings are added as “authoritative,” something other than a Christian is produced.

Chapter 3

BAPTISM

The topic of baptism is one of the most controversial topics within Christendom. Various groups, denominations, and churches teach a multitude of differing doctrines concerning baptism. Is it necessary for salvation? Who can be properly baptized? How should baptism be carried out? Etc. In regard to baptism, what does the Lutheran Church teach about it, and how does that teaching compare with what the New Testament teaches?

The Necessity of Baptism

Many in the religious world would be surprised to learn what Martin Luther taught about baptism. This is due to the fact that a large number of religious people associate Martin Luther with the modern doctrine which claims that belief in Christ is the only thing necessary for salvation. This modern doctrine often is referred to as

being saved by “faith only.” Since one of Luther’s defining teachings was salvation by “faith only,” modern religious people mistakenly identify their version of “faith only” with Luther’s version of “faith only.”

The truth of the matter is, Luther never taught that a person could be saved by believing in God without being baptized in water. Luther’s teaching focused on the fact that meritorious works could not **earn** a person salvation, as the Catholic Church of his day taught. He did not, however, teach that a person could be saved without being baptized.

In fact, Luther was adamant about the necessity of water baptism for salvation. Many of his teachings on the necessity of baptism are found in documents that the Lutheran Church continues to claim as accepted doctrines of the Church. In Luther’s *Large Catechism*, under the section titled “Fourth Part: Concerning Baptism,” Luther wrote: “Baptism is no human plaything but is instituted by God Himself. Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved, so that we are not to regard it as an indifferent matter, like putting on a red coat” (as cited in the *Book of Concord*, p. 457). It is clear from Luther’s comments that he viewed baptism as an essential part of God’s plan to save sinful humans. He clearly stated that a sinful human cannot be saved without being baptized. The Lutheran church **historically** has acknowledged this statement as an accurate declaration of its belief on the

subject of baptism (although, as we will see, the present-day Lutheran Church no longer acknowledges this statement as accurate).

The New Testament, as well, teaches that sinful humans must be baptized in order to be saved. The apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, told the multitude to “repent and be baptized everyone of you for the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Saul, who became the apostle Paul, was told to “arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). In 1 Peter 3:21, the inspired writer said: “There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” While it is true that other things are involved in God’s plan of salvation—such as faith, repentance, and confession—the Lutheran Church at one time rightly recognized that baptism in water is just as essential to a sinner’s salvation as any other part of God’s plan to save sinful man.

Unfortunately, the Lutheran Church (both ELCA and LCMS) seems to be changing its beliefs about the necessity of baptism for salvation of sinners. From the official Web site of the LCMS comes this statement: “The LCMS does not believe that baptism is ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross was saved (apparently without baptism), as were all true believers in the Old Testament era. Mark 16:16 implies that it is not

the absence of baptism that condemns a person but the absence of faith..." ("Baptism and Its Purpose," 2004, emp. in orig.). [For a treatment of the thief on the cross, see Appendix A.] In an article titled "Essential Questions—Christianity and Lutheranism," under a section titled, "What must a person do to become a Christian?," the official ELCA Web site gave this extremely short answer: "Jesus said, 'Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11:25-26)." Under the section that explains what a person must do to become a Lutheran, the same article said that baptism is necessary to become a **Lutheran** ("Essential Questions"). Therefore, the Lutheran Church teaches that a person can be **saved** without being baptized, but can be a **Lutheran** only after baptism.

It appears, then, that the Lutheran Church has drifted from its traditional belief—held by Martin Luther himself—that baptism is essential for the salvation of sinners. This is ironic, because Lutherans claim to hold the statements made by Luther as an accurate representation of their beliefs. The Lutheran Church has joined the ranks of most other denominations in their statements that belief in Christ, apart from water baptism, is enough to save a person. Lutherans, and most other denominations, claim that people are saved by "faith only," without further acts of obedience such as baptism. Indeed, Luther

faced similar arguments. Concerning such ideas, he wrote the following:

Our know-it-alls, the new spirits, claim that faith alone saves and that works and external things add nothing to it. We answer: It is true, nothing that is in us does it but faith, as we shall hear later on. But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that 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, not through the water, as we have sufficiently stated, but through its incorporation with God’s Word and ordinance and the joining of his name to it (*Book of Concord*, p. 460).

