

Sermon 2, Baptism and the Death of Jesus, Romans 6:1-7

Scripture Reading: Mark 15

- I. The Question: Shall We Live in Sin?, v. 1
- II. The Answer: How Could We Live in Sin?, v. 2
- III. What You Need to Know: Baptism Unites You to Jesus, vv. 3-6a
 - A. Baptism Puts You “Into Christ Jesus,” v. 3a
 - B. Baptism Unites You With Christ’s Death, vv. 3b-5
 1. Baptism co-Buries You with Christ, v. 4a
 2. The Purpose of Dying with Christ Is Walking in New Life, v. 4c
 3. Baptism co-Grafts You With Christ’s Death, v. 5a
 4. Baptism co-Crucifies You with Christ, v. 6a
- IV. What This Union Implies, vv. 6-7
 - A. Union with Christ Means Death for the Old Man, v. 6a
 - B. Union with Christ Means Disintegration for the Body of Sin, v. 6b
 - C. Union with Christ Means Freedom for You, vv. 6c-7

Proposition: Baptism unites us to Christ such that His death to sin becomes our death to sin.

Brothers and sisters, last week we saw that Jesus was baptized in solidarity with His people. He was baptized just like we are. This morning, I want to examine with you the flip side of that truth: you and I, indeed all the baptized, are in solidarity with Jesus Christ. He is one of us by His baptism — but by our baptisms, we are one with Him. In our text this morning St. Paul applies that truth to the great themes of death and life. Never forget that Jesus Christ died. We hang an instrument of death in the front of our worship spaces to remind ourselves of the fact that we are here to worship a crucified Jew. This week, the global church will mourn on Good Friday, as together we remember that Jesus was killed at the time when the Passover lambs were slaughtered. Jesus is in solidarity with us — but we are in solidarity with Him. He died, and when baptized, we die.

We die symbolically, in that we pass through the water of judgment that drowned Pharaoh's hosts. Our old, corrupt self dies spiritually, in order that we might be reborn to new life. We also die mystically, in union with our head, the Lord Jesus Christ. So today, we will dive into the apostle’s teaching regarding baptism and the death of Christ. Next Sunday, on the glorious day of Easter, we will go on to examine what the apostle teaches about baptism and the resurrection of Christ. But this week, what I hope to show you is that baptism is a sign and seal of solidarity with Christ’s death. His sufferings are, in some sense, yours if and when you are baptized. How could you live in sin? Baptism, rightly received in its full spiritual implications,

has united you to Jesus Christ. His death conquered sin. Baptism signifies and seals that union with Christ in which His death to sin becomes your death to sin.

I. The Question: Shall We Live in Sin?, v. 1

Paul has just wound up his comparison of Adam and Christ, and his triumphant declaration that where sin abounded grace hyper-abounded. And that, in turn, brings up a question. If the grace of God is the best thing we could possibly have, then wouldn't we want more of it? Shouldn't we sin more in order that God's grace will really hyper-abound? Whether this question is, or could be, sincerely meant is beside the point. The carnal mind being what it is, it is certain that this question will be asked, and asked regularly, whenever anyone hears the declaration that God forgives sins. If God forgives, then why should I bother trying to control myself? Or as the German poet Heinrich Heine reportedly said on his deathbed, "Of course God will forgive me. That's His job." Is that His job? Paul answers this question with an explosive outburst: "No way!" Literally, he exclaims "May it never be!"

II. The Answer: How Could We Live in Sin?, v. 2

But then, in true rabbinical fashion, he goes on to answer the question with a question: How can we, who died to sin, live any longer in it? All through this section, you'll see Paul play on these two words "life" and "death." We know that they are opposites. We know that they are mutually exclusive. And so Paul expects our instant assent to his question. "You're right, Paul," we say: "A person who died to something isn't a person who lives in that thing." That much is clear. Right up front, then, Paul has announced that death to sin is incompatible with life in sin. If sin is your element, the realm in which you live, the thing you never stop doing, then you never died with Christ.

But to truly understand what this concept of "died to sin" means, we need to look carefully at the rest of our text. Paul presents this as something that the Romans already knew. He was merely reminding them.

III. What You Need to Know: Baptism Unites You to Jesus, vv. 3-5

Don't you know these things? Well, whether you do or don't, he's going to remind you of them, to fill in the background of his statement that people who died to sin can't live in sin.

A. Baptism Puts You "Into Christ Jesus," v. 3a

So the first thing you need to know that is that baptism puts you into Christ Jesus.

