

MARTIN LUTHER

and Baptismal Regeneration?

By E. L. Bynum

Was Martin Luther the great religious and spiritual hero that he is declared to be by Baptists, Fundamentalists, and Evangelicals? During the lifetime of this writer, he has often heard devout Christians speak highly of the man who led the Protestant Reformation. Most of these seem to think that Luther was sound on the subject of salvation and that he restored the doctrines preached by Christ and his disciples. Nothing could be further from the truth, and we intend to prove it if our readers will accept what Luther himself said.

While Martin Luther did leave the Roman Catholic Church, he did not leave the false doctrine of Rome. In fact, he brought most of his doctrine out of Rome, and he perpetuated the awful heresies in the Church that he founded. Many of the heresies of modern day Protestantism can be traced back to Luther and through him to Rome. Of course, we are not saying that Luther did not say some good things, and we are not saying that he was not a great man. Yet, we can truthfully say that he was not a hero for truth.

LUTHER & BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

We hear much today concerning Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. It sounds good when it is stated in Luther's own words, or when used in the historical sense of Luther and his reformation. However, when you take a look at Luther's own writings on the subject of baptism and salvation, his doctrine of justification by faith has a hollow ring to it.

In his commentary on Romans, Luther wrote concerning Romans 6:3, as follows: "We are not found in a state of perfection as soon as we have been baptized into Jesus Christ and His death. Having been baptized into His death, we merely strive to obtain (the blessings of) this death and to reach our goal of glory. Just so, when we are baptized into everlasting life and the kingdom of heaven, we do not at once fully possess its full wealth (of blessings). We have merely taken the first steps to seek after eternal life. Baptism has been instituted that it should lead us to the blessings (of this death) and through such death to eternal life. Therefore it is necessary that we should be baptized into Jesus Christ and His death." (Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans, By Martin Luther, translated by J. Theodore Mueller, page 85).

Luther's understanding of baptism did not come from the Bible, but from the Roman Catholic

Church. This led him into infant baptism, which was also an invention of Rome. This has been Satan's vehicle for carrying countless millions of people into hell, while they were trusting in that infant baptism for salvation.

Haldane's comments on Romans 6:3 certainly show that Luther was wrong on his interpretation of the verse. "The figure of baptism was very early mistaken for a reality, and accordingly some of the fathers speak of the baptized person as truly born again in the water. They supposed him to go into the water with all his sins upon him, and to come out of it without them. This indeed is the case with baptism figuratively.. But the carnal mind soon turned the figure into a reality. It appears to the impatience of man too tedious and ineffectual a way to wait on God's method of converting sinners by His Holy Spirit through the truth, and therefore they have effected this much more extensively by the performance of external rites. When, according to many, the rite is observed, it cannot be doubted that the truth denoted by it has been accomplished. The same disposition has been the origin of Transubstantiation. The bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are figuratively the body and blood of Christ; but they have been turned into the real body, blood, soul, and divinity of the Lord, and the external rite has become salvation." (Romans, by Robert Haldane, page 245).

Haldane's above statement concerning the perversion of the Lord's Supper reminds us that Luther had a perverted view of this ordinance also. Luther's doctrine was little removed from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and consubstantiation, in reality they are playing ducks and drakes with the Word of God. Luther's views are clearly set forth in an article on the Lord's Supper in ISBE. "The original position of Luther, that the elements in the Supper were signs and seals of the remission of sins, was soon replaced by the doctrine of 'consubstantiation.' The bitter controversy with Carlstadt, and esp. the failure of the Marburg Conference, drove Luther forever into the camp of the realists. As early as 1524 he had outlined his doctrine against Carlstadt. He place himself squarely on the realistic conception of the words of the institution, and held that 'the body of Christ in accordance with the will and omnipotence of God and its own ubiquity is really and substantially present in, with and under the Supper, even as His Divine nature is in the human as warmth is in the iron. Wherefore the Supper is physically partaken of by those who are unworthy, albeit to their own destruction' (Bavinck, Geref. Dogm., IV, 318). This doctrine has been fully developed by the Lutheran divines, and is till this day the view of the Lutheran Church." (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, page 1926).