The apostle Paul made a similar statement when he wrote to the Colossian brethren that they were “buried with Him [Jesus—KB] in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). The Lutheran Church at one time correctly believed the biblical doctrine that baptism precedes the forgiveness of sins and is an essential part of God’s plan to save sinners. The evidence indicates it has strayed from that belief.

What is Baptism?

What, exactly, do Lutherans mean by the word “baptism”? It is obvious from the statements previously quoted that Lutherans believe that the baptism involves water.

But what part does the water play? Should it be poured or sprinkled over the person being baptized? Must the individual be completely immersed? And how does the Bible describe the act of baptism?

The Lutheran Church teaches that any type of water application such as sprinkling, pouring, or immersion is acceptable. The official LCMS Web site states: "Lutherans have therefore held that the manner of Baptism (that is, immersion, pouring, sprinkling, etc.) does not determine whether a Baptism is valid.." ("Method of Baptism," 2004). In another section, the site reiterates its sentiments: "Lutherans have always regarded the mode of baptism (immersion, dipping, pouring, sprinkling, etc.) to be a matter of Christian freedom that has no effect on the validity of the baptism itself (the power of baptism comes from God's Word and promise, not from the type or amount of water or the way in which it is applied)" ("Meaning of *Baptize*," 2004, parenthetical items in both quotes in orig.).

To argue for this particular point of view, the Lutheran Church declares that it is impossible to know from the biblical text whether the word *baptize* means to dip, wash, pour, or immerse. Thus, Lutherans believe any method of water application is acceptable. It is at this point, however, that modern Lutheran teaching once again veers from the New Testament pattern. It is a fact that the New Testament teaches that baptism is **immersion**.

The word translated “baptize” (*baptidzo*) actually means to “dip, immerse” (Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, 1979, p. 131). John Calvin said concerning the word baptism:

Whether the person baptized is to be wholly immersed...or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence: churches should be at liberty to adopt either, according to the diversity of climates, **although it is evident that the term baptize means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church** (*Institutes*, 1975, p. 524, emp. added).

It is interesting to note that Calvin recognized what the New Testament actually says about baptism being immersion, but chose to ignore the biblical text. It also is the case that Bible writers not only used the word that means “to immerse” or “immersion,” but defined the word as a **burial**. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul wrote: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were **buried** with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Paul also confirmed that baptism is a burial in Colossians 2:12, where he wrote that the Colossian Christians had been “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” To miss the

fact that baptism is a burial in water is to miss a major part of its significance. Just as Christ died, was buried, and rose again, so the candidate for baptism dies to sin, is buried (immersed completely) in water, and rises from that water as a resurrected being with new life. Sprinkling and pouring as forms of “baptism” miss this point entirely.

The New Testament knows absolutely nothing of pouring or sprinkling, as men like John Calvin have acknowledged. When the Ethiopian treasurer wanted to be baptized, both he and Philip “went down into the water” (Acts 8:38). When John the Baptizer baptized multitudes of people he did much of it in “Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23). When Jesus Christ was baptized, the biblical text says: “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, **coming up from the water**, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” (Mark 1:9-10). From these verses it can be proven that New Testament baptism entails the fact that those involved go “down into” the water as in a burial.

The practices of sprinkling and pouring, then, do not find their authority in the New Testament. The word translated baptize means to dip or immerse; the New Testament not only uses the word that means to dip, but also defines the term as a burial. The New Testament examples that have been given demonstrate that those involved

in baptism went “down into” the water. Immersion in water is the only authorized, valid method of baptism in the New Testament. Anything other than immersion is a man-made invention that God will not accept as appropriate or adequate.

The Candidate for Baptism

According to the Lutheran Church, what people or groups of people are eligible for baptism? Should baptism be reserved for those who are old enough to believe in Christ? Can babies be baptized? And what does the New Testament teach about the candidate for baptism? Does the New Testament teaching agree with Lutheran teaching about who can be baptized?

