

Romans, Part 30 1-29-23

Baptism of The Dead

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. We think of Mormonism. We think of Utah. We think of Mitt Romney and Glenn Beck and Steve Young, maybe too of Brigham Young and Joseph Smith. Mormons are generally very nice people. Hard-working. Family-oriented. They are pro-Jesus. They share our values for the most part. But, when you look into the Mormon faith you discover some very strange and disturbing things. One thing they do most of you don't know about is baptism of or for the dead. In Mormon belief, every soul spends time after death in a place where they are given the chance to hear and accept the gospel. If they accept the gospel they must be baptized in order to enter into a covenant with Christ and have their sins washed away. But, at this stage, the person is a spirit without a body and so they can't be baptized because this involves total immersion of their body in water. To solve this problem, the Mormon leaders came up with the idea of proxy baptism. Dead folks can get baptized, using someone else's body. So, they don't dig up someone's grave to baptize them. They find a live person to be a substitute. Of course, the dead person can't communicate this desire for themselves so it is incumbent upon the living to just assume this desire and have it done for the deceased. Such a proxy baptism is administered by full immersion in a Mormon temple. Their practice provides some measure of comfort to a grieving relative, but other than that makes no difference in the life or eternal destiny of anyone.

That is the Mormon form of baptism of the dead. Curiously, the apostle Paul teaches his own kind of baptism of the dead – but this one results in the most radical, powerful transformation one can imagine. Let's read and study together once again. Romans 5:**19-21** - 6:1-4 *As through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.* ²⁰*The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,* ²¹*so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* 6:**1-4** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ²May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with Him*

through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Last time we looked at those first two verses of chapter six – verses which repudiate the shallow-minded assertion that a lifestyle of sin magnifies the grace of Christ. We saw last time how the question of verse 1 demonstrates a misunderstanding of God’s purpose in salvation, His means of salvation and the nature of grace. We covered a lot of ground but did not spend enough time on the rhetorical question Paul asks in verse 2, *How shall we who died to sin still live in it?* Paul is arguing that continuing a life of sin doesn’t make sense, can’t be done, because we (you want to be part of this “we”) we died to sin. The “we” throughout Romans are those who are in the church, who have turned from sin, who have called on the name of the Lord Jesus. He says we died to sin. By the way, Paul is caught up with death in Romans 6. Fourteen times it is mentioned in fourteen verses. This is the first. Now, it is not immediately clear what is meant by this language, but the grammar should keep us from some errors. What is plainly indicated here is that Christians have died to sin. Paul alludes to this in coming verses 6:**6** (NLT) *We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ.* **7** (NLT) *When we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.* **11a** *Consider yourselves to be dead to sin.* All of these are telling us that our death to sin is not a process and is not a goal. We aren’t dying to sin. We aren’t trying to die to sin. It has been done for us and it is a completed reality. Turn to your neighbor and say, *I died to sin.* The ramifications of that are monumental and important to understand. This death to sin means that we are no longer under sin’s rule. We have a new master. Hallelujah! Grace has done this for us and it is complete. Consider the language of Colossians 1:**13** *He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.* You see that we aren’t moving kingdoms. He moved us and the work is finished. Ephesians 2:**19** *You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.* Was that a gradual thing? No. It is something that will take our lifetimes to grasp, but it happened immediately for us and was done by God. Comparisons can be made to adoption or to marriage. A legal event changes everything, and what Paul is describing for us is a legal redemptive event with cosmic consequences.