Huh? We might ask. We're talking about living in sin, dying to sin, and not living in sin anymore. What's baptism got to do with this, Paul? The answer in the apostle's mind seems to be "everything." When teaching about death to sin, he begins talking about the meaning of baptism as though it were the most obvious thing — certainly as though it was something his audience already knew.

So here's what you need to know: baptism puts you "into Christ Jesus." Now, is this an assertion that getting wet is the way of salvation? Has Jesus promised infallibly that everyone to whom the water of baptism is applied will in fact be inseparably united to Him, saved, and brought to heavenly bliss? No. It is very obvious that many baptized people aren't united to

Christ and never have been. So Paul isn't talking about the mere rite. He's talking about both halves of baptism, the part we do and the part God does. As we saw last week, John the Baptist distinguished these two parts in his preaching. Pastors baptize with water. Christ Himself baptizes with the spiritual realities, including the gift of the Holy Spirit. Well, Paul says here that another reality of baptism is being put into Christ. He uses three other verbs in the next verses to describe this union. We are co-buried. We are co-grown. And we are co-crucified. The things that are true of Christ become true of us!

To be put into Christ is not a physical merger. It's not like the merger between mashed potatoes and butter. Nor is it a mere "intellectual" merger, whereby we get placed into the same category with Christ. That is, it's not like the "merger" between two documents placed in the same file folder because of some characteristic they both share. Nor is it a total merger, as when you assimilate buttery mashed potatoes into your body and use them to make part of your arm. Rather, it's a spiritual merger. Theologians call it a mystical union. The Bible uses the analogies of marriage and adoption to describe it. Whereas before you weren't related to Jesus, now you are related to Him as your brother and to God as your Father. This is true even individually. Corporately, as a group, we as the church are related to Jesus as a bride is to her husband, or as your body is to your head. You are not individually Christ's spouse, but we corporately are.

Think about it. You are united to Christ. You are still you, but you are you in a totally new relationship, because you've been put into Him.

B. Baptism Unites You With Christ's Death, vv. 3b-5

Paul goes on to say that baptism, rightly received in its full spiritual reality as well as its outward symbolism, unites us to Christ not just in His person but also in His work. Thus, if you have been baptized and you really and truly believed God's promises that He makes to you in baptism, then you were "baptized into His death." What does that mean? That the benefits and blessings of His death belong to you. His death has become your death.

That sounds scary. What do you mean, Paul? How did I die with someone who lived and died centuries before I even existed? Well, the apostle goes on to tell us more of what he's thinking.

1. Baptism co-Buries You with Christ, v. 4a

He's trying to say that in a mystical sense, we died with Christ and were co-buried with Him. You say you've never died? Physically you haven't. But in terms of your union with Christ, you did. That union is so profound that His death is yours. Baptism symbolizes burial, drowning, falling into the waters of chaos and there perishing. In effect, Paul is doubling down here. We say "I don't know what you mean, Paul, with this talk about dying."

Paul responds, "You didn't just die. You were buried too!"

What does this mean? That your old man, your old self, died to sin and was so dead that it got buried. You experience the same realities that Christ experienced! Again, the apostle is not talking physically here. He's speaking mystically. He's saying that you, the real you, died to sin with Jesus. You didn't die *for* sin like Jesus did. No. He suffered the penalty your sins deserved

so that you wouldn't have to. But now, in union with Him, you need to know that you died to sin and were buried.

What does this mean? It means that sin no longer reigns over you. You don't belong to it anymore. You can imagine one of those post-apocalyptic movies, where life is horrible. Someone says, "Death is the only way out of this place." Well, that's what the apostle is saying here. Death is the only way to get out from under sin's dominion. But rather than killing every new believer right away, God instead has us undergo a spiritual death in and with Christ. In fact, you could say that Christ is the one who really died, and His death is credited to us — just as in the rest of our salvation, He's the one who really lived right, and His life is credited to us. You got free from sin's dominion by getting baptized into Jesus, Paul says. That baptism killed and buried you with Jesus.

So if you've been baptized, or are planning to be baptized, then think about it like this. Think about it as a drowning, where the old you, the you that was enslaved to sin, sinks to the bottom and dies. But then the new you comes up out of the water! You're still the same person, of course. We don't physically drown when we're baptized. But our relations have changed. Before sin ruled you. After baptism into Jesus, the apostle is explicit: you've escaped sin's rule. You're not under its jurisdiction any more. You crossed the border to freedom.