There is significant agreement between the divisions of the Lutheran Church as to who is eligible for baptism. The Lutheran church teaches that babies and infants, as well as adults, are candidates for baptism (by which is meant sprinkling, immersion, or pouring). In the *Smalcald Articles*, which both the ELCA and LCMS claim to hold as accurate declarations of their faith, the following statement is made: “We maintain that we should baptize children because they also belong to the promised redemption that was brought about by Christ. The church ought to extend it to them” (*Book of Concord*, 2000, p. 320). In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (accepted by both ELCA and LCMS), the text under “Article IX: Baptism,” reads: “We confess that baptism is necessary for

salvation, that children are to be baptized, and that baptism of children is not ineffective but necessary and efficacious for salvation” (*Book of Concord*, p. 183).

It is here that we must address one of the most disappointing aspects of the Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Church, in its constitutions, claims to hold to the statements made in the *Book of Concord*, yet when those statements disagree with some popular denominational teaching, the Church denies those statements. One of the best examples of this can be seen in the area of infant baptism. In Luther’s *Small Catechism*, Luther himself gave the reason why infants are baptized. In this document, Luther claimed that infants are “possessed” by the devil and that baptism drives the devil away from them.

Out of a sense of Christian commitment, I appeal to all those who baptize, sponsor infants, or witness a baptism to take to heart the tremendous work and great solemnity present here. For here in the words of these prayers you hear how plaintively and earnestly the Christian church brings the infant to God, confesses before him with such unchanging, undoubting words that the infant is possessed by the devil and a child of sin and wrath, and so diligently asks for help and grace through baptism that the infant may become a child of God (*Book of Concord*, p. 372).

In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, also recorded in the *Book of Concord*, the early founders of the denomination said that “it is necessary to baptize little

children in order that the promise of salvation might be applied to them according to Christ's mandate [Matt. 28: 19], 'Baptize all nations.' Just as salvation is offered to all in that passage, so baptism is offered to all—men, women, children, and infants. Therefore it clearly follows that infants are to be baptized because salvation is offered with baptism" (*Book of Concord*, p. 184).

According to the early Lutheran writers in the *Book of Concord*, babies (as well as adults) must be baptized to be saved. According to these writings, babies are born with such a sinful nature that they are "possessed by the devil"—a situation that can be remedied only through baptism. How are such teachings regarding in the Lutheran Church today, and what should be our response to such teachings?

First, it must be noted that the teaching that babies are born in sin and doomed to hell if not baptized is incorrect (see Appendix B). Second, even though the Lutheran Church claims to hold to the statements in these documents, it then denies comparable statements in its current "official positions."

For example, on the official LCMS Web site, in an article titled "Baptism and Its Purpose," the text states:

Lutherans do not believe that only those baptized as infants receive faith. Faith can also be created in a person's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's (written or spoken) word. Baptism should then soon follow conversion.... Mark

16:16 implies that it is not the absence of baptism that condemns a person but the absence of faith, and there are clearly other ways of coming to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (reading or hearing the Word of God) (“Baptism and Its Purpose,” parenthetical items in orig.).

According to the LCMS Web site, then, baptism is not necessary to salvation, and there are other ways for adults and infants to be saved. In another article from the site, however, titled “Why We Baptize Infants,” the text says that infants are baptized because,

[a]ccording to the Bible, all people—including infants—are sinful and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)... Like adults, infants die—sure proof that they too are under the curse of sin and death. According to the Bible, baptism (somewhat like Old Testament circumcision, administered to 8-day-old-babies—see Col. 2:11-12) is God’s gracious way of washing away our sins—even the sins of infants—without any help or cooperation on our part (“Why do Lutherans Baptize Infants,” 2004, parenthetical items in orig.).

Let’s try to put these pieces together. The *Book of Concord* says infants are “possessed by the devil” and must be baptized to be saved. The modern-day Lutheran Church claims to accept these teachings, but then says that there are other ways to be saved that do not include water baptism. In another statement, the Lutheran Church says that baptism is “God’s gracious way of washing away

our sins—even the sins of infants—without any help or cooperation on our part.” If the Lutheran Church claims to believe that in baptism God washes away sins, how then can it claim that baptism is **not** “ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation” (“Baptism and Its Purpose”)? The Lutheran position on baptism is confused, and stands in serious contradiction.

