

# Baptism

## Romans 6:1-4

Ok, take your Bibles and turn with me to Romans 6. Today is an exciting day at Harmony Bible Church. There is a lot going on. And our primary focus is on baptism. We started with baptisms, we are going to have more baptisms in a little bit, and right now we are going to study what God's Word has to say about baptism. In all of this, let me tell you that we have two goals. One, we want you to understand why baptism is a big deal. In my experience, most people just don't get what baptism is all about. Many seem to look at it as little more than a religious tradition that we kind of do, because, well, that is just what we do. But I love what John Piper has to say about this topic:

*We are not mainly talking about church tradition here. We are mainly talking about Jesus Christ and his magnificent work of salvation in dying for our sins and rising for our justification. Talking about baptism means talking about how Jesus taught us to express our faith in Jesus and his great salvation. So don't have small thoughts as we begin. Have large thoughts. Great thoughts about a great reality – Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified to bear the sins of millions and raised to give them everlasting life in the new heavens and the new earth.*

Now, when it is put that way, its pretty clear that baptism is something absolutely huge. And so our first goal today is for all of us to see just how exactly huge it is.

Our second goal for this morning is for those who have not been baptized to respond and be baptized today. Let me be up front and tell you that at the end of the message we are going to give you the opportunity to be baptized – right here and now. So, if you haven't been baptized, be thinking about it as we move through the message this morning.

So, let's look now at Romans 6:1-4, which will serve as our primary text. Paul writes:

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into 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. (Romans 6:1-4 ESV)*

From this passage, I want us to see three things about baptism.

**1. The purpose of baptism is to illustrate a believers union with Christ.**

Number one, the purpose of baptism is to illustrate a believers union with Christ.

Now by illustrate I mean to give a visible picture or symbol of an invisible reality. Let me give a few examples that will help to clarify this. Oftentimes when I am talking about baptism with children, I use the example of a picture storybook. For example, I have here the Gospel Story Bible. And if I turn to page 114 I find the story of David and Goliath. On one side of the page are the words, which tell the story, and on the other side is a picture that illustrates what the words are describing. Now, we wouldn't say that the picture is the story. This picture isn't David slaying Goliath. It's simply an illustration of what happened. And that's what baptism is, an illustration of our union with Christ.

Here's another example that will perhaps speak more to the adults in the room. I have on my finger a wedding ring. Many of you do as well. What is the purpose of a wedding ring? It serves as a symbol of the commitment that a husband and wife make to one another. The vows that I spoke to my wife on our wedding day are not visible; but this ring is. And while the ring is not the commitment, it symbolizes the commitment. The ring is an illustration of the fact that Eva and I have been united by covenantal marriage vows. And that is what baptism is. It's an illustration that a believer, by covenant, has been united to Jesus Christ.

So, I hope this is clear to you now. Baptism is a visible symbol of an invisible reality – the reality that believers have been united to Christ. Now, that's all well and good, but it would probably be good for us to talk about exactly what it means to be united to Christ? What exactly is this union with Christ? Here in Romans 6 we see that union with Christ includes two things.

- **Believers are united with Christ in His death.**

First, it includes the fact that believers are united with Christ in his death. Look at verse 3 with me again, *baptized into his death*. The main point that Paul is trying to make in this passage is that God's grace does not lead people to continue to sin, because those who are united to Jesus Christ have died to sin. In verse 1 Paul is anticipating that some might say that because God's grace increases in proportion to sin, then why don't we just sin more so God will get more glory when He gives grace to cover that sin? But Paul responds in verse 2 that this is unthinkable, because those who have died with Christ are dead to sin. The point is that believers are dead to their sin nature. That when Christ died, their old sin nature died with Him. And not only did the sin nature die, but it was also buried. Do you see that in verse 4? Believers were buried with Christ. In his commentary on this passage James Boice says that to go back to sin once

you have been united to Christ is like digging up a dead body. It's just not something that you do.

Now, Paul explains the most wonderful aspect of this truth in verses 6-7. Look at it with me:

*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. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:6-7 ESV)*

Union with Christ means that believers are free from slavery to sin. It is no longer our master. We are now able to say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to God, because the chains of sin were broken when Christ died on the cross. Why is baptism such a big deal? One reason is that it's a reminder of the fact that we are free from bondage to sin.

- **Believers are united with Christ in His resurrection.**

Thankfully, however, believers were not only united with Christ in His death, but they were also united with Him in His resurrection. Look again at verse 4:

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into 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.*

So, baptism not only pictures that believers are free from slavery to sin, but it also pictures the fact that they have been resurrected and given a new life. That's why Paul can say in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)*

Ephesians 4 tells us that this life is a life of righteousness and holiness:

*Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24 ESV)*

So hopefully you are now beginning to get why baptism is such a huge deal. Baptism isn't important because the actual act of getting wet is important, but rather because what it represents is of immense importance. Baptism is huge because it points to the greatest person and the greatest truth in the entire world. It points to the Son of God who willingly died so that we could be free from the power of sin and live a holy life. It points to the fact that our sins have been washed away and therefore we are no longer

under God's judgment. And most gloriously it points to the fact that we have new life in Christ that we will experience for all eternity. And what could be huger than that?

## **2. The method of baptism is by immersion.**

So, the purpose of baptism is illustration. The next thing we need to see in our passage is that the method of baptism is by immersion. Now, we are probably all aware that there are other methods that churches use to practice baptism, most notably pouring and sprinkling. However, there are three pieces of evidence that show that the Biblical method of baptism is by immersion. One, the Greek word for baptize is *baptizo*. Everyone say that with me. *Baptizo* means to immerse, to go all the way under.

