

**Text: Rm 6.3-5**

We are here this afternoon for a baptismal service. Almost every Christian church performs some form of the baptismal rite.

I say “almost” because there are some groups often thought of as Christian churches that don’t baptize.

Some of these groups don’t even define themselves as churches, though they hold regular services and (for all outward appearances) function like a church.

Nevertheless, the point is that *baptism* is a universal Christian rite. Every Christian church believes in or practices *some form* of a rite called baptism.

Well, here we are in a *Baptist* church. Baptism is one of our distinctives. It is a part of who we are. A Big Part!

What I want to do this afternoon is explain what we think the Bible means by baptism (not just what Baptists mean). This will explain why we limit baptism to believers only.

Perhaps you grew up in a tradition that baptized infants as a ritual of birth. Some churches believe that the children of church members are part of a covenant with God. They unite their children with the church immediately, trusting that over time their children will come to faith in Christ.

Others who baptize infants assume that the act of baptism guarantees God’s acceptance of that person into heaven. Baptism makes you a Christian, in that view of baptism.

We don’t see that in the Bible. We insist on believer’s baptism only. Today I want to explain why.

Read Rom 6.1-5

**Proposition: Baptism teaches by symbolism what it means to become a Christian by faith in Christ alone.**

**I. Baptism symbolizes death and resurrection**

As I looked through my old notes on this passage, I found that I had three messages on verses 3 and 4 alone when we preached through Romans. I can’t go into all that detail today!

## A. The links with death and resurrection are clear in our text

1. "All of us who have been baptized..." the subjects of baptism
2. "Baptized into Christ..." the spiritual reality before baptism (more on this later)
3. "Have been baptized into his death..." First link
4. And again, v. 4: "buried with him through baptism into death"
5. Then the second link, "as Christ was raised from the dead" (resurrection)

I think the symbolism is clear: baptism symbolizes death and resurrection

## B. These links instruct us concerning the *mode* of baptism

1. The debate over mode: sprinkle (or pour) vs. immerse
2. Does it make a difference?
  - a. Only if the meaning of words makes a difference
    - 1) Baptism is a transliteration of the Gk, *baptisma*, connected with the verbs, *baptizo* and *bapto*
    - 2) These verbs mean "to dip, to immerse" (from the time of Hippocrates on)
      - a) "to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge (of vessels sunk, Polybius 1, 51, 6; 8, 8, 4; of animals, Diodorus 1, 36) ...
      - b) "to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water..."
      - c) "metaphorically, to overwhelm..."
      - d) "In the N. T. it is used particularly of the rite of sacred ablution, first instituted by John the Baptist, afterward by Christ's command received by Christians and adjusted to the contents and nature of their religion (see βάπτισμα, 3), viz., an immersion in water..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> βαπτίζω in Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889), BibleWorks, v.8.

b. Only if the symbolic link makes a difference

- 1) Sprinkling may sufficiently symbolize cleansing (surely a part of what happens at conversion)
- 2) But sprinkling cannot symbolize death and resurrection as immersion does

## II. Baptism symbolizes union with Christ in death and resurrection

A. The language of union

1. "baptized into Christ Jesus" (3)
2. "baptized into His death" (3)
3. "buried with him" (4)
4. "we have become united with him in the likeness of his death" (5)
5. "we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (5)

"We could paraphrase 'united' as 'fused together.' The Greek word (*sumphytoi*) means 'grown together.'"<sup>2</sup>

"Paul uses an expression here, translated 'united with,' that strictly means 'grown together,' virtually with the force of 'fused into one.'"<sup>3</sup>

"The word exactly expresses the process by which a graft becomes united with the life of a tree."<sup>4</sup>

B. The union is expressly with Christ's death and Christ's resurrection

1. The Lord Jesus died the death of sin though he was not a sinner
2. His death pays the penalty of sin (infinitely, because his life is infinite)
3. Our faith in him unites the believer with his death (which becomes our death)

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rm 6.5.

<sup>3</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 70.

<sup>4</sup> William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 157.

4. Which also unites the believer with his resurrection (which by faith will be our resurrection in the life to come)
- C. Water baptism provides a visible symbol of the invisible spiritual union that happens through faith in Christ
1. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again
  2. Nicodemus didn't understand, how can a man be born when he is old?
  3. Jesus said, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn 3.6)
  4. Jesus gave the illustration of the wind: you can't see the wind, but it is real — so too, you can't see the spiritual union (invisible) but it is real
  5. Baptism pictures that real, inner, spiritual change

### III. Baptism symbolizes a renunciation of the old life for the new life in Christ

- A. The context of our passage is dealing with the question of sin
1. The Law (OT Law) came in to increase (make more plain) human sin (Rm 5.20)
  2. Yet God's grace to forgive sin "abounded all the more" — God has enough grace to forgive all sin (Rm 5.20)
  3. Sin reigned in death (all men die) but grace reigns through Jesus Christ (Rm 5.21)
  4. A foolish suggestion: if God's grace abounds, shall we sin all the more so that grace may increase? (Rm 6.1)
  5. May it never be! We died to sin (Rm 6.2)

The symbolism of baptism is a dying to the old ways — that lifestyle is the lifestyle of the past for a Christian.

Note: that doesn't mean a Christian never sins, but that he has turned away from that path.

- B. Baptism functions also as a symbol of resurrection so that “we too might walk in the newness of life” (6.4)
1. The rest of the chapter will explain how we grow in grace and in victory over old habits and old ways
  2. But the picture of baptism is a picture of victory
    - a. In heaven, in the real resurrection, there will be no sin
    - b. Every sin you ever struggled with in this life will no longer plague you
    - c. Your baptism symbolizes your faith in that future

### Conclusion:

We’ve talked much about symbolism, death, dying, resurrection, heaven, and faith.

Faith is essential to salvation. That’s why we don’t baptize infants. They can’t begin to exercise faith.

To really get this, write down this text: Romans 3.21-31. Notice how many times Paul refers to faith.

Over and over again: we are saved by faith alone.

And our baptism is a physical representation of that faith, a faith in Jesus Christ that anyone can share.

Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ as your only Saviour from sin?