Infant Baptism

Not only does the Lutheran position on baptism contradict itself, but it also goes against what the Bible says about New Testament baptism. In the New Testament, the Bible specifically states that the candidate for baptism must do several things in order for that baptism to be valid in God’s sight.

First, the candidate for baptism must hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 10:14 reads: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Hearing the Word of God is one of the fundamental steps to becoming a Christian. Yet, simply hearing that Word without understanding it is of no value in the salvation process. The candidate for baptism must hear **and understand** the Gospel message. Jesus Christ, on numerous occasions, instructed His listeners to “understand” what He was saying. In Mark 7:14, He said: “Hear me, everyone,

and understand.” In explaining the parable of the sower, one of the reasons those of the “wayside” soil did not obey was because they did not “understand” (Matthew 13:19). The New Testament knows nothing of baptizing any person who has not heard **and** understood the Gospel of Christ. Obviously, babies cannot understand the Gospel. It could be the case that someone would tell them the story, but infants would understand neither the language nor the content of the message. Babies simply cannot hear and understand the Gospel.

Second, the Bible clearly establishes that the candidate for baptism must believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 10:10-11 states: “For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” Hebrews 11:6 declares: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” And, of course, one of the most famous “belief” passages 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.” The Bible clearly states that the candidate for baptism must believe that God exists, that Jesus is His Son, and that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. An infant cannot believe these things, because a baby does not have the capacity even to understand them, much less believe them.

Luther's *Small Catechism* says concerning baptism: What gifts or benefits does baptism grant? Answer: It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation **to all who believe it**, as the words and promise of God declare. What are these words and promise of God? Answer: Where the Lord Christ says in Mark 16[:16], "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be damned" (*Book of Concord*, p. 359).

This statement by Luther was quoted on the LCMS Web site in an article titled "Baptism and Salvation." It would seem from these statements that the Lutheran Church agrees with the Bible that the candidate for baptism must believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ. That, however, is not the case. The Lutheran church teaches that infants can be baptized without a prior belief in Christ.

How does the Lutheran Church explain why it baptizes infants, even though infants cannot believe in God or the Gospel? The Lutheran Church teaches that when an infant is baptized, God "creates faith" in the heart of the infant.

Although we do not claim to understand how this happens or how it is possible, we believe (because of what the Bible says about baptism) that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. This faith cannot yet, of course, be expressed or articulated, yet it is real and present all the same (see e.g., Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5-6; Matt. 18:6; Luke 1:15; 2 Tim. 3:15) ("Baptism and its Purpose").

Several problems exist with this explanation concerning an infant's "faith." First, the biblical record clearly confirms that a person must believe in God and Christ **before** baptism. Belief in Christ was always a prerequisite to baptism. Yet the Lutheran Church teaches that God mysteriously gives faith to an infant **during** baptism. Second, by using the word faith instead of belief, the Lutheran Church has attempted to sidestep the real issue. The "faith" that the Bible says saves a person is a mental belief and understanding of God, the Sonship of Jesus, and the Gospel. Romans 10:13-14 says: "For 'whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him on whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Paul clearly stated that a person cannot "call upon God" without first believing in Him and His Son. Infants do not have the capacity to believe prior to their baptism and thus cannot be scriptural candidates for baptism.

In addition to understanding the Gospel of Christ and believing it, the proper candidate for baptism must be willing and able to communicate his or her belief that Jesus **is** the Son of God. Romans 10:9 declares: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good con-

fession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate..." (1 Timothy 6:12-14). Infants not yet able to utter elementary words such as "mommy" or "daddy" certainly cannot believe the story of Jesus and **confess** that they believe in the deity of Christ.

How Should Baptism be Carried Out?

