

BAPTISM (*a little water changes everything*). **Romans 6:1-14**

Portions adapted from "DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE TO GOD" by Don Schultz @ SermonCentral.com

One of the boys in a Sunday School class proudly announced to his teacher that he was getting baptized the next Sunday and that he was going to wear his swim goggles. She told him that was really great, but asked why the youngster would want to wear his goggles during the Baptism service? The boy replied, **"So I can see my sins washed away!!!"**

Children have a very simple and straightforward way of viewing things. It's only when we get older that we start to make things more complicated. Today in the Christian Church there is some confusion over the meaning and methods of Baptism: Most Protestant Churches will baptize both professing Christians and the children of adult Church members, by sprinkling, pouring, or dunking. But Some Churches--mainly Baptist, and Pentecostal--insist that the only acceptable form of baptism is believer's baptism by immersion. The Catholic Church also practices infant or believer's baptism, but their understanding of the sacrament is sufficiently different from Protestant Churches and puts them in their own category.

Now, if you would like to better understand these various attitudes towards baptism, I would be glad to discuss them with you. However, today, we will not seek to resolve the matter--simply because you did not sign up for a weekend seminar on the subject.

Rather, I want us to focus today's thoughts on the significance of Baptism as it applies to our lives.

What does it mean for you and me now to declare **"I have been baptized!"**?

- What transformation has been wrought in our life according to this symbolic act?
- And what should be the result for our life lived after our baptism?

These are questions clearly answered by the Romans passage that we read earlier.

Baptism is all about change and life after death.

Across our country, major changes are taking place. With wildfires out west and horrendous springtime tornados and floods here in the east; landscapes are being dramatically altered. When the fires have run their course, the tornadoes moved on, and the flood waters receded, everything that existed before has been destroyed and a totally different landscape has appeared. Eventually, plants will grow back and the area will recover, but it will never be the same again. That's what fires, tornadoes, and floods do--they change the way things are, often dramatically.

Do you realize that you have also been dramatically changed?

- You are also now different from how you were before--not the same.
- Something happened inside you that has changed your soul--as declared by your baptism--the landscape of your heart has been dramatically altered.

You can sum up that change with a simple phrase: **dead to sin, and alive to God.** Whether infant baptism or believer's baptism, this is what baptism symbolizes.

And this is what we are going to consider today: the change that has taken place inside of you and every other Christian in the world. We are going to find out what it means, according to the Bible, and how it is symbolized by your baptism, that you are now dead to sin, and alive to God.

First, let's talk about death. There was a pastor who decided not to baptize a young believer on a particular Sunday, because it was October 31st, Halloween. He was concerned because, for many people, Halloween celebrates death. So he did not want an impressionable young person to be baptized in a season celebrating death. I understand his concern, but I believe his fears were based on the false idea of not wanting to connect our baptism with death.

Baptism is first about death.

Look again at Romans 6:3-4

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his **death**? Therefore we have been buried with him **by baptism into death**, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ."*

In order to become a Christian... you have to die.

- Your sinful self has to die.
- And your sin filled past has to die.

That's why Romans 6:2 asks the question: "*How can **we who have died to sin** go on living in it?"*

And Romans 6:6 declares "*We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the **body of sin might be destroyed**, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin"*

This theme is repeated in **Colossians 3:3** which says "*For **you DIED**, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."*

And **2 Timothy 2:11** tells us "*Here is a trustworthy saying: If **we DIED with him**, we will also live with him"*

Did you know, because of the death of the Jesus, there are now dead people walking all over the earth. They are not zombies, they are not the undead, they are not men on death row; they are all the Christians.

By faith in Christ we have truly become the living dead.

Before meeting Jesus, we were alive to sin and dead to Christ. But when Christ came into our life we were changed; our position was reversed. **Ephesians 2:1-5** says *God made you alive, who were "dead in trespasses and sins"*.

We used to be alive to sin but dead to Christ.
Now we are dead to sin but alive in Christ!"

