

Romans 6:1-4: Remember Your Baptism

OUTLINE

Remember you died to sin
Remember you were baptized

INTRODUCTION

In Reformed circles we talk about remembering your baptism. When you doubt your faith, remember your baptism; when you are tempted to sin remember your baptism; when you are on your death bed remember your baptism. Our baptism is a visible sermon that acts as a sign of what God has done for us, an outward action that describes an inward reality where He united us with Christ in His death and life. It acts as a visible seal. Like a king making a royal seal on some royal proclamation or law, God gives us a visible seal that promises us that we are His children; that we are saved; that we are destined to be resurrected just as Christ was resurrected. In part we talk about remembering our baptism because of Martin Luther. He was a man who was on the front line for the truth of the gospel. His life was literally under threat due to his stand that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and that we are not dependent for salvation on the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church. The majority of the world was against him, and in 1521 Luther was ordered by Emperor Charles the V of the then Holy Roman Empire to attend the Diet of Worms to affirm or renounce his views in light of a Papal Bull written by Pope Leo X. Luther made his famous speech about 'Here I stand, I can do no other....' And the Emperor declared Luther to be a notorious heretic and forbade the propagation of his ideas. Luther had to be kidnapped by a friend and hidden in a castle, where he ended up translating the Bible into German. That was a very tumultuous time in his life where Luther would have been filled with fear and doubt. One Lutheran writes, 'Not surprisingly, he was often plagued with fear and anxiety, and with doubt and discouragement about whether any of this would ever bear fruit. When all of this started to get Luther down, he had a unique strategy: he would stand up, face down the devil that he believed to be tormenting him, and yell, "I am baptized!" (He was also known to throw ink pots across the room.) Some sources indicate that he would write the same phrase - "I am baptized" - in chalk on his desk, to remind himself, as he worked, of his unbreakable connection to Christ and to the communion of saints.'¹

But Luther was not the first to use the tool of remembering baptism to remind himself of important gospel truths. Paul also called the Romans to remember their baptism as well. Today we will be looking at Romans 6:1-4 as Paul calls the Romans to remember their baptism. In Romans 5:21 Paul had concluded an important discussion about assurance of salvation, showing the incredible salvation that God has wrought for us as believers. In 5:1-11 Paul began heaping up the benefits that are ours now that we are justified. In 5:12-21 Paul, ever the teacher explains the mechanics of how we can be so thoroughly and wondrously saved. He explained how we died through the disobedience of Adam and received condemnation; and how through the obedience of Christ we are justified receiving the free gift of righteousness not our own. Listen to v19-21 and listen out for a provocative statement about grace abounding, 'For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the

¹ <http://www.gracepritchardburson.net/2021/01/12/i-am-baptized/> accessed 4/4/2024

many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Paul has been deeply explaining how we are saved by faith not by works; by the work of Christ imputed to us, not by our own works. That we gain more in Christ than we lost in Adam, and that God has superabundantly saved us by His grace.

Paul knowing his audience and the typical objections that people make to a gospel of free grace now answers one of those objections. If we say that God justifies the ungodly, by faith and not by works; if God saves us not by us being righteous but through giving us a free gift of righteousness not our own, the legalist will automatically object, ‘If there is nothing we add to our salvation then what will guarantee that we will be holy?’ The legalist always feel that they have to follow up this salvation which sounds too good to be true with some qualification that makes it all finally depend upon us. They will want to insert baptism, or redefine faith as works, or joining a particular church, or some other act. Paul anticipates this and answers it by getting the Romans to remember their baptism.

We have two points to lead us through these verses. By our baptisms we want to remember that we have died to sin; and that we were all baptized.

Remember you died to sin

V1-2, ‘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?’ Here we see Paul expecting the legalist to react with his predictable remonstrance that a gospel of free grace will result in people abusing that grace. Paul does not resort to scare tactics and warning people of hell for disobedience as the legalist often does; nor does he reinvent the gospel adding works making it conditional on something we add, another legalist tactic. He begins by emphatically denying that those who are saved necessarily abuse this grace, and rather points the Romans to what happened when they got saved, something demonstrated in the symbolism of their baptism, they died with Christ to sin. As Paul deals with the problem of sin in the life of the believer he does not resort to the typical tactics, but instead doubles down on the gospel, he points us to what God has done, what God has caused to be true of us. It is interesting to note that in this great chapter that talks about sin in the believers life, the first command/imperative is found in v11, and it is not a command to do anything but to recognize what God has done in us, ‘So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.’