According to the New Testament, there is only one acceptable mode of baptism (read Ephesians 4:5). That baptism is a total immersion in water of a person who is old enough to understand and repent of sin, believe the story of Jesus, and confess his or her belief in the deity of Christ. The candidate must understand that the purpose of baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), and must be immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

What should be occur if all of these requirements have not been met? The Bible gives us a very clear example of a group of people who had met several of these requirements, but not all of them. In Acts 19:1-5, we read a story of several men from Ephesus who had been baptized into John's baptism, yet had not heard about the Holy Spirit. From the text, we can learn that these men had been immersed (which is what baptism means in the New Testament), and that they had been baptized to obey God.

When Paul realized, however, that they had not be baptized in the name of Jesus, and had not heard about the Holy Spirit, the men were re-baptized in the proper name with the proper understanding (Acts 19:5). From this example, we can learn at least two very important things. First, when a person is baptized incorrectly—without having met the requirements found in the New Testament—that person should be baptized again. Second, when the Bible speaks of “one baptism” in Ephesians 4:5, it does not mean that it is a sin to be baptized more than once. It means that there is only one baptism accepted by the Lord as valid for obedience and salvation.

The Lutheran Church’s positions on baptism are internally contradictory and unbiblical. It is my prayer that all who read this book will rid themselves of every man-made creed and belief concerning baptism, and obey what God has said in the New Testament. When a person is properly baptized, then that person becomes a Christian—not a Lutheran, Baptist, or Methodist—just a Christian.

Chapter 4

CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Pastors, Bishops, and Elders

In the New Testament, a group of elders, who met very strict qualifications, made the decisions for each congregation. These elders were the spiritual overseers of each congregation. In Acts 20:17, Paul called unto him the “elders (*presbuteroi*) of the church” from Ephesus. In verse 28 of that same chapter, Paul told these elders to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to shepherd (*poimaino*) the church of God...” In this same verse, Paul stated that these elders were the “overseers” (*episkopoi*) and that they were “to shepherd” (*poimaino*). Paul’s use of the phrase “to shepherd” is the verb form of our word “pastor.” The men given the spiritual oversight of each congregation are overseers or bishops (*episkopoi*), and also are referred to as pas-

tors (*poimen*—Ephesians 4:11) or elders (*presbuteroi*). The Greek words used in the New Testament to describe these men and their functions are used interchangeably to describe the same office. Peter wrote that the elders were to shepherd (*poimaino*) the “flock of God serving as overseers” (*episkopos*), not as being “lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

In regard to the qualifications these pastors should possess, the apostle Paul offered two very specific lists in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Among the necessary qualifications, the candidate should be “the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). Therefore, those men who met the qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus could be elders or pastors who were approved by God to shepherd His Church.

At this point, the Lutheran Church’s stance on the pastoral office conflicts with the Word of God. According to the ELCA *Constitutions*, the biblical qualifications do not adequately provide for the correct people to become pastors. In its *Constitution*, 7.31.13, the ELCA lists several qualifications not found in the New Testament. In order to be a pastor for the ELCA, a person must have “satisfactorily completed the requirements for the Master of Divinity degree from an accredited theological school in North America.” Furthermore, the candidate must have “completed at least one year of residency

in a seminary of this church, except when waived by the appropriated committee,” and must have “been recommended for approval by the faculty of a seminary of this church.” The LCMS has similar additional qualifications. In its *Constitution*, 6.91.1, pastoral candidates must be “graduates of programs of study leading to ordination of no less than 60 semester hours or the equivalent therefore,” or in “exceptional cases” be “laymen who have carried out the full responsibilities of the pastoral ministry for at least 10 years, who are currently licensed for such ministry by a District President.”

Although it might seem “harmless” that the Lutheran Church adds its own qualifications to the biblical lists, the implications are indeed quite serious. If the Lutheran Church believes that it has the authority to include non-biblical qualifications for pastors, does it feel that it also can include non-biblical qualifications for church membership? Once a church starts adding to the biblical commandments, it has added an unauthorized human element that is unacceptable to God. Let’s see how that works. In the New Testament church of Christ, a man could be a pastor by meeting the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy and Titus. Peter, in fact, listed himself as an elder or pastor (1 Peter 5:1-3). Yet, in the twenty-first-century Lutheran Church, the biblical qualifications are not considered sufficient, and so others have been added. Therefore, those early Christians who were appointed as pastors and elders would not be eligible in modern-day Lutheran

churches. In truth, the apostle Peter would not be eligible for the pastoral office, due to his lack of formal education.

