

LD 26 (QA 69-70); Isaiah 1:18-20; I John 1:5-9; Baptism's Gospel Message I. The Need for Washing II. Washed by the Blood III. Cleansed by the Spirit

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how much of your day revolves around washing? It is a lot more than you think- if you include laundry, the dishes, cleaning the house and the cars; in addition to the daily washing of your body- most people spend over 1 hour each day cleaning something. The problem is- whatever we clean gets dirty again! Every dad knows the frustration- I just washed the cars and look at them today! Every mom knows the annoyance- I just finished doing the dishes and its time to eat again! Is there no end to this laundry? What is clean gets dirty again- needing to be washed once more! If only there was a way to get something washed so that it would stay clean! Well, today we are going to be considering the washing of mankind- and the way in which we are washed will prove the power of the washing agent. With our consideration of baptism this morning we are jumping a little out of order in the Catechism. So we will consider this theme: the sign of baptism reveals the gospel message of cleansing through the blood of Jesus.

I. The Need for Washing

In our first point we will consider how we each have a shared need for washing. We sang earlier from Psalm 51- I am evil, born in sin. To get at the heart of our need for washing, we need to understand where the dirt comes from- what is the source of pollution for mankind? Well, the pollution of mankind comes from our nature- we each sharing in the fallen nature of Adam. Not from the dirt of this earth- but the dirt of spiritual rebellion. Born with a flesh that is polluted- sinful from the time our mothers conceive us. We have a totally depraved nature- meaning that sin effects every part of us- each aspect of our body and our souls is stained. Even little Josette- so cute and little- clothed in white- shares in this pollution! We have a dirty nature- and our actions are also wicked. We have a sinful nature and commit sinful actions- we are polluted in body and in soul- committing sin in thought, word and deed. The birth of a child even illustrates this point. The pain of childbirth is a vivid reminded- labor pains tell

us that everything is not right in this world. The curse and its consequences are felt. And as this child arrives- covered in blood- needing to be washed and clothed. There is something that is fallen about us. And as these children grow, no one need to teach them how to be selfish- to cry and complain- to say- "me first- or that's mine". It comes natural to us all! But this selfishness is not just a childish thing- we are all selfish in various ways. Thinking first of ourselves and our wants before others. The reason that this first point is so important is because we all need to acknowledge our need! We all need to see our own sin- to see that we are dirty and in need of cleansing! If you do not think you are dirty- why would you seek water to wash in? So what is your view of yourself? This calls for sober self evaluation. Do you know that you are dead in your sins and trespasses- that you need life! That you are dirty- that you need cleansing! So we all- not just little Josette- we all need to know- to see our dirty selves. Why? So that we come to the water! That we seek the washing!

II. Washed by the Blood

So lets continue by considering the solution to our sin and misery- how baptism points to our need but also the solution to that need! To deal with the dirt and the stain, we have to have be washed by the blood of Jesus Christ as QA 70 states. What does it mean to be washed by the blood of Jesus? Well, it means that God has forgiven my sins because of Chris blood. The water of baptism points to the pouring out and cleansing with the blood of Jesus. Now the external sign is one that even our children can see and understand- just as water is used to make dirty things clean- so also the blood of Jesus makes us clean! If you need to take a show, wash the dishes or wash the car- you need water- right?! His blood is the water that washes away the dirt of our sins. Now remember that in OT Israel, washing with water was a very important process. Before you could come to worship at the tabernacle or temple- you needed to wash. Even the priest had a ritual washing and cleansing at the bronze basin in the courtyard. But this external washing that took place- and the external washing that we just saw applied to little Josette- has an inherent limitation. Physical water cannot get at the internal stain!

