

A Developing Christian's Life

Excerpted from Eric W. Gritsch. *Martin - God's Court Jester*. pp. 181-182

The following is a concise perspective as to how baptized Christians have answer the question throughout the ages of why we suffer in this life after being touched by God through the Holy Spirit. The answer is revealed in the reasons why and how we worship God and the importance of spiritual growth through God's Word and sacraments.

"Luther's views on worship and education provide a significant ecumenical platform from which to face the ancient and troublesome question, "What ought to happen between baptism and death?" From the very beginning, Christians have been concerned about the time after baptism, about the forgiveness of post-baptismal sins, and about life in the world. If baptism means initiation into the kingdom of God, why should one struggle with evil? Could one not move on to something better after having experienced a touch of the Holy Spirit as a token of what would later become a never-ending life with God? Why must a Christian's life be so filled with suffering, so cruciform? Luther's answer was the assertion that all of a Christian's life is a *return to baptism*, not a march forward to something else, whatever that may be - spiritual self-fulfillment or even growth into "perfection." How does one return to baptism? One returns to baptism by clinging to God's promise of love, given and sealed by the Holy Spirit in infant baptism. This promise of divine love is continually proffered by other Christians who have thus become the instrument of the gospel: the cheering news that salvation from evil and liberation from death comes through Jesus Christ who is God incarnate. The gospel instruments are means of wholistic human communication: the judging and consoling Word in preaching, teaching and absolution, both public and private; and the Lord's Supper, the meal in which Christ promised to be present. Every time the gospel is communicated in these ways, the old life of sin is renounced and the new life in Christ is affirmed, just as in baptism the old Adam was drowned so that new life could emerge. In this sense, Christian life is a continual dying and being reborn by being exposed to the gospel in Word and sacraments. To Luther this external body-side of God was the sole source of comfort to the terrified conscience. Christian life is therefore structured, nurtured, and shaped by the externals of Word and sacraments."