Then verse three takes us into the whole idea of baptism of the dead because it says **3** *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?* So, you died to sin and somehow

that is related to baptism? Please know that the “we” we spoke of earlier is also the “all of us” in verse 3. It is talking about believers in Jesus. If you are one you have been baptized. And that baptism joined you forever with Christ. The language is that we were baptized into Christ, merging with Him. Paul says this baptism makes us partakers of His death and partakers of His resurrection. It gives newness of life and freedom from sin. It makes us alive to God. It takes us out of Adam and places us in Christ. Now, I am going to ask you, in all seriousness, does a water ritual in a church, whether pouring or immersion, does a water ritual do that? By no means! So much that Paul has been telling us in Romans mitigates against the understanding that all this transformational stuff happens because of water baptism. It does not. Millions have been baptized by water and have not been united savingly with Jesus. Surely you understand that. But the baptism Paul writes about unites us with Christ and makes us heirs of all that is His. Is there a baptism that can do that? Yes! There is. But we must let the writings of Paul interpret the writings of Paul and here is what Paul says elsewhere that enables us to make sense of Romans 6. In I Corinthians 12, we read this **13a** *By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.* Dig in here. What is the body? It is the body of Christ that is one with Him. It is our baptism that places us in that body and who does this baptizing? Not a preacher, but the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Paul didn’t invent this doctrine. We encounter it back in the gospels when John the Baptist said that followers of Jesus would be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Don’t reflexively think of water when you read of baptism. There is a far more important baptism in the Scriptures and it saves and secures a believer. Galatians 3:**27** *All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* You are in Christ. You are wearing his uniform. You are wrapped in his righteousness. The devil can’t touch you or condemn you. You are secure and you didn’t get that way on the day of your water baptism, but on the day the Spirit fell upon you through what Paul calls in Titus 3:**5** *The washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.* Washing, renewing, baptism. Who is the baptizer? The Spirit of the living God. There is nothing wet here. Don’t buy the line that baptism refers always to an immersion in water. It does not. I Corinthians 10:**1-2** *Our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* And who got wet? Only the Egyptians and it wasn’t a happy time for them. But that passage helps us understand what baptism is. When the Hebrews came out of Egypt who was their leader? It was Moses. Their baptism was into him, it joined them to him in a new way. The destiny of two million or more was linked to

the destiny of Moses. No turning back. But now, we are baptized into Christ. Our destiny, our status now is linked to Jesus, and I am more than okay with that. Amen?

The doctrine of union with Jesus is under-appreciated in the church. A good study of Romans should fix that. Romans 6 is all about our union with Jesus. Romans as a whole is about that. How many times does Paul use that little prepositional phrase “in Christ.”? Just here in Romans 6 it is in verse 3 and verse 11 and verse 23. Look at 6:**23** *The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Eternal life is found in union with him. Romans 8:**1** *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Romans 8: 39 says that nothing **39** *will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* You think it is important that we be in Christ? You think it valuable to understand what that means? It means you are united with Him. Married to Him. All that is His becomes yours. His righteousness, His access to the Father, His inheritance. Salvation is when you are joined by grace, by the baptism of the Spirit to Christ. I Corinthians 6:**17** *The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.* So now – you have died to sin. Now you know you are joined to Christ. Turn to your neighbor and say, “I am joined with Christ.”

You know, Paul’s doctrine of Holy Spirit baptism was taught in the gospels. So too was Paul’s doctrine of union with Jesus. In John 15 what did the Lord say? He said I am the vine, you are the branches. United you see. He goes on John 15:**4-5** *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* What can you do apart from Jesus? Nothing! But when you are in him, attached to him, joined to him, you can bear much fruit.

Alright then. Back to Romans 6 and Paul’s harping on death. Verse 3 says that our baptism into Christ means that we are baptized into His death. That may not sound like such a good thing, but it is. It means that when He died, we died. The cool thing is that He endured death for us. He paid for sin, for us. We were a part of what happened to Jesus. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there? Oh yes, you were. Me too. We were dying there in Christ to the end that our debt is paid. It is finished! 6:6 says that our old self was crucified with Jesus. Verse 8 says we have died with Christ. That is key to why the justified do not go on sinning. Dead people don’t sin. We can say more about that in a bit but that is the outline of Paul’s argument. You can’t keep sinning you died to sin when

Jesus died for sin. You are united with Christ in His death. And His burial. Why does Paul mention the burial? I think it is because burial has a way of putting the deceased person out of this world permanently. At least it illustrates that. There is a certain finality conveyed in burial. When a loved one dies, there is a certain unreality about it, but when you see the dirt covering the casket it has a way of ending any delusion. Just so, get over your previous life of sin. Move on. It is gone! And gone forever. Dead. Buried.

