

# *A Preview*



## *Baptized for This Moment: A Bible Study*

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## *Lesson 4: Baptized for Mercy*

*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (ACTS 2:44-45)*

**I**n Lesson 3, we started looking at what the baptized people of God do, and we did so by looking at evangelism. When it comes to works of witness, mercy and life together, the first is probably the most difficult because the devil and our own sinful flesh hate the Gospel and will do anything to keep it from being heard. The devil isn't nearly as concerned if we're merciful or getting along with each other, because even non-Christians can do such things. It's the Gospel that Satan wants the Church to abandon. The Lord, however, is faithful. He will preserve His people by the grace He won as He defeated Satan on the cross.

In today's lesson, we move on to works of mercy even as we keep last week's discussion of evangelism in mind. Our goals are to:

- Answer some of the common concerns that Christians have when they fail to see good works follow faith.
- Gain a better understanding of what it means to be baptized for mercy from a study of Acts 2 and 2 Corinthians 8-9.
- Consider possibilities for personal and congregational works of mercy, both locally and internationally.

### **On Love, Labor and Bullies**

Here's another quote from the Formula of Concord regarding good works:

Dr. Luther has written that a person's will in his conversion is purely passive, that it, that it does nothing at all. This is to be understood with respect to divine grace in the kindling of the new movements, that is, when God's Spirit, through the heard Word or use of the holy Sacraments, lays hold of a person's will and works in him the new birth and conversion. When after the Holy Spirit has worked and accomplished this, and a person's will has been changed and renewed by His divine power and working alone, then the new will of that person is an instrument and organ of God the Holy Spirit. So that person not only accepts grace, but he also cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the works that follow. (Epitome of the Formula of Concord II 18)

By water and the Word in Holy Baptism, you're already a child in the household of God.

There's work to be done in the house, and it is by labor that we learn love. Many a battle of wills is fought on a piano bench:

## NOTES FOR LEADERS

**1.** Eph. 4:1 describes salvation as a “calling to which you have been called.” This phrase is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it makes clear that it is God who does the calling. Salvation is His work and gift to us, not our work of calling upon Him. Second, calling is a verbal term that reminds us that God saves by His Word, whether proclaimed or joined to water in Holy Baptism. Thus Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism says, “The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” That explanation continues to speak of both calling and Christian unity: “In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

Humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love result from the Holy Spirit’s work within us and contribute to life together. Love, gentleness and patience are all specifically listed as “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22–23. Their opposites (pride, harshness, impatience and giving up on one another) are all divisive sins contrary to what you are set free to be.

**2.** We should be eager to maintain unity. “Eager” implies that we make haste and take pains to do so. Current trends in Christianity tend to emphasize diversity; in some cases, the Christian faith is so individualized that it seems each Christian is permitted his or her own system of beliefs, and the only unity is that “we all believe in Jesus.” Paul makes unity a top priority, something that Christians should eagerly and actively pursue. Even in matters of adiaphora, Christians and congregations should be careful that their practices do no harm to the unity among members and sister congregations. Unity is given by God and, therefore, is to be treasured over personal expression or local innovation.

The word “maintain” is remarkable here. The Ephesians do not have to strive to create unity, but only maintain it because it has already been given to them. The unity of the Spirit that is the basis of life together is not the work of man, but a gift of God. However, the fact that they must strive to maintain it also means that it can be lost.

**3.** Paul notes that there is one body. There is one Church, the body of Christ (see Eph. 4:12, 15–16), and we are brought into the Church by means of Holy Baptism. Ephesians is full of baptismal language. For instance, we are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13), “members of the household of God” (2:19) and cleansed “by the washing of water with the word” (5:26).

This one Church belongs to the one, true Triune God: “one Spirit” (4:4), “one Lord” (4:5) and “one God and Father of all” (4:6). It is no coincidence that we are brought into the Church by means of water “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You have been called to “one hope,” namely eternal life in the kingdom of God. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then “your faith is futile” and “we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:17, 19). But Christ is raised from the dead, and we are thus united in the hope of eternal life. This is the shared hope of all the baptized, because they have been joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection in Holy Baptism (Rom. 6:3–11).

There is “one faith.” Although many justify contradictory beliefs within Christianity on the basis that “we can’t really know for sure,” the Lord provides His Word so that we might know what the Christian faith is. The variety of contradictory teachings within Christianity is not because the Word is unclear, but because sinful man often misinterprets Scripture. Sadly, many of these disagreements over different articles of faith (such as original sin, faith, the Sacraments, justification and sanctification, to name a few) put the blessings of Holy Baptism in doubt. The fact that there is one true faith, however, means that the blessings of Holy Baptism are certain. There is “one baptism,” namely the washing of water and the Word “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This Baptism is vital for unity because it is by means of Holy Baptism that sinners are made sons of the Kingdom and united as members of the one body of Christ.

Again, “diversity” and “tolerance” are watchwords of the day. This passage is seen by some to be far too limiting and exclusive. It must be emphasized that this is all a great comfort. Because of our sin, we deserve no salvation whatsoever. But there is one Savior — one more than we deserve, who is also the Savior of all!