Physical water lacks the power and the depth to deal with what is really plaguing us. No, we need something better- something stronger. So although Jesus commands us to use the external sign- washing or sprinkling with water- the need for internal washing and cleansing remains. And the internal washing that we need is this- to stand under the blood of Jesus. As Eph. 1:7 says- that Jesus Christ's blood cleanses- washes away sins. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. So let's follow this line of thought. Dirt equals sin- and water equals blood. Just as dirt is removed by water, so also the blood of Jesus removes our sins- or secures the forgiveness of our sins. As we read in I John 1:7- the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Earlier we read from Isaiah 1 where we find this image. Though our sins are like scarlet- though our sin are crimson red- though our hands are covered with blood- we shall be made as white as snow- washed and made as white as bleached wool. Now this is a striking contrast. Here we see that the blood of Jesus makes us clean. This is not how our minds work. Men, what happens when you cut yourself shaving and then you put on your white t-shirt? Well, that blood stains right! Blood makes white things red- stained- they are no longer clean. Blood pollutes- the shedding of blood makes a person unclean. But now- Jesus' blood shed and applied to us makes us clean. Instead of making us dirty- the blood of Jesus makes us clean! So instead of causing a stain- His blood removes all stains! Such is the work of our gracious God! So baptism points to the washing we need- to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Baptism is, however, a bloodless sacrament. No blood was here placed on Josette- no the water remains the sign. A picture of the perfect blood that was shed- Jesus' blood poured out once for all- for the complete forgiveness of all our sins! Cleansing from ALL sins! His blood is so perfect- so powerful- that once it has been applied to you, you are clean! His washing is effective- so that no more washing away of sins needs to take place. That is why we do not repeat baptism- it is once for all- just as Jesus' blood was shed once for all! His blood has a continuing power- a staying affect. So that we are now forgiven- and will remain forgiven. And

how do we get this washing? Well, when we are joined to Christ by faith, His cleansing blood washes you and makes you clean!

III. Cleansed by the Spirit

But there is one more aspect to the sign of baptism that we need to consider. Not only the washing with blood and the forgiveness of sins, but also the cleansing by the Spirit and the renewal of our lives.

As QA 70 continues, to be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit renews and sanctifies us to be members of Christ. So there is double washing in view here- washed by Christ's blood and Spirit.

This link because baptism and the Spirit is evident in the baptism of Jesus in Mt. 3- when Jesus was baptised by John and after coming up out of the water, the Spirit descended upon and remained with Jesus. So baptism points to washing but also renewal. Baptism is also a sign of initiation and inclusion- signifying that we belong and that we are part of something. Being part of the body of Christ- the communion of the saints- means that the Spirit of Christ will be working and acting within. To say this another way, baptism speak not only of blood and water- but also wind and fire! So in baptism, there are promises that are being made. Signs that are signified. To those who are part of the church of Christ- those who receive the sign of baptism- these are promised both the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Joel 2 says- it will come about in those days that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh- on your sons and daughters. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. Baptism is the sign of covenant membership. In the OT this sign was circumcision, baptism is the sign of those who are part of the New Covenant. As a mark, baptism distinguishes those who belong to God. This one belongs to me- this is a child of the heavenly Father- this one is a temple of the Holy Spirit. But what is the Spirit doing- what is the work that He performs. Well, the work of the Spirit is to cleanse- to purge and renew the inner man. Listen to these words from Rom. 6:4- we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life. Here again, we have new imagery added to baptism.

Baptism is washing, cleansing- and baptism is death and resurrection. Baptism signified the old man and the way of sin dying- and the new man and the way of righteousness coming to life! As you can see, baptism signifies both justification and also our sanctification. As we have been washed by the blood of Christ and made holy- once for all- we continue to be washed by His Spirit as we purified in our daily life! Historically, this would be called improving upon your baptism. To improve your baptism is to simply embrace the promises made to you at your baptism- and to be dedicated to growing in holiness and obedience as the Spirit works within. Baptism is not a dead doctrine- and your baptism is not something that happened to you once long ago but has no impact on today. No, those who are washed in the blood are those cleansed by the Spirit.

To conclude, although most people spend over 1 hour every day cleaning something- few Christians think about their daily calling to be clean. If we had to be re-baptized every time we sinned- we would never be clean! Praise God that the blood of Jesus is sufficient and powerful to cleans from all our sins! We are also called to pursue holiness as the Spirit continues His work within! Baptism is a double washing- by the blood and by the Spirit! Forgiven and Holy! Justified and sanctified! That is what baptism means and that is what baptism demands. The sign of baptism reveals the gospel message of cleansing through the blood of Jesus. The gospel message revealed at baptism is clear- you are dirty- and only the blood and the Spirit of Jesus can make you clean! Baptism proclaims a message about your sin, salvation and service.