But oh, there is more. The news of what our baptism into Jesus means is just getting started. *4 We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* You see Paul is using all these great redemptive realities to argue that we can't possibly live in sin any longer. Conversion is not just a transaction, it is a transformation. When Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted, we, in him, were likewise raised, you see. Ephesians 2 is so clear and powerful on this Ephesians 2:**4-7** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* You see those fantastic prepositions? With Him. In Him. We are made alive and we are raised. So, what do we do? We walk in newness of life. We live differently for sure. We think about the future differently too. Part of what Paul is about here is fortifying our assurance. He keeps saying that we have died with Jesus, surely, we will live forever with Jesus too. 6:**5** (NLT) *Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.* 6:**8** *If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.* This life we have now as believers is an indestructible life because it is joined with Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the Father's love.

So, what does all this mean practically for us as we live Christian lives in a hostile world? We see that God's purpose in joining us to Jesus is that we walk in newness of life – a quality of life worthy of the name, life. John MacArthur has some good applications I am going to share with you. He says these truths in Romans 6 give us confidence in temptation. You may know I Corinthians 10:**13** *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.* The way of

escape is often provided just by knowing and remembering gospel truth when we need it. Romans 6 reminds us we have died to sin. And in the last verse it says 6:**14** *sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.* Oh, Brothers and Sisters, that is something the devil does not want you to know. Learn it and you can be confident in temptation

Then secondly, you can be confident when you sin. Even though believers no longer live in sin, abide in sin, serve sin, we do still commit sin. But the reign of grace reminds us that we confess our sin and God is faithful to forgive us. We remember who we are, joined to Christ and we again frustrate the devil by not giving heed to his accusations. We are like the man in proverbs who falls seven times, but rises again.

Thirdly too, the fact that sin's tyranny is broken means we have confidence in death. As a pastor, I am around death and the dying a little more than most. It is always a challenge. You kind of hear the devil mocking and saying, "see – it all comes to a bitter end," even for great men like Jim Childress. But the word of Jesus is more powerful than the lying voice of the prince of darkness. Jesus says, you have died with me and you will live with me. And whereas verse 14 says sin is not master over you, verse 9 says death is not Christ's master and since I am in Christ guess what? Death is not my master either. We have confidence facing temptation, confidence when we sin, confidence as we face death. And there is nothing else in the world that will give you that. Only the gospel of Jesus, only this teaching that we have died with Christ and are raised with Christ, only this union with our Lord that makes everything of his to also be ours.

Finally, I should note that newness of life does not suggest perfection of life. No, no. The Scriptures assume that we will still sin and instruct us how to react when we do. But, there is clearly an expectation of change, of growth, of sanctification. In the weeks ahead, we will see more of what is taught in this wonderful chapter. We will look at old man gone and escape from the sin zone. For today, let's conclude with the story of Lazarus which illustrates some of what we have seen. You remember the story. Lazarus was dead for four days. Jesus approached the tomb and asked that it be unsealed and opened. He was warned that Lazarus would stink to high heaven, but the Lord insisted. He then spoke the word, *Lazarus come forth.* And Lazarus rose from the grave and walked out. When he came out he still had on him the grave clothes and Jesus said to his sisters, *Loose him and let him go.* Just so, many people have been lifted out of the deadness of separation from God, who have been redeemed, and yet still have on

grave clothes. The Lord would say to them and maybe to you, *Get off those grave clothes, be loosed, be free. Get rid of the remnants of your deadness and walk in newness of life.* Romans tells us we are dead to the reign of sin and alive to the reign of grace. So, we discontinue our sin, we exult in grace, and we walk in the new and glorious way that our Savior has set before us. Still more on that next week. Let us pray.