If you look at verse 6 you will see what Paul says we need to know about what God has done, ‘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.’ This chapter is one of the most difficult in Romans and it is these ideas of ‘old self’ and its being crucified; and the ‘body of sin’ and its being brought to nothing that creates this difficulty. The connection that we must see in v6 is that the crucifying of the old self, or as v2 puts it, having died to sin, is so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. The gospel does something inwardly which changes our relationship to sin so that we can now overcome it where it once used to overcome us. We died to sin. What does this mean?

This phrase has been misunderstood in several ways. Firstly, dying to sin is something that God does to us when we experience the new birth it is not something that we do to ourselves. You cannot choose to die to sin today, that is like deciding to live without blood. It is an act that is impossible for us to do for ourselves, God is the author of our deaths. He is the hitman who causes us to die to sin, this is a form of suicide that lies outside of any person's ability. In theological terms it is a monergistic act that God performs upon us, we are passive and receive it, we do not contribute to it. Secondly, we died to sin in the death of Christ, in other words it is something that happened to Him first that is then applied to us. In theological terms our federal head experience in His death and end to His relationship with sin as the sin bearer that has ramifications for us. Thirdly, we died to sin and experienced the application of His death when we were born again. This seems a simple thing to emphasize but there have been schools of thought that have tried to teach a second blessing version of holiness teaching where we reach a higher form of Christian living by consecrating ourselves to a new level of service, otherwise known as 'dying to self.' Paul is talking about what happened the moment we were converted not a second experience that is added to our lives that enables powerful service. Fourthly, Paul tells us we died to sin, not that we are presently dying to sin. In other words he is describing a once off act that brings about a new relationship to sin, not an ongoing process that we need to nurture by our own strength and vigilance. Putting sin to death; and having died to sin must be distinguished. Having died to sin is a once for all thing done to us by God; putting off the old man, or putting sin to death is an active effort on our part where in dependence upon God we mortify the deeds of the body. The one deals with the power of sin and its ability to rule us as it once did when we were dead in Adam; the other deals with the ongoing process of growth in holiness. In theological terms the one is describing positional sanctification; the other progressive sanctification.

When we are born again the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, the sin we loved, we hate, we often feel more guilty for sin after conversion. No person who is truly born again who understand the seriousness of sin, who has learnt that Christ had to die to pay for it, they cannot justify it in their lives and gladly abuse grace. You will notice in v2 Paul says, 'How can we who died to sin still live in it?' As believers we still have a sinful nature, that is not removed, and we do still sin, but we cannot 'live in it.' Something has been done to us that includes a change inwardly. God guarantees that we will walk in holiness not by scaring us with hell all the time and denying that our salvation is secure; nor by adding works to the gospel denying that we are saved by faith alone. He ensures our holiness by what He does in uniting us with the powerful work of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead; by taking out the heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh; by putting His holy Spirit to be within us.

Remember you were baptized

V3, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?' Here we can see that Paul clearly references the time of their baptism. Now we must not get the wrong idea from this verse, there are many who believe that baptism saves, or who believe that Paul is ascribing some sort of sin killing power to the event of baptism. Sacerdotalists believe that baptism saves; and there are brands of perfectionists that believe that baptism removes the sinful nature enabling perfect obedience, both of these are false. Some have tried to relieve the tension of Paul's wording by saying that Paul is talking about the baptism in the Spirit when we are invisibly joined with

Christ. I agree with Sinclair Ferguson that unless specified when we see the use of the word baptism it is usually talking about water baptism. So if Paul is talking about water baptism, why does he make it sound as if baptism is the means by which we died with Christ, making it sound a lot like baptismal regeneration?