There was considerable debate among the reformers concerning this doctrine. Zwingli to a large extent sided with Carlstadt, even going so far as to say that Luther's doctrine was "an opinion not only rustic but even impious and frivolous." Calvin did deviate some from Luther's view, but in the main their view was very similar. Unfortunately many of the Protestant denominations have followed after Luther and Calvin in this unscriptural view. Transubstantiation and

consubstantiation are both serious errors and both came from the Roman Church.

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION VS. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Did Martin Luther really believe in justification by faith? If we can believe his own words, then he did not. We are indebted to The Rehoboth Clarion, May 1980, for a quotation from Luther's commentary on Galatians. Luther is commenting on Galatians 3:27, which says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Below we give Luther's comments on this verse.

"To put on Christ is taken two manners of ways; according to the law, according to the Gospel. According to the law, as it is said in chap. xiii to the Romans: 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ:' that is, follow the example and virtues of Christ. Do that which he did, and suffer that which he suffered. And in I Peter ii, 'Christ hath suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.' Now we see in Christ a singular patience, and inestimable mildness of love, and a wonderful modesty in all things. This goodly apparel we must put on; that is to say, follow these virtues.

"But the putting on of Christ according to the Gospel, consisteth not in imitation, but in a new birth and a new creation: that is to say, in putting on Christ's innocency, his righteousness, his wisdom, his power, his saving health, his life and his spirit. We are clothed with a leather coat of Adam, which is a moral garment, and a garment of sin; that is to say, we are all subject unto sin, all sold under sin. There is in us horrible blindness, ignorance, contempt and hatred of God: moreover, evil concupiscence, uncleanness, covetousness, &c. This garment, that is to say, this corrupt and sinful nature, we received from Adam; which Paul is wont to call the Old Man. This man must be put off with all his works (Eph. iv; Col. i;) that of the Children of Adam, we may be made the children of God. This is not done by changing of a garment, or by any laws or works, but by a new birth, and by the renewing of the inward man; which is done in baptism, as Paul saith: 'All ye that are baptized, have put on Christ.' Also, 'According to his mercy hath he saved us by the washing of the new birth, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' (Tit. iii.) For besides that they which are baptized, are regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost to a heavenly righteousness and to eternal life, there riseth in them also a new light and a new flame: there rise in them new and holy affections: as the fear of God, true faith and assured hope, &c. There beginneth in them also a new will. And this is to put on Christ truly and according to the Gospel. "Therefore the righteousness of the law, or of our works, is not given unto us in baptism; but Christ himself is our garment. Now Christ is no law, no lawgiver, no work; but a divine and an inestimable gift, whom God hath given unto us, that he might be our Justifier, our Saviour, and our Redeemer. Wherefore, to be apparelled with Christ according to the Gospel, is not to be apparelled with the law or with works, but with an incomparable gift; that is to say, with remission of sins, righteousness, peace, consolation, joy of spirit, salvation, life, and Christ

himself.

“This is diligently to be noted, because of the fond and fantastical spirits, which go about to deface the majesty of baptism and speak wickedly of it. Paul contrariwise commendeth and setteth it forth with honourable titles, calling it ‘washing of the new birth, the renewing of the Holy Ghost.’ (Tit. iii.) And here also he saith, that all they which are baptized have put on Christ. As if he said, Ye are carried out of the law into a new birth, which is wrought in baptism. Therefore ye are not now any longer under the law, but ye are clothed with a new garment; to wit, with the righteousness of Christ. Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy. Now, when we are apparelled with Christ, as with the robe of our righteousness and salvation, then we must put on Christ also as the apparel of imitation and example. These things I have handled more largely in another place, therefore I here briefly pass them over.” (Emphasis ours.) (This quote from Luther was taken from the unabridged: “A Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians.” Robert Carter Publishers, N.Y., N.Y. 1848, pas. 346-347).

