

## ***Article 2: It's Free and It's For You***

Last time we examined how sinful man is unable, by his own reason or strength, to believe in Jesus Christ the Lord or to come to Him. Here is a summation of what we learned:

The Scriptures flatly call natural man in spiritual and divine things *darkness* (Ephesians 5:8 "...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light..."; In Acts 26:18 Paul tells how Jesus sent him "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.")

The Scriptures deny to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man all readiness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work, or to agree to work anything good and right in spiritual things from himself. (1 Corinthians 2:14 "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." Romans 8:7 "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.")

In a word, what God's Son says remains eternally true, "For apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Paul says, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

*--Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord 11.10-14*

God works it. He does it through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Gospel of John-with those famous opening words that carry us back to Creation: "In the beginning was the Word"-is written to show us how He who created the world came among us to work the New Creation.

Pivotal to John's Gospel is chapter 3 with the most cherished Bible verse of all: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The groundwork which Jesus provides for this passage is His own explanation of the blessing, gift and necessity of Baptism. "Baptism is the inaugural rite into the Kingdom of God, a role that cannot be assigned to faith." Baptism is the occasion and the cause of regeneration. It provides faith with its certainty, because the benefits of salvation are in Baptism. It is not an expression of faith, but is completely the work of God. You are "born of God" (Jn 1:13).

That which is "born of the flesh is flesh." We have rehearsed what that is all about above-darkness, unbelief, spiritually dead, enemies of God. But that which is "born of the Spirit is spirit." In Baptism a person is "born from above." He has a new Father, he is

made a believer in Jesus Christ as he is filled with the Holy Spirit. No one of us can take credit for this spiritual transformation from darkness to light, from death to life. God works it. He does so by the water with the Word, but “without the Word of God the water is simple water and no baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is a gracious water of life and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” as St. Paul says Titus chapter three:

“According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.”

God made Israel His own people by their passing through the Red Sea. He makes you His child through the water of Baptism. God brought Israel into the Promised Land in their crossing of the Jordan River. You are brought into the Kingdom of Heaven in the rebirth of the Jordan known as Baptism.

How can this be? Because Baptism is Christ’s own institution with all authority in heaven and on earth. In it you are joined to Jesus Christ, to His death and resurrection. You are part of the New Creation

“Or do you not know that, as many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore you were buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also you yourselves might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3-4

Baptism into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is every Christian’s spiritual birth. God works this rebirth as easily in an infant as in an adult by His Word and Spirit. It is glorious, working the forgiveness of sins and giving eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

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