This situation brings into focus one of the crucial issues concerning the Lutheran Church. When a church adds to or subtracts from the Bible, it no longer can be considered faithful to the New Testament pattern. If the pastors in the New Testament church would not be eligible to be pastors in the modern-day Lutheran Church unless they met “further qualifications,” then the obvious conclusion is that the Lutheran Church is not the Lord’s Church that we read about in the New Testament.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the New Testament always presents a **plurality** of pastors for every church. In Acts 20:17, the text states that Paul “sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” Paul told Titus to “appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5). When the brethren in Antioch sent relief to the church in Judea, they “sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30). In Acts 14:21-23, Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders in every church.” James informs those who are sick to call “for the elders of the church” (James 5:14). The Bible never mentions a lone pastor, bishop, or elder ruling over a congregation or a group of congregations. Yet, in the Lutheran Church, the organization of the various congregations is much different from those in the New Testament. In the ELCA, a “bishop” is over a synod, and in-

dividual pastors are “over” individual congregations. In the LCMS *Guidelines for the Constitution and Bylaws of a Lutheran Congregation*, section 4.1 discusses the various members “who are under the spiritual care of the pastor of this congregation.”

The Lord’s church is constrained to utilize the form of church government that its Head, Christ, has chosen for it. Through the New Testament, we see that each congregation was to be under the oversight of a plurality of qualified elders. These men made the spiritual decisions for the congregation, and were not obliged to take their decisions before the congregation for a democratic vote.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church, and the gates of hades would not prevail against it. Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, informed us that the church is the body of Christ (1:22-23), and that there is only one church that belongs to Jesus (4:4). The church of Jesus Christ is composed of those people who are following the teachings found in the New Testament. The church of the Lord must teach the same plan of salvation as the apostles taught in order to be the church. The one church that belongs to Christ must have the proper organization in order to be His church. The church of Christ must teach the doctrine of Jesus and the apostles as to the proper candidate for baptism. And the Lord's church must wear His name and give Him the glory and honor due that name.

In Mark 4:13-20, Jesus told a parable about a sower who sowed seed on four different kinds of ground. The seed that was sown was the Word of God (4:14). When the Word of God falls on good and honest hearts, it produces Christians only and only Christians. Doctrines that produce something other than New Testament Christians are not products of the true Word of God.

The Lutheran Church is filled with many kind, sincere people who believe that they are members of the one true church that Jesus bought with His blood. When their basic doctrines are compared to the New Testament, however, the two stand in opposition to one another on numerous points. The Lutheran Church teaches that a person can be saved before water baptism; the New Testament teaches that a sinful person must be immersed in water to be saved. The Lutheran Church uses the name of Luther, while the New Testament teaches that such denominational division is wrong. The Lutheran Church teaches that texts and documents besides the Bible are “authoritative” and “binding;” the New Testament teaches that only God’s Word is authoritative and binding. The Lutheran Church teaches that a lone pastor is the head of a congregation; the New Testament teaches that each congregation is overseen by a **plurality** of pastors who are responsible for the spiritual decisions of the church.

The Lutheran Church is a manmade religious organization that is not the Lord’s church. The New Testament knows nothing of a Lutheran Church or Lutheran

Christians. If you are a Lutheran, I urge you, in a spirit of love, to leave that denomination and begin your search for the Lord's church that is pictured in the New Testament. I urge you to be immersed in water into the death of Christ for the remission of your sins, just as the apostles taught in the New Testament (Acts 2:38). And I beseech you to rise from that water of baptism determined to be a Christian only and only a Christian.

Appendix A

WHAT ABOUT THE THIEF ON THE CROSS?