LUTHER AND THE ANABAPTISTS

Baptists who are always speaking so highly of Luther and Calvin surely need to read what they said about the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists are now known as Baptists. Luther and Calvin both reserved some of their harshest words for this truth-loving people who refused to follow the false doctrine of Luther and Calvin. In the Preface of the above named book by Luther, we find the following: “For thus do the Anabaptists teach, that baptism is nothing except the person do believe. Out of this principle must needs follow, that all the works of God be nothing if the man be nothing. But baptism is the work of God and yet an evil man maketh it not to be the work of God. Moreover, hereof it must follow, that matrimony, authority, liberty, and bondage, are the works of God; but because men are evil, therefore they are not the works of God. Wicked men have the sun, the moon, the earth, the water, the air, and all other TIC creatures which are subject unto man; but because they I; be wicked and not godly, therefore the sun is not the sun, the moon, the earth, the water, are not that which they are. The Anabaptists themselves had bodies and souls before they were re-baptized; but because they were not godly, therefore they had not true bodies and true souls. Also their parents were not lawfully married (as they grant themselves,) because they are not re-baptized; therefore the Anabaptists themselves are all bastards, and their parents were all adulterers, and whoremongers; and yet they do inherit their parents’ lands and goods, although they grant themselves to be bastards, and unlawful heirs. Who seeth not here, in the Anabaptists, men not possessed with devils, but even devils themselves possessed with worse devils?”

It is a shame that Luther and others have made such havoc of the doctrine of baptism. No one was ever saved by baptism, for it is only a form, picture, and symbol of our salvation and not the very means of salvation. We quote from a well-known Bible teacher of the 20th Century

concerning Romans 6:3. “It must be plain that baptism is a form. It is not in itself a means of salvation. It is a previous faith which saves. It is not our death that is set forth in the form of baptism, but Christ’s death which alone is the means of our salvation.” (Romans Where Life Begins, by Roy L. Laurin, Dunham, pages 192,193).

THE RESULTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

While we do not always agree with A. T. Robertson, he did hit the nail on the head on baptismal regeneration. “Out of this perversion (baptismal regeneration) of the symbolism of baptism grew both pouring as an ordinance and infant baptism. If baptism is necessary to salvation or the means of regeneration, then the sick, the dying, infants, must be baptized, or at any rate something must be done for them if the real baptism (immersion) cannot be performed because of extreme illness or want of water. The Baptist contention is to protest against the perversion of the significance of baptism as the ruin of the symbol. Baptism, as taught in the NT, is the picture of death and burial to sin and resurrection to new life, a picture of what has already taken place in the heart, not the means by which spiritual change is wrought. It is a privilege and duty, not a necessity. It is a picture that is lost when something else is substituted in its place.” (A. T. Robertson in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, page 387).

Luther and those who have perpetuated the doctrine of baptismal regeneration are responsible for a whole raft of false teaching that afflicts Christianity today. No doubt but what our modern day Church of Christ teaching on baptismal regeneration came from Luther’s Protestantism. Although we are sure that Luther would cringe at the thought, this false teaching has resulted in the Mormon perversion of baptizing for the dead.

MODERN LUTHERANS AND BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

There are three large Lutheran bodies in the U.S.A. Of the three, the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church is considered to be the most evangelical. However, I am sad to say that they continue to perpetuate Luther’s baptismal regeneration error. For evidence we are reproducing a four page tract printed by Concordia Tract Mission of St. Louis, Missouri, entitled, “How To Keep Your Baptism Alive.” Frankly it is about the crudest and most heretical statement that we have ever read on the subject of baptism. Although it is made cute by the cartoons which adorn it, nevertheless it is filled with poison doctrine that will no doubt lead many astray. It is printed in tract form for wide distribution, and this makes the error all the more terrible.

[The frame below contains the text of above tract.]

The relationship established through Baptism is like a fragile flower.

The new life in Christ, created or confirmed by Baptism, can wither and die from lack of caring.