2. The Purpose of Dying with Christ Is Walking in New Life, v. 4c

Why do we have to die and be buried like this? Why so extreme, Paul? The answer is that we couldn't get out of sin's dominion any other way. Salvation is not possible without this death and burial. You see, without this burial, there would be no walking in newness of life. New life! That's the name of a church here in Gillette, and a name that countless churches in many other cities across the world have chosen to be theirs as well. Why is that name so popular? Because new life is the goal of this death and burial that we experience in Christ. Jesus didn't die and be buried just so that we could be united to Him in that. He died and was buried so that we could have the new resurrection life that He has. The goal was for us to *walk* in new life, to live the new lifestyle (as we say nowadays). What is this new lifestyle? It is a lifestyle of spiritual life, of obedience to all God's commands, of living in unbroken fellowship and relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit. New life means new relationships. Rather being enemies of God, alienated from people on earth, we are now at peace with God and with our fellow brothers and sisters.

So why would you want to undergo baptism and be, in a sense, buried alive? Because life awaits on that other side of that burial. This why the Christian can no longer live in sin, as v. 2 claims. It's because the Christian has escaped from the realm of sin and been given new life. Sin still exists. Believers still sin. But they don't have to!

3. Baptism Grafts You Together With Christ's Death, v. 5a

Well, Paul repeats himself in slightly different ways throughout this section, because his point is so important — and so complicated. He just used the metaphor of co-burial. Some have argued that this demands that baptism be administered always and only by immersion. There's nothing

wrong with immersion. But look at this next verse, where Paul uses a term from the field of botany. This term is “co-growth,” and it’s used in the parable of the sower to talk about the weeds growing up with the good seed and choking it out. It also refers to the process of grafting, whereby a branch from one tree is merged onto the root of another. Since Paul’s idea here is a once-for-all idea, our English translations don’t render this term “co-growth,” because in English that sounds like a process. But that’s literally what the word rendered “united together” in our Bibles means in Greek. You have been grown together with Christ, such that you are inseparably united with Him, if you were baptized and received that baptism with faith. Paul uses an “if” here because he doesn’t want to assert that every last person who reads his letter is a true Christian. But if indeed you were baptized in faith that God’s promises are true, then you are united to Christ. You’ve grown together with Him.

Now, if immersion is required by v. 4, what mode of baptism is required by v. 5? There’s not a good way to put water on someone to mimic that person having grown together with Christ in a death to sin.

But that’s the whole point: if you receive baptism with faith, then you are at that point joined together with Christ as a branch is grafted into a tree, as two plants grow up in the same pot. Specifically, His death applies to you.

IV. What This Union Implies, vv. 6-7

So what does this union imply? Paul says that in light of this truth that we died to sin in Christ’s death to sin, we know three things.

A. Union with Christ Means Death for the Old Man, v. 6a

First, union with Christ means death for the old man. What is this old man? Newer translations have the gender-neutral “new self,” which leaves out most of the meaning of this phrase. In colloquial English, if I ask you, “Who’s your old man,” what am I asking? Well, here’s what I’m not asking. I’m not asking about your old habits, your old personality, your old “self.” I’m not hinting that though you now eat vegetables and practice yoga, I know that a few years ago you lived on beef and french fries and rode bulls. To ask “Who’s your old man?” doesn’t mean the same thing as “Who did you use to be?” Not at all. Rather, “Who’s your old man?” means “Who’s your father? What family did you come from?” And that’s how Paul uses “old man” here. The old man is Adam, the first man, the one whose transgression brought condemnation upon everyone according to the previous chapter of Romans. He’s your daddy according to the flesh. The most basic fact about a human being is that he is a son of Adam. But Paul insists that that old Adam was co-crucified with Jesus.

You see, according to the apostle there are two options. You can be in Adam, or you can be in Christ. Everyone in Adam dies. Adam sinned, and his guilt and sinfulness were passed down to all of his descendants. Every human being conceived by ordinary generation is in Adam, corrupt and headed for death. But some, by the grace of God, are pulled out of Adam, “die to Adam,” and come under the lordship and headship of Christ. So yes, there’s definitely a sense in which your old sinful self dies when you become a Christian. But the broader message the

apostle wants us to grasp is that when you become a Christian, your link to Adam as the original sinner is broken. No longer are you caught in the reality of Adam's sin. No longer is your primary identity "Son of Adam." That's all been crucified with Christ. Now your primary identity is "child of God." The point is not that male Christians have an "old man," and female Christians have an "old woman," and so the best translation is the gender-neutral "old self." No! The idea is that we all have a connection to Adam, the one who plunged us all into sin and death, unless and until that connection is broken by a link to Jesus Christ, the one who crucified the "old Adam."

