

Spiritual Baptism Romans 6

Galatians 6

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Responsive Psalm 105:1-8

If we were to sort of sum up the first half of the book of Romans one could say that Paul has been setting forth a sort of Human historical account, going from the creation and fall of Adam, to the promises and offspring of Abraham, the giving of the law to Israel, and finally to the arrival of the promised seed, the Messiah who would come and take away the sin of the world. The implications of this retelling is to show that all of mankind, even the Jews are not exempt from the need of salvation, despite having been chosen in Abraham and delivered from slavery through Moses, which were actually symbolic of the spiritual offspring, and being delivered from the bondage of sin. Paul made it clear in the previous chapters that all men are either, in Adam, or in Christ. That is, still lost in sin and rebellion against God, or reconciled and made holy through the grace and mercy of God through his Son Jesus Christ. These two men, Adam, and Christ are the key representatives of mankind who determine, as heads of two separate communities the destinies of their members. As Paul has shown, all people are in Adam, for we are all born of the flesh, and as such, the bondage of sin, and rebellion against God is intrinsic to our very nature.

It is inescapable, and a natural part of who we are. We are born in sin, and though that is the outcome of the fall of Adam and subsequent curse upon his offspring, we are not merely guilty by association, but are also guilty of our own sin and rebellion as Paul points out in chapter 5 verse 12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men.....because all sinned." We can not claim any innocence in this matter, nor can we use our nature in Adam as an excuse, for we are guilty of our own sins. In fact, in our natural state, we revel in our sin as we selfishly seek our own pleasure, comfort, and interests, and we are more than happy to continue to do so. Even our own desire to be good is driven from this same desire of our own selfish pleasure and interest, for any apparent goodness that we may appear to muster up within our own natural lives only serves to build up in us pride and arrogance. Thinking ourselves something, when in reality we are no better than anyone else, for even our desire and attempt at morality in our natural state produces sin.

Diana and I watched this comedy show in which the entire premise was built upon the false idea that mankind can be good enough, can rack up enough good points to be able to go to the good place. As wrong as everything was in the show, it did get one thing right though, it is revealed that there is not one single person who goes to the good place because even their good acts are tainted by a selfish desire. This is the reality of mankind, that even our so called goodness, is tainted by sin. Isaiah wrote of this in chapter 64:6, he said "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all of our righteousness are like filthy rags;" Just to add a bit of context here, the term used here as filthy rags, is a reference to pieces of cloth used to clean, or contain bodily fluids. In short, without Christ, our works of morality, and goodness, are like these rags used to clean the dirtiest parts of humanity.

Our works of righteousness in the flesh are repulsive to God. Isaiah continues, “we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none who calls on your name, who stirs himself up to take a hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities.

This was the curse of Adam, that because of his sin, God has hidden his face from us, and we are consumed in his wrath because of our own iniquities. But as we talked about last week in Chapter 5, we are not left in this hopeless misery with no way to atone for our sins, for Christ has come to reconcile his people to himself, and in doing so has paid the penalty for our sins so that we may be counted as a holy and just people. And because of this our works have changed, they are not longer driven by a selfish desire to find morality and justification, but rather they are born out of a the love of Christ working in us to will and to do. The new birth is truly that, a new birth creating in us to be a new creature who is no longer seeking to justify ourselves, but live to bring praise and glory to the one who as saved us from our natural state of wretched hopelessness. Here in chapter 6, Paul explains how God has made a new community out of the fallen offspring of Adam, he explains how the Spirit of God brought about a new covenant community through its participation in the death of Christ. The first Adam strove after position and recognition, eating of the forbidden fruit in a desire to be like God, but the last Adam, who is Christ let go of his position and recognition in heaven in order to save the cursed sons and daughters of the disobedient Adam. God demonstrating his own love toward us, that while we were still yet sinners Christ left all he had, to come in the likeness of man to die the cruel death of the cross so that our sins may be paid for and God will no longer hide his face from us, but that we may be blessed as his Sons and Daughters in the inheritance of an everlasting life in his presence.

Paul has set up this idea of there being 2 communities, one in Adam, and the other in Christ. Here in chapter 6 he will dive into the details explaining how the members of each of these communities share in the transgressions, or obedience of their respective heads. Let us go ahead and read the first 14 verses of chapter 6. So in the first few verses here we run into a problem of interpretation, that is reading something into the text that may not have been originally the intention or Paul's thought. As new covenant Christians on this side of the cross, as we read the scriptures we see words and terms and we assign them meaning based upon our belief and previous context of the terminology used. This is an important thing to discuss because it seems here in this text is possibly one of these occasions where we may be tempted to read into what the author is saying because of our own bias instead of letting the context speak for itself. Often times when we see the word baptism, the first thing that pops up in our mind is the practice which we hold, which is a public confession of faith by water immersion. But as we know, this term Baptism is often used in many other ways meaning to be fully immersed in, or covered by.. such as being baptized by the spirit. Or Christ asks his disciples who asked him if they could sit on his right, and left hand in glory, in the book of Mark 10:38, You do not know what you ask, are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

There are many occasions in scriptures where the term baptism does not mean the practice of water baptism. Now I am not here this morning arguing against such a practice, for we also see many biblical examples of that as well, starting with John the Baptist as a prophet foretelling of the death, burial, and Resurrection of the one who was coming after him, and throughout the new testament we also see Christ himself instructing his disciples to go forth, preach the word and to baptize, and we see accounts throughout all of the book of Acts of Peter, Paul, and other disciples and apostles doing just that, baptizing believers in water. But I think that we need to be careful to not default to that understanding every time we see the word baptism, for in doing so we may end up missing a larger point, which is what I believe is the case here in Roman's chapter 6. There is a problem with understanding verse 3 here to be water baptism, it makes it a requirement for salvation, for Paul says that if we were baptized in Christ's death we were buried with him through that baptism and raised from the dead by the glory of the father therefore we should walk in the newness of life. Again, the problem with understanding this as water baptism here which I it is commonly understood to mean, is to make water baptism a requirement for walking in this newness of life, or in other words salvation.