The bond of Baptism between God and man is not a permanent condition. It can be broken like

the stem of a flower, through carelessness and neglect. Heaven is opened and sins are forgiven in Baptism. It is an act of God, through which He claims people to Himself. It is His grace. But the Baptism is only the beginning of Christian growth, which He claims people to Himself. It is Christian growth, which should continue throughout life. Keep close to God. Keep the bloom of new life from your Baptism alive. Water it regularly with the Word and Sacrament of the Holy Supper, lest it wither like the grass.

We baptize the whole family, including children and infants.

God's Word records in Acts 16 the Baptism of the Philippian jailer and all of his household. "And they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house [children, servants, family]. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family." (vv. 32-33]

Acts 22:16 "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

According to the cover, the way to keep your baptism alive, is by watering the flower of baptism with God's Word and Holy Communion. This is purely the figment of someone's imagination for nothing like this is taught in the Bible. Of course the Bible teaches that those who have been saved should study God's Word, but this is not in order to keep one's baptism alive. No such thing as Holy Communion is taught in the Bible, but rather it is the Lord's Supper.

According to the tract, the Green Thumbed gospel gardener says, "The relationship established through Baptism is like a fragile flower. The new life in Christ, created or confirmed by Baptism, can wither and die from lack of caring." The gospel gardener may say that, but certainly the Word of God does not. No relationship is established with God through baptism, nor is new life in Christ created in baptism. It is the blood of Christ and not baptism that washes away sin. As Paul tells us in Eph. 2:8, it is by grace through faith that we are saved.

The tract further states, "The bond of Baptism between God and man is not a permanent condition. It can be broken like the stem of a flower, through carelessness and neglect. Heaven is opened and sins are forgiven in Baptism. It is an act of God, through which He claims people to Himself." No scripture proves that any bond between God and man is established through baptism. Sins are not forgiven through baptism, but rather baptism does picture the taking away of sin. It is apparent that the unnamed writer is trying to scare people into believing that this bond can be broken and the soul lost, if one does not water it regularly with the Word and the "Sacrament of the Holy Supper." Those who are saved do not lose that salvation, and the Lord's Supper is not a "sacrament."

The tract then reads, "We baptize the whole family, including children and infants." This is as unscriptural as it can be. There is not one instance in the NT of any infant ever being baptized. Although millions of infants have been baptized by the Roman Catholic Church, Lutherans, and

other Protestant churches, they have all done it without one bit of Scriptural authority. The best proof that the writer could produce, was to insert words in brackets to the account of the baptism of the Philippian jailer. Here is what he says, "God's Word records in Acts 16 the Baptism of the Philippian jailer and all of his household; 'And they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house [children, servants, family], And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family' (w. 32-33)." There are a number of things that we object to in this quote. (1) We object to the version quoted from for it is obviously not the King James Version. He is quoting from the modernistic Revised Standard Version produced by the National Council of Churches. (2) He entirely leaves out the salvation Scripture from this passage, where the jailer said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." He could not quote these verses, or he would have to forget about his baptismal regeneration. (3) In the quote that he does make he inserts in brackets "children, servants, family." This is pure conjecture, as there is no hint of "children" being in the house or being baptized. There are many houses today which have no children in them, and why should we automatically believe that the Philippian jailer had children in his house? There is one verse that proves that no children or infants were in view. In v. 32 we read, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." It is evident that the ones that were baptized in v. 33 were the ones that heard the "word of the Lord" in v. 32. Since infants cannot hear the "word of the Lord" or any sensible teaching, they could not have been baptized.

The NT pattern of baptism is plainly declared in Acts 2:41. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" Since infants cannot receive the word, none were baptized in New Testament times.

I Peter 3:21 makes it clear that baptism is a figure or a picture. "The like figure whereunto even baptism cloth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism is a figure or picture of our salvation, but it does not produce or provide salvation. The Lutheran tract writer evidently believed that baptism actually washes away sin, by his use of Acts 22:16.

Luther's stand as a religious hero is greatly diminished when we look at what he believed and what he has produced in the modern Lutheran movement.

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