Well, what do you do with dead people? (You bury them.)

Baptism is God's way of driving this truth home to us:

And yes, it is true that Believer's immersion baptism provides the best illustration of the reality of our death—going under the water is symbolic of being buried.

Thus baptism reminds us that our past has been washed away under the flood of God's love. Our old sinful self is dead and has been buried; it was crucified with Christ and it was also buried with Christ.

Scripture teaches us that even as he himself was being nailed to the cross, in himself, Jesus was also nailing our sins to the very same cross. In Jesus we were nailed to that cross. And with Jesus we died and with Jesus we were buried (Colossians 2:13-14).

So baptism is first about death, not the end of our existence—just as it was not the end of Jesus' existence—but it is the end of our guilt before God and our slavery to sin.

The part of you that lived exiled from God has been crucified with Christ, it has died and been buried. Just as a tornado destroys and changes everything in its path, so also God has, through the cross of Christ, completely destroyed your sinful nature; he has left the landscape of your spiritual life forever changed.

This is what baptism signifies, your sinful nature symbolically nailed with Jesus on that cross, dying and being buried, so that now you are completely dead to sin.

But out of the grave, Jesus rose to newness of life—so as you are brought up out of the baptismal waters you also rise to a new life.

Thus baptism symbolizes both your death to sin but also your rebirth to new life. As Jesus told Nicodemus, we must all be born TWICE; once physically, the second time spiritually. It is baptism that represents our second birth as a brand new person filled with a brand new Spirit to live a brand new life.

In medieval times, in illustration of this rebirth, new believers would first strip off all their old clothes to descend, naked, into the baptismal pool. Then coming up out of the water they would be re-clothed in a new white robe visually symbolizing to themselves

and to the watching world that their old self had been stripped away in death and buried and that they were now reborn and re-clothed with an entirely new self.

And this is how baptism is still practiced in the Orthodox Church, though usually only with infants, with the naked baby being plunged beneath the water of a baby sized baptismal font to be symbolically born anew.

If you saw the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" this was the problem when Ian Miller wanted to marry Toula Portokalos. She was worried about what would upset her father more, that her future husband was not Greek or that he was a vegetarian. So, to become more acceptable to his future in-laws, Ian was baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church. But, being too big for the baptismal font, the best he could do was to strip down to a pair of running shorts and kneel in a baby pool while the priest poured water over his head. Toweled off and redressed, his future family, somewhat missing the point, now joyously declared him completely Greek.

The symbolism of baptism is that we have been reborn, not to a particular faith or ethnic group, but to a new life. As Romans 6:4 reminds us: *just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **so we too might walk in newness of life.***

After Jesus rose from the dead, he lived a completely new life. On the cross, he had been covered with the sins of the world, paying their full cost with his own death. Now, having risen from the dead, he was free to live a completely new, glorious life. Because of Christ, that is also what happens to you. At your baptism, your old nature is symbolically crucified, dead, and buried and you are reborn to a new life that is completely sanctified, purchased by Jesus, held by the power of the Holy Spirit, and holy unto God.

You are dead to sin and alive to God. Now, being dead to sin and alive to God certainly has its benefits. But it also has its responsibilities.

As God's children we are expected to grow into and live up to this new God-given life into which we have just been born

Romans six makes our commitment to this new life very clear in multiple places.

- Verse 2 asks: ***How can we who died to sin go on living in it?***
- Verse 6 teaches: *We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, **and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.***
- And verses 12-13 summarize the new altered life expected of us. *Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness,*

*but present yourselves to God **as those who have been brought from death to life**, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.*

A Marine recruiting commercial shows a man climbing straight up a rock cliff. He runs into all kinds of obstacles--he even loses his grip for a moment and hangs by one hand from the cliff. But eventually he gets to the top and stands there boldly looking out over the world. The point of the commercial is that the Marines can turn you into this person. If you join the Marines, we will make you strong, and courageous, a person of honor and integrity; the new person that you want to be.