We must remember the context in which Paul is writing here as well, in chapter 5 he instructs us in the reality of the 2 communities, the one in Adam, and the one in Christ. Using the term baptism in the way it is used throughout scripture, one can say that all of mankind is baptized fully immersed, in the curse of Adam, just as likewise those who are Christs are baptized, fully immersed in his death. And I think that this is the baptism that Paul is talking about here in chapter 6, it isn't the practice of water baptism, but rather it is the baptism that all who are in Christs new covenant community are baptized by, the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul is talking about a corporate baptism, not an individual. He had just finished explaining the 2 separate corporate groups, each with their own figure heads and how we have now become a part of Christ, no longer under the curse of the first Adam, but redeemed by the blood of the second. Though this is in individual work within the life of each and every believer, we are seen as being one in the community of Christ, who have been redeemed by the baptism of Christs blood. Paul also uses this language in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, where he writes, about the Jews who were lead out of Egypt. "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware hat all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink. For they all drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ." Paul uses this concept of baptism as a shared experience through one person, or event, all of the fathers of Israel was baptized in Moses in the cloud and the sea.

Now look at verse 3 in Roman's 6 again. "OR do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death." Sharing in his death, having our sins put to death on the cross so that we may be justified and declared holy becoming one in Christ. Verse 4 "therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, not into water, but into his death, and just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the father so also we should walk in newness of life."

If we apply this understanding of baptism to be one of a corporate nature it would then seem that Paul is writing about the great act of salvation that took place in the death of Christ. This was Jesus' exodus; like Israel's exodus out of Egypt lead by Moses, Christ, left all he had to take on flesh and become man, and in his dying and resurrection, he brought his people, of every race, status, creeds, nations, and generations out of that exodus with himself, because they have been baptized in the Spirit into union with him, to join him in the promised land.

What took place at Christ's death and resurrection was the transfer of the entire Christian community from the realm of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. As Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13. "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." Believers were baptized into Christ's death collectively, and will be raised together as one community in his blood when he returns. It is finished, the justification, redemption, and sanctification of God's people through the death of Jesus Christ as been accomplished. There is no more to be accomplished, those who have been baptized in his death and resurrection await the day of his return to be reunited with him in heaven.

Christ accomplished all, there is nothing that we can add to the work that he has done on our behalf. This is the answer to Paul's question in verse 1. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Christ took our sins and paid for them on the cross, our sins died with Christ, and he was raised glorified having accomplished all the father had sent him to do. Likewise we have died in Christ, having our sins taken away and payed for so that we may rise glorified in him when he returns. This is Paul's point, being baptized in Christ's death frees us from the bondage and slavery of sin, it no longer has a hold on those of us who are in him for when God looks upon us, he sees his Son for we have been baptized in the redeeming blood of the one and only messiah, the spotless lamb who came to free his people from captivity and bring them to a land of milk and honey. Again what Paul is implying here, is that this baptism is in terms of its occasion. Just as Moses was united with the people of God through a baptism of cloud and sea that took the Jews out of Egypt, so to in his exodus Christ took those who were baptized into union with him from the realm of sin and death. At this same historic moment, all believers experienced the one baptize into his death and have been freed by Satan's control, in the same way he wrote that all of Israel is baptized in Moses through the fathers having shared in the baptism of cloud and sea.

And as we can see in scripture as well, until Christ came and was put to death on the cross there was no union between believers, or with him as there was afterward when the Spirit came. It was this baptism of the spirit that brings the covenant community into existence, when we are born again with the indwelling of the spirit we have become one in the covenant community of God. So if we think about it that settles the debate that some have in the question, "when did the church historically come into existence." The answer would be, the moment of Christ's death and resurrection, is when the church of God was sealed and bound in an everlasting covenant in Christ's blood and was ratified by the spirit at Pentecost, making all who shared in the baptism of his death, one in the spirit.

Next week, we will probably continue to speak on these first few verses of chapter 6, because there is more to glean from it, but I wanted to take the time this week to really dive into what Paul means by being baptized in Christ's death for as we continue in this chapter it will help in understanding the point that he is making. I had personally never thought of this chapter in this way, seeing it as those who have been baptized through water as those who are identified in Christ's death, but the reality is that is making more of the practice than I think is intended. If we would apply that understanding to this chapter it would be arguing for baptismal regeneration, so I think it was important to take the time today to dig into what Paul was saying. That we who are in Christ, through the spirit are baptized into his death..not through water, but in the blood of him who redeemed us, making our salvation in him, and in him alone. It is finished, Christ has accomplished salvation for all who God has given him, once and for all. This does not diminish the importance of the practice of water baptism for by it is our confession as we identify in him as those who share in his death and resurrection, but it is not the water baptism itself that accomplishes this, for it has been accomplished on the cross already. I hope that this helps us to see the works of Christ in a bigger light, who suffered and died for our sins as our head, the second Adam of a new people, created in him for his glory.