B. Union with Christ Means Disintegration for the Body of Sin, v. 6b

When you've been united to Christ, which is what baptism means and in a sense does, then your "body of sin" — that is, the entire mass of sin which once ruled you and expressed itself through your body — will be rendered inoperative, will fall apart. The word translated "done away" or "abolished" is defined in Friberg's Greek lexicon as "from the basic sense cause to be idle or useless, the term always denotes a nonphysical destruction by means of a superior force coming in to replace the force previously in effect, as, e.g. light destroys darkness." So what happens to the body of sin? It is overwhelmed, overruled by the power of union with Christ. You no longer need to serve sin with your body. You no longer need to carry around this huge mass of sin. Overruling sin is rendered inoperative by your union with the death of Christ.

Notice that Paul doesn't say that sin is totally eliminated from the world. Sin still exists. You can still commit it. But the dominion it had is gone.

C. Union with Christ Means Freedom for You, vv. 6c-7

You don't have to serve sin anymore. Its legal claim is terminated, and the stronger power of Christ has come in to drive it out! Do you believe that? Do you live in light of that? Brothers and sisters, if you've been baptized in faith, then you've been freed from sin! That doesn't mean that sin itself is destroyed. It means that its dominion, its rule over you as a slave-driver and a tyrant, is over. Sin says, "Lust after her!" You say, "I won't and I don't have to. I don't obey you any more, sin!"

Paul bases this teaching on the fact that one who has died with Jesus is freed from sin. Sin is no longer your master. Jesus knows that. You know that. But sin is a liar. Sin will keep enticing you, keeping bossing you, keep telling you that nothing has really changed. Don't believe it! The word of God declares that everyone who's been baptized into Christ Jesus has been baptized into His death. If you died with Him, then you've escaped from the power of sin. You can still sin. You can still seek sin out. We all do. But here's the difference: when you were an unbeliever, you had no option but to sin. Sin had you, one way or the other. Even if you did something outwardly good, you did it for fundamentally sinful motives. Now, though, you are freed from sin's tyranny.

So next time temptation comes knocking, next time sin comes enticing, say, "I'm done with you, sin. You have no power over me." Remember Christian's combat with Apollyon in *Pilgrim's Progress*:

{143} APOL. Whence come you? and whither are you bound?

CHR. I am come from the City of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and am going to the City of Zion.

APOL. By this I perceive thou art one of my subjects, for all that country is mine, and I am the prince and god of it. How is it, then, that thou hast run away from thy king? Were it not that I hope thou mayest do me more service, I would strike thee now, at one blow, to the ground.

{144} CHR. I was born, indeed, in your dominions, but your service was hard, and your wages such as a man could not live on, "for the wages of sin is death" [Rom 6:23]; therefore, when I was come to years, I did, as other considerate persons do, look out, if, perhaps, I might mend myself.

Apollyon's flattery

APOL. There is no prince that will thus lightly lose his subjects, neither will I as yet lose thee; but since thou complainest of thy service and wages, be content to go back: what our country will afford, I do here promise to give thee.

CHR. But I have let myself to another, even to the King of princes; and how can I, with fairness, go back with thee?

{145} APOL. Thou hast done in this, according to the proverb, "Changed a bad for a worse"; but it is ordinary for those that have professed themselves his servants, after a while to give him the slip, and return again to me. Do thou so too, and all shall be well.

CHR. I have given him my faith, and sworn my allegiance to him; how, then, can I go back from this, and not be hanged as a traitor?

APOL. Thou didst the same to me, and yet I am willing to pass by all, if now thou wilt yet turn again and go back.

{146} CHR. What I promised thee was in my nonage; and, besides, I count the Prince under whose banner now I stand is able to absolve me; yea, and to pardon also what I did as to my compliance with thee; and besides, O thou destroying Apollyon! to speak truth, I like his service, his wages, his servants, his government, his company, and country, better than thine; and, therefore, leave off to persuade me further; I am his servant, and I will follow him.

Is that your resolution this day? Are you ready to remember your baptism, remember that Apollyon used to be your master but is no longer, that you died with Christ and are therefore free from the rule of sin?

Brothers and sisters, baptism into Christ's death means *freedom*. So then, if you have been baptized, remember it. Reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. If you've not been baptized, then come and welcome to Jesus Christ. Be baptized into His death. Be co-buried with Him, co-planted with Him, co-crucified with Him. Then, and only then, will His death to sin become yours. Then, and only then, will you take hold of that which is truly life. Amen.