Two, every clear example of baptism in the New Testament is one where those who were being baptized were immersed. So, for example we know that John the Baptist baptized by immersion. John 3:23:

*John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized. (John 3:23 ESV)*

If John was only sprinkling those who were being baptized, he would not have needed a place where water was plentiful. He would have only needed a jar or a cup.

We also know that Jesus Himself was baptized by immersion. Mark 1:9-10:

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. [10] And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (Mark 1:9-10 ESV)*

One more example would be Acts 8:38, where Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch:

*And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. [39] And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:38-39 ESV)*

There are other examples, but I think you get the point. Every example we have of baptism in Scripture is by immersion.

The third piece of evidence for baptism by immersion is the symbolism here in Romans 6. The symbolism of being buried and raised with Christ only works with baptism by immersion. Going under the water pictures our death and burial with

Christ and the fact that our sins have been forgiven, and coming up out of the water shows that we have been raised with Christ into newness of life. Other methods of baptism miss most if not all of this symbolism.

### **3. The subjects of baptism are believers.**

So, the purpose of baptism is illustration. And the method is by immersion. The last thing we need to see here in Romans 6 is that the subjects of baptism are believers. Just as immersion is the only method of baptism in the New Testament, so too do we find that the only people that are baptized are those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, here is an easy way to state how the New Testament teaches us to baptize. We baptize *by immersion after conversion*. Did you catch that? We baptize by immersion after conversion.

When I use the term conversion I am referring to the moment that someone repents of their sins and turns to faith in Jesus Christ, what we typically call the moment of salvation. And this leads to one of the most important points of the message. Everyone listen closely to me now. Baptism does not save. I recognize that from a surface reading of Romans 6:1-4 it might seem like that is what Paul is saying. But that cannot be the case because Paul's primary goal in Romans is to show that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone. In fact, flip back one chapter in Romans. Chapter 5 verses 1-2 say this:

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2 ESV)*

Paul says that we have been justified (made right with God) by grace through faith, not by grace through faith plus baptism.

Paul also makes this clear in two other passages where he is talking about baptism:

Galatians 3:26-27:

*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:26-27 ESV)*

Colossians 2:12:

*Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:12 ESV)*

So, baptism doesn't save. It is simply an illustration showing that we have been saved. We have to be very careful with this, because if we say that baptism is required for salvation than we make it based upon something we do, and then we are trusting in our works to save us. But Ephesian 2:8-9 is very clear on this.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)*

So, everyone got that? Baptism doesn't save. Rather, it is an illustration of the fact that we have been saved.

Now, that said, I think we do need to recognize that the New Testament clearly teaches that baptism is for all who have been saved. And we can actually see that here in Romans 6. Look again at verse 3:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

In this letter Paul is writing to a group of believers that he had never met. And yet he takes for granted that all of them have been baptized. Apparently the thought of an unbaptized believer never crossed his mind. We see this clearly when he says 'do you not know?' In other words, 'you know this, right?' This is elementary. This is basic. This is foundational. To be a believer means to be baptized. I feel pretty confident that if Paul was here today and discovered that there were unbaptized believers in our church he would be dumbfounded. It wouldn't make sense to him. That's because for New Testament Christians the very next thing you did after you were saved was to be baptized. Let me give you some examples.

On the day of Pentecost after Peter preached the first post-resurrection sermon, we see this:

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41 ESV)*

Or in Acts 8 when Philip preaches in Samaria:

*But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12 ESV)*

In Acts 10 after Peter preaches to Cornelius and a number of other Gentiles we see this:

*“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:47-48 ESV)*

And we can go on and on, but let me summarize by saying that the New Testament knows of only one believer who was not baptized, and that was a thief on the cross. And I think we can all affirm that he had a pretty good reason. So, can I ask you this morning if you have not been baptized, what is your reason? Is it because you haven't realized its importance? It is because you haven't understood its significance? Is it because you have not been taught that you should be? Whatever the reason, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ and have not been baptized, I would urge you to be baptized today.

That said; let me urge you to do so not out of obligation or compulsion, but rather as a response to the relationship you have with Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate it this way. Back to the wedding ring one more time. I have worn this wedding ring almost every single second for the last 16 ½ years. These days I hardly ever take it off. And you know why I wear it? Two reasons. One, it illustrates the fact that I am Eva's and Eva is mine. I want the world to know that I am married to Eva Carr. The second reason is that it gives me a great deal of joy. It brings me joy because it is a constant reminder of the bond I have with a very special person. Brothers and sisters, this is how we should think of baptism. Baptism illustrates the fact that Jesus is ours and we are His. And when we are baptized and watch others being baptized, it is a wonderful reminder of the bond we have with Him and all the benefits we experience because of it.

Pray

Ok, Pastor Leonard and our worship team are going to lead us in a couple of songs right now. And as they do, we want to give you the opportunity to respond to what you have just heard and be baptized today. We have Elders and Deacons ready to interview you and get you ready. We have everything you need – we have extra clothes, we have towels. And so if you believe the Lord is leading you to be baptized today, when the music begins in just a moment I invite you to go directly out the back doors and meet our leaders at Harmony Central, and they will help you with everything you need.

Let me reiterate one thing, however. As I just said a few moments ago, baptism follows conversion. Before you can be baptized the first thing that has to happen is you must repent of your sins and trust in Jesus. And if this is you today, you can join our leaders

at Harmony Central as well and they will be happy to share with you more about how you can be saved today.

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