

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 8 and POWER POINT 8:

BAPTISM:

1. We live in an age of hyper spirituality and unbelief. Religion is fine if it's kept to oneself and is vague. It may seem unspiritual that one book on ink or that a sermon preached from a pulpit that is air waves striking the ears and processed by the brain should be the means in which the Holy Spirit creates faith and saves souls.
2. The Word speaks of other means that share Christ and save by the power of the same Word. These are the Sacraments, Baptism (B) and Holy Communion, (HC). LS is sacramental spirituality, centered on the conviction that the Holy Spirit descends in B and is present in the wine and bread of the HC. It's odd to think that bread and wine or even paper and sound waves should convey the word of the eternal God, but that's the next lesson.
3. But Lutherans believe that the G is conveyed, objectively and when a person is B even an infant. The G is conveyed objectively, when HC is celebrated and one is actually fed bread and wine with the actual body and blood of Christ for forgiveness. These are astounding claims that the objectivity of God's Grace and that God accomplishes all, all we need to do is to receive.
4. Just as God was present with the OT people in their Temple sustaining them with worship and sacrifices, God is present today in His Church. The Word justifies individual sinners and calls them together in the body of the church. The Holy Spirit is at work in His Church as the pastor proclaims God's Word and applies it to His people. That Word is operative in a Church in an intimate way as the pastor B and feeds the flock HC.
5. "Baptism now saves you," says the Bible, "it is not the removal of dirt, but the pledge of a clean conscience toward God." 1 Peter 3:21. Such words are clear and hardly explained away. B does save, it connects to the resurrection of Christ as Romans 6:3-5 state three times that B connects one to the death and resurrection of Christ as Scripture asserts. "We are buried with Him and united to him in His resurrection." These are strong words LS teaches to cling to God's Word rather than to interpret it away, take it literally. B links one with Golgotha, time and place and the empty tomb. A B person has a share in Christ's death and resurrection.
6. This scandalizes many Evangelicals, but Christians of all stripes can learn much from LS, but it is in Sacramental theology where they draw the line. EV is not here to argue doctrine or go in depth, consult sources for 'further reading.' LS understanding of B is the most evangelical of doctrines. LS believes in conversion, the necessity of personal faith, but LS rejects B as magic and that it saves by virtue of the act itself.
7. "How can water do such great things?" Asks Luther, "It is water with the Word and faith that trusts the word such Word of God in the water." Nor is B a human work, which placates the divine. B like every other saving act is God's Work. Luther writes in his Large Catechism, "To be baptized is not to be baptized by people, but by God Himself, although done with human hands, it is God's work." How can LS say a baby is 'born again?' How can LS square their teaching of B saving with their teaching of justification by faith?

8. Infant B is one of the best illustrations of justification by faith. LS does say that B infants can have faith. A baby does not have knowledge or capacity for choice, but faith is not intellectual mastery or a decision. Faith is a trust, utterly dependent upon Christ. Can a baby trust their parents? The love of the mother for her child is something the baby knows and is the most heartfelt realities of their existence. If a baby can have faith with their parents, resting securely on their love, why can't they have faith in their heavenly Father?
9. In faith, a person is passive and receptive, salvation is not by works, a moral effort or having knowledge or certain spiritual experiences. Salvation receives the free gift of God. A baby B models that reception. Adults struggle with their zeal to save themselves by their own effort.
10. This is why Jesus when explaining the Christian life, faith and conversion, offers a little child as the model. "Unless you change and become like little children.....you will never enter the Kingdom of God....." Matthew 18:2-4. A helpless child is a role model. "Unless you change," in justification there is no room for human pride or one's capacities or one works, "Humble yourself like this little child."
11. In B infants passively receive God's grace and are changed. The Holy Spirit dwells and has living faith that needs to be constantly nourished (Seed under a can illustration), by hearing God's Word and just like life, must be fed or die.
12. We are not to sentimentalize B as just a ceremony. For all the good feelings and cuteness of the baby from parents, relatives and the congregation, in B the child dies. The waters of baptism signify a cleansing. The NT says "A burial." In B a child is named, but a personal name is the name of God. "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Word of God invokes God's presence and the child's identity is the identity of Father who made the child, the Son who redeemer her and the Holy Spirit who leads her into faith.