

## **Romans (25): Believer's baptism signifies new life in Christ**

### **Introduction:**

Today we arrive at the first verses of Romans 6. We will give our attention to the first paragraph, which is found in verses 1 through 4.

<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We 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.

We read that our Christian baptism signified a transformation in life for the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism shows forth the believer's union with the Savior, so that the believer's life and experience is tied up in Christ, what Jesus experienced in His death, burial, and resurrection. The reason that God caused this union to take place between the believer and his Savior was so that the believer would be freed from a life dominated by sin to a life characterized by newness of life through Christ.

### **I. The meaning of the passage**

In **verse 1** the apostle asked the rhetorical question, "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*" Here we see another instance in which the apostle employed this rhetorical device of asking a question in order to stimulate a conclusion on the part of his readers.<sup>1</sup> Paul was probably answering the charge, or perhaps anticipating the charge, of some that had regularly opposed his teaching. One might assume that he was countering those who were antinomian; in other words, they believed that they could be Christians while they continued to live in sin. These opposers affirmed Paul's teaching of the sinner's justification by God's grace through faith alone apart from works, but they wrongly thought that this allowed them to live sinfully with impunity. One might assume at first glance that Paul was correcting this error. But this would not be correct. Paul was probably correcting those challengers who came against his

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<sup>1</sup> Other occurrences rhetorical questions that we have already seen in this epistle include the following:

-- **Romans 2:3.** Paul challenged the false notion that God will give some people (namely Jews) leniency or exoneration for the sins they commit. "**Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?**"

-- **Romans 2:21f.** Paul implies in his rhetorical question that it is folly to think that one can practice sin in the same manner as those who will be damned by God and yet escape their fate. This would have been an assumption on the part of a Jew. Paul asked *four rhetorical questions* that depict the Jews' transgression of God's law:

- (1) "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?"
- (2) "While you preach against stealing, do you steal?"
- (3) "You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"
- (4) "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

-- **Romans 2:26.** Paul asked, "*So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?*" The rhetorical question implies the answer, "Yes, he will."

-- **Romans 3:8.** Some of Paul's detractors were claiming that to follow Paul's argument, and that the Jews' unfaithfulness will show forth greater glory to God, then why not intentionally sin so that we might greatly glorify God? He wrote, "*And why not do evil that good may come?--as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*" Paul would not dignify that claim with an effort to provide an answer.

teaching from the opposite extreme. They were legalists, either Jewish non-Christian, but more likely ones who claimed to be Christians but who also taught that faith must be coupled with good works in order for the sinner to become justified before God. They believed wrongly that Paul's gospel of free grace allowed for salvation for ones who believe in Jesus but who continue in their sin. Here Paul is saying that way of thinking is not right and that it is incompatible with his teaching regarding God's grace in salvation.

Paul answered his own question in **verse 2**: ***"By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"*** Paul answers in saying that living in sin is wholly incompatible with the great change that took place in the state of the believer in his relationship to sin through the believer's union with Jesus Christ. New life in Christ makes living in sin not possible for the (true) believer. The believer died with respect to sin so that he can no longer live in it or be controlled by it.

The apostle then calls upon their baptism as a basis for teaching them how it was they died to sin. **Verses 3 and 4** read,

***<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?  
<sup>4</sup>We 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.***

Now when the Scriptures say that this union with Christ occurred when we were "baptized into His death", we should not view baptism in a sacerdotal manner. In other words, there is nothing magical or powerful in baptism as a rite. Baptism is a sign, a symbol of salvation that takes place by grace through faith, not through the rite of baptism.

Paul is not arguing that baptism magically destroys the power of sin. Baptism is an outward, physical symbol of the inward, spiritual conversion of Christians.<sup>2</sup>

When Paul asked the question, "Do you not know that...?", we may assume several facts.

