

## Romans 6:3-6,8,11: Baptism Into the Death of Christ

<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

<sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into [his] death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

<sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin...

<sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...

<sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In the church today, baptism is something of a mystery.

- There is not much teaching about it.
- Many people doubt that baptism is necessary at all.
- Others think of baptism as simply an outward action, something one must do to satisfy others' expectations:
  - "Getting baptized is something my parents expect me to do."
  - "This girl I like won't go out with me until I say I'm a Christian and get baptized."

Because baptism seems like an empty thing, other people want to fill it up with a meaning of their own.

- They will say, "Baptism is an outward sign of my inward decision to follow Christ."

But this doesn't really answer the question about why baptism is necessary and why we have to bother with it.

- If what matters is my decision, then anything else that happens (e.g. baptism with water) just comes after the fact and isn't really as important.

In Romans 6, Paul takes a very different approach to explaining what baptism is and why it is necessary.

- Baptism is God's answer to the fact that we are no longer free.

In verse 6, Paul reminds us that when one leaves God and looks away from God, one's life goes away from God and becomes captive to other things.

So the person who is looking for a freedom apart from God ends up becoming a slave to other things.

How can we tell if a person is a slave?

A person is a slave when they cannot do as they wish; what happens will be controlled by something else.

In the next chapter of Romans, Paul talks about this in greater detail:

- When we are moved to act by desires and fears, we often end up doing things we did not want to do.
  - So, for example, I tell myself that I am really a peace-lover and that I value people, but I find myself blowing up with anger and tearing down people with my words.
  - Or I tell myself that I am very wise about relationships and a very moral person, but my mind and my life fall very easily into sexual immorality.
- So, having claimed that we always set the best standards for ourselves and uphold them, in truth our lives are very far from God and are presently under the control of other things.

When God shows us that we are not strong but weak, not wise but foolish, not close but distant, a part of us cries out, “What shall we do?”

At that moment God turns our eyes to the crucified and risen Jesus. God asks us

- to turn away from other things by repentance,
- to place all of our hope and trust in Jesus and
- to be baptized into his death.

In a death, old things must die.

On the cross of Jesus, all looking to others for honor and approval died; Jesus died alone, abandoned, as a man without honor.

On the Cross, all dreams of ease, comfort and prosperity died; everything Jesus had was taken from him, his clothes, his dignity, finally even his life.

At this point, we stand before God and must make a choice.

We can turn our backs on God and let fear and desire lead us back to running hard after approval, honor, money and advancement, always yearning for more.

But even if one gets more, the inside is unchanged.

Again and again we fall away from God and even from the standards we set for ourselves.

By our words and actions we keep hurting other people, including people we love.

Outward prosperity, inward want.

The alternative is to stand under the cross of Jesus and to say, “Lord, you are all I want. I am sorry for the way I left you, neglected you and acted against you. I am sorry for the ways I have hurt others, even those I love. I am not ashamed to enter into your death through baptism, so that I may share in your life and be with you always.”

To the person who prays this prayer and enters into Jesus’ death through baptism, the Lord says this: “Your sins have been nailed to my Cross and they are forgiven. The power of the desires and fears that held you is broken. Now I am the Lord and I am for you. I will never leave you or forsake you. Now I am pouring into you a new life, my life, which is greater than sin, death, suffering or anything else in this world. **You are truly free.**”

If this is what you desire and you have not yet been baptized, I encourage you to talk with Jack and Sharon about being baptized this Easter.

Perhaps you have been baptized at some point in the past but you feel the Lord tugging at your heart and inviting you into deeper experiences of his death and risen life.

If so, please take time during this season of Lent to reaffirm your baptismal commitment to the Lord, using a prayer such as this:

Lord Jesus, by the renewing work of the Spirit,  
I was buried with you and into your death by baptism.  
By this you made me to be your own and to be alive again.  
I can never express how grateful I am for this.

Lord Jesus, impress on my mind the sign of your cross,  
that I may not be ashamed to confess my trust in you as the crucified Lord  
and to fight under your banner against sin, the world and the Devil  
and to continue as your servant in and through all things.

Lord Jesus, complete your work in us, that we may rise up to victory.

Amen.

For those who would like to reaffirm their commitment to Jesus publicly during Easter, time will be set aside on Easter for this, together with laying on of hands and prayer for the descent of the Spirit.



**When you went down into the water, it was like night, and you could see nothing.  
But when you came up again it was like finding yourself in the day.  
That one moment was your death and your birth; that water was both your grave and your mother.**

**--Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* 11.4**