One word, synecdoche! This word is used to indicate when a part is used to refer to a whole. For example, when a person has purchased a new car they may say, 'Have you seen my new wheels?' 'Wheels' here is a part which refers to the whole. In the first century church, when you thought about conversion, this was a multi-layered moment which involved several parts. You will often find only one or two parts being mentioned and other parts you might expect to find being left out. Conversion to Christ involves, faith, repentance, receiving the Spirit, being washed/receiving forgiveness, baptism, and being added to the church. As you read through the NT you will see that when salvation is spoken of all of these elements are seen as part of the moment, though they do not all have the same function. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are justified, repentance is the necessary accessory to faith, but not a co-instrument for justification; receiving the Spirit, or as Paul puts it here being baptised in the Spirit, is the invisible benefit, or not so invisible in the first occurrences of it; baptism being the formal moment of confession, and incorporation into the church and which brought all the ingredients together in a single historical moment.

So to speak about the day you were baptised is to speak about the day you had faith, repented, received the Spirit, were forgiven and was added to the Church. To speak about the day you were baptised in the Spirit, which is what Paul does here is to speak of the day you were baptised. So returning to our question, why are we speaking about water baptism when the text is speaking about Spirit baptism? One word, synecdoche!

This understanding will help you avoid some very important errors. For example, some have minimised faith because Acts 2:38, does not mention faith but only repentance, 'And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Some have stumbled into the error of baptismal regeneration because baptism has been so closely linked with washing and salvation such as Acts 22:16, 'And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'" And 1 Peter 3:21, 'Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

The early church did not look back to an altar call, or a confirmation, or a sinner's prayer, but their baptism as the moment of their confession, faith, repentance, receiving of the Spirit, washing and the moment they were added to the church. Water baptism is the symbol and the ceremony where these realities are pinned in the minds of the authors of Scripture. Salvation, baptism and church membership were not all split apart as they are today but all bundled together.

Baptism is a visible sign that speaks about all of these realities, it is the outward sign of these wonderful inward truths. Baptism is a concrete, tangible, historical reality that we can hang our minds on. Calvin taught that God deliberately gave us these external training wheels because of the natural weakness of our faith, 'But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last gives way.

Here our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings." (Institutes, Book IV, Chapter 14, 3). They say that pictures paint in a thousand words, this is true for baptism, it is a word-picture, a visible sermon.

You will notice that Paul assumes that every Christian was baptized. There is no Christian who has not been united to Christ in His death, therefore there should be no Christian who is not outwardly marked by baptism as being one with Him. What Paul says here cannot be true for an infant who has not exercised saving faith in Christ either. Children born to Christian parents are not united with Christ in His death and are no longer enslaved to sin. They are still in Adam until they are born again and not in Christ. Paul sees baptism as applied to believers only when he says, 'all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?' Paul is appealing to a fact that is true for every Christian, a spiritual reality that is represented by our baptism.

Let me make some applications as we draw this to a close. Ulla, Marcel, remember your baptism today and what it says about what God has done for you in the gospel. Christian if you are here today and have been baptized then you too can remember your baptism and what it says to you.

When you are thinking to yourself, I cannot stop sinning, I am doomed to be an addict and destroy myself with sin, I may as well give in now, remember your baptism. Remember that you died with Christ to the power of sin. Your old self, the person you were apart from Christ, that person that was enslaved is no longer you. You are united with Christ, His Spirit is within you, you can now present your members as instruments of righteousness in dependence upon Him.

When you sin and think that you are not saved, when the devil or your conscience accuses you, say to yourself, I am baptized. This will remind you that though your sins deserve death, His death has paid for them in full. That He has resurrected and because He lives you will live also.

Or when you face your own death or the death of a Christian loved one, and you are gripped with fear of the unknown, remember your baptism, remember that God raised Jesus from the dead, because no one dressed in a righteousness like Christ's can stay dead, it would be unjust and God is perfectly just. Remember your baptism which reminds you that you are one with Christ and see how it promises you that you too will rise one day just like Him.

When things go badly in your life and you fear that God is pouring out His condemnation upon you, remember your baptism, Christ has taken your condemnation, He was God forsaken that you never need to be. All of God's wrath towards you was satisfied in the death of Christ, whatever difficulty you are feeling is not God's wrath but His wise and Fatherly ways that will work together for good.