**1. First, Paul assumed that all Christians, whom he included with himself in the words, "all of us", were baptized when they became Christians.**

There is no account in the New Testament of a person being converted to faith in Jesus Christ who did not become baptized, if he had the opportunity to do so. Baptism was viewed as part of the conversion event.

For Paul baptism, faith, reception of the Spirit, repentance, and confession of Christ are one complex of events that occur at conversion. Paul refers to believers as baptized because unbaptized Christians would be an anomaly.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, in the first century there was no one who claimed to be a Christian but who had not undergone baptism. People repented of their sin, turned in faith to the Lord Jesus, and then submitted to baptism as believers. This is why sometimes baptism is closely associated with initial salvation and is sometimes expressed in a manner that causes confusion for evangelicals who believe in salvation by grace through faith alone.

For example, consider some biblical references in which baptism is closely linked with salvation. We read of this in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.

<sup>36</sup>"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

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<sup>2</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway Bibles, 2008) p. 2167.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998)p. 310.

<sup>38</sup>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.”*** <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

<sup>40</sup>And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup>So ***those who received his word were baptized***, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup>And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:36-42)

When the Samaritans believed the gospel that was proclaimed by Philip, they were all baptized.

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

It would seem that they were baptized immediately upon faith.

Later when the apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel to the people of Corinth, we read of those who believed were baptized.

<sup>5</sup>When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” <sup>7</sup>And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup>Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. ***And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.*** (Acts 18:5-8)

And so, baptism is so closely associated with conversion to Jesus Christ that it was viewed as synonymous with the conversion event.

<sup>14</sup>Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup>***Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved***, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:14f)

Now, of course baptism is not the means of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith apart from works. But faith is demonstrated in the desire and willingness of the believer to own and be identified with His Savior and His people.

**2. Baptism illustrated a real change in one’s relationship with sin when the believer was converted to Jesus Christ.** Paul wrote, ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”*** Here Paul stated the fact, one that he had assumed they would have already understood. Apparently this teaching regarding the meaning of baptism was often given to the new convert at the time of his baptism. He will later explain more fully the implications of this truth.

**3. Baptism illustrated the believer’s union with Jesus Christ not only with view to His death, but with view to His resurrection, resulting in his calling and ability to live new life in Jesus Christ.** Verse 4 states this truth: ***“We 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.”*** Our union with Jesus Christ was not only with respect to His death, but with respect to Christ’s resurrection unto life also. In fact, it speaks to the spiritual reality that true believers are in union with their Savior in all aspects of their existence.

Baptism “into Jesus Christ” means baptism into union with Christ. To be baptized “into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2) is to be baptized into the discipleship of Moses or into participation of the privileges which the Mosaic economy entailed. To be baptized “into the name of Paul” (1 Cor. 1:13) is to be baptized into the discipleship of Paul, a suggestion that Paul violently rejects. To be baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19) is to be baptized into the fellowship of the three persons of the Godhead. Hence baptism into Christ signifies simply union with him and participation of all the privileges which He as Jesus Christ embodies.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Several implications of our passage

### A. Baptism by immersion is strongly suggested by our passage.

Baptism is practiced in three different ways by those who profess to be Christian. We believe the Bible teaches and illustrates baptism by immersion. But there are many who practice baptism by the mode of sprinkling water on the head of the one baptized or pouring water on the head of the one baptized. Usually those who do not practice immersion argue that the mode of baptism is unimportant; it does not matter whether one is immersed, poured upon, or sprinkled with water. We believe that the Bible clearly teaches immersion.

One of the reasons we give is because only the mode of baptism by immersion, not by sprinkling or pouring, is suggested by this passage in Romans 6:1-4. Sprinkling or pouring may illustrate the biblical idea of cleansing, but not death, burial, and resurrection, which is suggested here.

And yet some deny that even Romans 6:1-4 suggests immersion. One well-respected reformed commentator of Romans, **John Murray**, wrote these words:

The assumption of so many commentators, non-baptist as well as baptist, to the effect that the apostle has in view the mode of immersion as vividly portraying our burial with Christ and emergence with him in his resurrection is without warrant.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that he was wrong in this assertion.