Spiritually, this is what your baptism, whether infant or believer--symbolizes: your death to the old life, your rebirth into God's new life **and your desire to now live as God's child: To be dead to sin and alive to God.**

To be alive to God, means that you love Him and serve Him above all other things. This includes:

- Honoring his name in the presence of others.
- Honoring his Word, by hearing and studying it faithfully
- Applying his Word to your life and growing in your faith.
- Trusting in him, and honoring Him by loving other people, never being selfish, but always being generous.

Yes, like the rock climber, you will run into all kinds of obstacles--sometimes you may even lose your grip spiritually. But God is there to help you get to the top. This is the person God has made you to be and in baptism this is the person you have declared that you want to be. This is what it means to be dead to sin, but alive to God.

There's a familiar saying that is not quite true. Here it is: "God loves me just the way I am."

The truth is that God so loves you--as he loves me--not just the way we are but in spite of who we are.

And God loves us so much that He will meet us where we are: in some pigpen of a life, in the deepest hole of despair, in the darkest prison cell of sin, God loves you so much he will meet you there.

As King David recounted in one of his Psalms (139) there is truly no place where we can hide from God. He knows where we are and he is already there waiting to bring us home.

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

This is the true saying: **God loves you so much He will meet you wherever you are... but God loves you too much to leave you there.**

Because God loves you so much, with His son's death He killed your old self. With His Son's return to life, He rebirths you into a new life that is now dead to sin and alive to Himself. Like a fire burning away your sinful past, like a tornado shredding your former world, like a flood washing away your guilt, God has changed you completely and given to you the power to live a holy life in fellowship with him.

This is who you now are. This is how you should now want to live. And, if you have received believer's baptism—this is what you are declaring has happened and what you want to be from now on: **dead to sin but alive to God.**

If you received baptism as an infant, this is how your Christian parents, and the entire congregation of the church, pledged to raise you—as a growing member of God's covenant community, until you reach a level of maturity when you can claim these promises for yourself.

With both believers and infant baptism we affirm that as children of God we are called and equipped to live a new way of life. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith encourages us to **remember our baptism daily**; to think of what it means to be claimed by God's love to the life that God has called us to now live.

According to history, whenever Martin Luther felt his energy flagging, his doubt growing, or his fear strengthening, he would cry out, "**I am baptized!**" And in that cry he found the renewal of strength to go forward on whatever journey he faced.

May that become your battle cry as well: when faced with temptation to sin, to leave the path of righteousness, to turn a cold shoulder to a godly need. Remember your baptism, through which you were made dead to sin and alive to God. Say to yourself: **I am baptized** and keep going forward.

Several years ago, Michigan Pastor Rick Stacy baptized a man in Lake Superior in October at 9:00 PM in the night. Rick had been talking with Myron and his wife about accepting the Lord as their personal savior and sealing that decision with baptism.

Myron was hesitant for a long time and then finally said, "Yes, I want to accept Jesus—and I want to be baptized tonight—right now in Lake Superior.

In case you don't know Lake Superior is cold.
The average temperature (year round) is about 38 degrees.
But this was late October and the waves were running 3 feet high.

The water was very cold. They were going to walk out waist deep into the water, but only made it about knee deep. Rick laid Myron down and the waves washed over him as he was baptized.

When they went back to Myron's home for some hot cocoa and a hot soak for their cold feet, Rick asked Myron why it was so important that he do this this night in Lake Superior. Myron answered: "*I was an army officer in the infantry during Viet Nam. I saw and did things that no man should see or do. So I wanted my sins buried in the deepest and coldest place...*"

That is what it means to be baptized.
To declare to the world "I am baptized."

Say it with me, "I am baptized."

Now pray it with me.

Friends, if you do not yet know Jesus Christ as your Savior, please come and talk with me after the service and give me the privilege of introducing you to one who has known and loved you all your life.

And if you have been born again but not yet told the world, we can take care of that as well—right here in among God's people in John Blair's pond. So you too can declare: **I am baptized.**