

November 9, 2003

Pastor Russell Lackey  
Reformation L.C.  
Romans 6:1-5

## **Baptism is God's Gift of Grace**

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4We 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. 5For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

### **Swimming Upstream**

Today I am preaching about baptism. In many ways I feel like a salmon that must swim against two very strong currents — American Evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism. American Evangelical Christianity does not baptize a person until he or she is able to repent and believe. Roman Catholicism baptized babies while focusing entirely on the act of baptism instead of the Lord's promise in baptism. It is my aim to swim against both in order to spawn a deeper truth, namely; baptism is a work of God and a gift of grace!

To do this we need to look back to last week's sermon. We learned that a person united to Christ is united to Jesus' death and resurrection. This is God's doing. "But by His doing you are united Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30). It is by God's doing that we are "in Christ." This should not surprise us that God would do this because we have learned many wonderful things about God. God is our Shepherd (who prepares a table for us); our Father (who is gentle with us); and our King (who gladly gives us the kingdom). He does not rent, lease, or sell the kingdom. He gives it!

Why God must give it is because there is no way we can earn it. Even worse we do not even want it. "For the mind set on the flesh is death... because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Romans 8:6-7). What Paul is telling us is that man is not able to tear himself loose from his former sin. Neither is he able to love God. Humanity is bound by the chains of sin. Humanity opposes God. If a change is going to occur, it must be from God. That is why he must give the kingdom.

### **Baptism Unites Us to Jesus**

So now we can finally move to the question that all of us want answered, how does one become united with Christ? Paul tells us in Romans 6:3-4:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death (Romans 6:3-4a).

Paul is speaking clear right here. A person is united to Christ through baptism. The gift of baptism puts us in fellowship with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul is able to say this because Jesus himself said this. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20). In other words, one becomes a disciple by baptism and learning Jesus' teaching.

The New Testament is chocked references that support our position on baptism. "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13). "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). "You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12). Baptism unites us to Jesus!

### **Possible Objections**

Now I told you that we would be swimming upstream. And right now you might be feeling the labor of this journey. But we have not yet reached our destination. We have to deal with three very important objections that must be answered!

**1. What about those believers who have not been baptized?** The classic example is the thief on the cross was not baptized and Jesus promised him paradise. We must admit that there are special circumstances when it comes to being united to Christ. We must also admit that there are Christians who for some reason or another never were baptized. However, these are the exception to the rule and we never define the rule by the exception. For instance, God spoke to Balaam through a donkey. We do not bring in a donkey to speak to the congregation (though there might be days when you think I am a jackass). God led Israel through the Red Sea. We do not go to the Red Sea and wait for it to be opened. Just because the thief on the cross was not baptized, this does not give us any real reason to not be baptized.

Instead, my question is why would you allow the thief on the cross to stop you from being baptized? Especially since Christ commanded it. There is not a single case in the New Testament where a person was cut to the heart by the gospel and did not want to be baptized. Instead, they ran to it. The Ethiopian Eunuch did not say, let me wait until I feel more compelled, or until it has sunk in. The Ethiopian ran to the water. The jailer, on the very night of his conversion, ran toward baptism. Why would they run to something that was just a symbol? No, it is so much more powerful than just a symbol! **Baptism unites us to Christ!**

**2. What about infant baptism?** *The Pseudo-issue against infant baptism:* Scripture never says children should be baptized. The problem is that Scripture also never says that parents should wait until their children are grown up before they are baptized. *The Real issue:* Are children really capable of faith and

repentance? The answer is no! But neither are adults capable of repentance. Remember the lesson from Romans. Man is lost because of sin. He possesses no power to tear himself loose from his sin. How can one repent if one is not able to tear himself loose from sin? How can a person have faith when there is nothing a soul can do to trust the grace of God? Children are not capable of faith and repentance, but neither are we.

This is why we call it grace. It is as free as the air which envelops us on every hand and forces itself upon us as soon as it secures the least access. Such is the grace of God in Christ. Grace searches for the individual sinner. It is not the sinner, who first seeks grace. Because grace searches for the sinner long before the sinner thinks of grace, baptism becomes "Infant Baptism." Grace searches for man as soon as he is born.

A child of course has no idea of what is taking place in the moment of Baptism. He or she cannot think, consequently neither repent nor believe. All an infant can do is remain passive. Jesus gains unimpeded access to this little human life with all his grace and gifts. That is why Jesus tells us adults that if we do not receive the kingdom of God "as a little child," we shall never enter therein (Matt 18:3).

James Nestingen likes to say, "Baptism demonstrates the mercy of God because when you were but a child you were carried on your back to the baptismal font. And there God said, "You are a keeper!" **Baptism unites infants to Christ!**

**3. What about those who were baptized as babies and then walk away from it?** All we need to say is that they walked away from God. They have become prodigals. They are dead. When they are dead then they need to be brought back to life. And that is where the Word of God is so important because only the Word of God can bring a person back to life.

The analogy is that of an electric wire attached to a house. To every house there is a main electric wire attached to it from the electric company. Now, there can be a time when the breaker box is damaged and there ceases to be electricity in the house. When the box is fixed, does the main electric wire have to be reinstalled? Absolutely not! Why because the main wire was always there.

And that is how it is with baptism? When we are baptized into Christ, we have the main wire of God's grace run to us. Now, there can be situations that damage the breaker box. Parents can stop taking their children to church. Children can have bad pastors who do not proclaim the gospel. They can become so indoctrinated by this world that their faith is chocked out of them. It is at this time when they become. But, when the Word of God is once again proclaimed, they are called back to God. And the Word fixes their unbelieving hearts and soon they are once again alive.

You see, God's grace has always been there. And yes even though the child walked away from this grace, God does not walk away from him. Instead, God sends his workman out with the Word in order to fix the dead house. And when the person comes back to faith, they are not born again (that happened in baptism) they are instead brought back from the dead! **Baptism unites us to Christ!**

**Conclusion**

Friends, God is always searching for us. This is the point of the sermon and of Christianity. It is the gospel. We have a God who freely bestows grace upon us. It is God's work, not our own. And so yes, we baptize babies. And yes we keep them in our sanctuaries during services. And yes when they are older and run away from God we go after them! Why? Because God goes after us! He goes after you. This is his love. May we be a church that swims against all current to proclaim this love!

**In Jesus Name,  
Amen!**