Many people dismiss water baptism as a prerequisite to salvation on the grounds that “the thief on the cross was not baptized.” The thought is that since the thief was suspended on the cross when Jesus said to him, “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43), he was being pronounced saved by Christ without being required to be baptized. As one well-known preacher put it, “There was no water within 10 miles of the cross.” Please give consideration to two important observations.

First, the thief may well have been baptized **prior** to being placed on the cross. Consider the scriptural evidence that renders this at least a viable possibility. Matthew 3:5-6 says, “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan” went out to John the Baptist and were baptized. Additionally, John 4:1-2 states that Jesus and His disciples baptized more people than John (see also Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:21; 7:29-30). If the

thief had already submitted to baptism, there would have been no need for him to be re-baptized. He simply would have needed to repent of his post-baptism thievery and acknowledge his sins—which the text plainly indicates that he did.

Second, and most important, the real issue pertains to an extremely crucial feature of Bible interpretation. This feature of understanding the Bible is so critical that, if a person does not grasp it, his effort to sort out Bible teaching, in order to arrive at correct conclusions, will be hopeless. This principle was spotlighted by Paul when he wrote to Timothy and told him he must “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). In other words, if one simply takes the entire Bible—all 66 books—and treats them as if **everything** that is said applies directly and equally to **everyone**, his effort to be in harmony with God’s Word will be hopeless and futile.

For example, if a person turned to Genesis 6 and read where God instructed Noah to build a boat, if he did not study enough to determine whether such instruction applied to himself, he would end up building his **own** boat—thinking the entire time that God wanted him to do so. The Bible is literally filled with commands, instructions, and requirements that were **not intended to be duplicated** by people living today. Does God forbid you and me from eating a certain fruit (Genesis 2:17; 3:3)? Does God want you and me to offer our son as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2)? Are we commanded to load up our possessions and leave our homeland (Genesis 12:

1)? Moving to the New Testament, does God want you to sell everything you have and give it to the poor (Matthew 19:21)? Does God expect you to leave everything, quit your job, and devote yourself full time to spiritual pursuits (Matthew 4:20; 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 5:28)? The point is that the entire Bible applies to the entire human race. However, careful and diligent study is necessary to determine **how** it applies. We must understand the biblical distinction between the application of the **principles** of the Bible and the **specific details**.

Here, then, is the central point as it pertains to the relevance of the thief on the cross: Beginning at Creation, all humans were responsible for obeying the laws of God that were given to them at that time. Bible students typically call this period of time the Patriarchal Dispensation. During this period, which lasted from Creation to roughly the time of the cross, non-Jews were subject to a body of legislation passed down by God through the fathers of family clans. In approximately 1,500 B.C., God removed the descendants of Abraham from Egyptian bondage, took them out into the Sinai desert, and gave them their own law code (the Law of Moses). Jews were subject to that body of legal information from that time until it, too, was terminated at the cross of Christ. The following passages substantiate these statements: Matthew 27:51; Romans 2:12-16; Galatians 3:7-29; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 2:11-17. The book of Hebrews addresses this subject extensively.

To get to the heart of the matter quickly, read especially Hebrews 9:15-17. When one “correctly handles the Word of truth,” one sees that the Bible teaches that when Christ died on the cross, Mosaic Law came to an end (and Patriarchal law shortly thereafter). At that point, all humans on the planet were called to obey **the law of Christ** (Galatians 6:2). The law of Christ consists strictly of information that is intended to be in effect **after** the death of Christ. It includes **some** of the things that Jesus and His disciples taught while He was still on Earth. But as regards the **specifics** of salvation, one must go to the rest of the New Testament (especially the book of Acts) in order to determine what one must do today to be saved. Beginning in Acts 2, the new covenant of Christ took effect, and every single individual who responded correctly to the preaching of the Gospel was **baptized in water in order to be forgiven of sin by the blood of Christ**. Every detail of an individual’s conversion is not always mentioned, but a perusal of the book of Acts demonstrates decisively that water immersion was a **prerequisite** to forgiveness, along with faith, repentance, and confession of the deity of Christ (Acts 2:38,41; 8:12,13, 16,36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16).

The thief was not subject to the New Testament command to be baptized into Christ’s death (Romans 6:3-4), just as Moses, Abraham, and David were not subject to it. They all lived **prior** to the cross under different law codes. They could not have been baptized into Christ’s

death—**because He had not yet died!** In truth, the New Testament contains at least two other incidents in which Jesus forgave the sins of different individuals simply by pronouncing those sins forgiven. Matthew 9:1-8 and Mark 2:1-12 give parallel accounts of the story about the paralytic man who was lowered through the roof by his friends in the hope that Jesus would heal him. Upon seeing their faith, Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven you” (Mark 2:5). Many in the crowd questioned Jesus’ action, thinking that only God can forgive sins. And Jesus, to show that He was God in the flesh, healed the man to prove to the crowd that He had “power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10). A similar story is found in Luke 7:48, in which Jesus forgave the sins of a sinful woman who washed His feet. There is no doubt that while Jesus was alive on this Earth, He had the power to forgive sins. However, the establishment of His church and the launching of the Christian religion did not occur until **after** Christ’s death, on the day of Pentecost around A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2). An honest and accurate appraisal of the biblical data forces us to conclude that the thief on the cross, and other New Testament incidents of immediate forgiveness accomplished directly by Christ while He was alive, are not appropriate examples of how people are to be saved **this side of the cross.**

Appendix B

DO BABIES GO TO HELL WHEN THEY DIE?

Does the Bible teach that babies possess such an inherent sinful nature that they go to hell if they die as infants? According to Martin Luther and others who contributed to the writings found in the *Book of Concord*, hell would be the final destination for any soul who had not been baptized, including infants. After looking at several biblical passages, however, it can be proven conclusively that it is not the case that infants, whether baptized or not, go to hell. In fact, the Bible presents a clear case for the salvation of all souls who die in their infancy.

In 2 Samuel 12, King David's newborn son fell terminally ill. After seven days, the child died. The Bible records that David said: "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I

shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (vss. 22-23). It is clear that David’s dead infant son would never return to this Earth, but David also said that one day, he would go to be with his son. Where would David go to be joined to his son? Through inspiration, God called David His “servant” of God (2 Samuel 7:5), and a man after “God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). Furthermore, several comments made by David recorded in the Psalms seem to indicate that his own eternal destination was going to be “in the house of the Lord” (Psalm 23:6). David also wrote about seeing God, when he stated: “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). If David, then, would be in heaven, we can conclude that the same eternal destination awaited his infant son, to whom David would one day go. King David was looking forward to the day when he would be able to meet his son in heaven. Absolutely nothing in this context gives any hint that the dead infant son’s soul would go to hell.

Furthermore, Jesus said in Matthew 18:3-5:

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

And in Luke 18:16-17, Jesus remarked: “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.”

Therefore, we have been given a specific example in the Old Testament of an infant who died and would live forever in heaven. And Jesus Christ Himself, in the New Testament, stated that little children retain the qualities that make a person eligible to inherit the kingdom of God. We see, then, that infants and small children that die are in a **safe** state, and will live eternally in heaven.

With such clear statements from the Bible about the eternal destiny of dead infants and small children, why have religious people mistakenly taught that babies go to hell when they die? Due to the influential nature of John Calvin and his teachings, many people have taught that sin is “passed” from one generation to the next. It is believed by many religious people that children “inherit” the sins of their parents. Yet, the Bible pointedly and explicitly teaches that such is not the case. In Ezekiel 18: 20, the Bible says: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son.” Also, in Exodus 32, Moses pleaded with God to forgive the sins of the Israelites when he said: “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book’” (Exodus 32:32-33). The Bible is plain in its teaching that babies do not inherit the

sins of their parents. [One commonly misapplied scripture used to teach that infants inherit sin is Psalm 51:5-6, which has been explained in detail by Wayne Jackson (2000).]

The Bible nowhere teaches that babies go to hell if they die in infancy. Neither does it teach that babies inherit the sins of their parents. Although many skeptics have tried to portray God as an evil tyrant Who condemns innocent children to eternal destruction, their arguments are without merit or any semblance of biblical credence. In the words of Jesus Christ, "Let the little children come to me."

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