But many times reformed paedobaptists, that is, those who are reformed but practice sprinkling and the baptism of infants, acknowledge the practice of the early church. **John Calvin**, himself a paedobaptist, who wrote some very hard things against those who practiced baptism by immersion, wrote these words:

Whether the person baptized is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence: churches should be at liberty to adopt either according to the diversity of climates, although it is evident that the term baptize means to immerse, *and that this was the form used by the primitive Church*. (Calvin’s Institutes, Book III, Chapter 15, Part 2, Section 19.)

This is a common acknowledgement among numbers of paedobaptists.

It would seem only one biased against immersion would not be able or willing to see the clear parallel and the vivid illustration of baptism by immersion to the idea of death, burial, and resurrection. The editors of the ESV Study Bible, who are not all Baptist, acknowledge the clear implication:

In the early church, baptism was probably by immersion, at least as a general rule, though Christians dispute whether such a practice must always be followed literally today. Therefore, baptism pictures a person being buried with Christ (submersion under water) and being raised to new life with

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<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle of the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 214

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

Christ (emergence from water). This symbolizes the person's union with, and incorporation into, Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. Hence they now have the power to live in newness of life.<sup>6</sup>

The record of history testifies to the mode of immersion only in the early church. One of the earliest extra-biblical writings available is called the *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Its writing is thought to be around AD 125. This is what it records about the practice of baptism:

Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and, if thou canst not in cold, in warm. If you have neither, then pour water thrice on the head in the name, etc...<sup>7</sup>

Here we see that baptism by immersion is suggested. They baptized in "living water" that is, running water, again, suggesting immersion was the mode. Only when water was insufficient to immerse was baptism to be performed by pouring water on the head of the one being baptized. This provision for baptism other than immersion is not found in the New Testament. In fact, although it would have been possible for Philip to baptize the Ethiopian in his chariot by way of pouring or sprinkling, Philip did not baptize the new convert until they had first come to a body of water (cf. Acts 8:36ff).

#### **B. Believer's baptism is strongly suggested in this passage.**

Paul in writing to Christians, is appealing to their experience of baptism as believers, who had undergone conversion through repentance and faith upon hearing the gospel. These were responsible knowing people, not infants or unbelievers that had been baptized. He did not suggest that a baptism prior to conversion, such as infant baptism (or household baptism as some prefer), would convey this truth upon their conversion. He assumed these people who had been baptized had been converted. Only believer's baptism fits this context.

Those who are reformed who practice infant baptism, I would think, would have a problem with this passage. Again, Paul was appealing to everyone one who received this epistle as having been baptized and that at their baptism (i.e. conversion) they had experienced new life in Christ. He regarded everyone of them baptized as being in union with Jesus Christ, in other words, having received salvation. Believer's baptism is strongly suggested by Paul's description and appeal to baptism as signaling the one baptized as one who was in union with his Savior in his death and resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

**C. Although we have given emphasis to baptism, it is not baptism that is Paul's main emphasis here. Paul uses baptism to teach his principle lesson here, the believer's union with Jesus Christ in His life, death, burial, and resurrection, and the implications that has for the believer's life.** He is addressing the basis for on which the believer is to view himself and Paul is also establishing the principle of union with Christ as the means by which Christians may live holy lives before our God. In the next few chapters Paul addresses the believer's sanctification, in other words, the manner in which believers can live as holy Christians in this fallen world. It is all tied up in their spiritual union with their Savior.

**D. Justification is the ground upon which the life of sanctification is built. The two are inseparable, but at the same time they must be distinguished from one another.** What we mean by this is that one

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<sup>6</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 2167.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 64.V

<sup>8</sup> Although many reformed paedobaptists (those who baptize infants) presume their children are in the "covenant" due to their parents being Christians, I do not believe that they could assume that all of these people who have been baptized as infants are in union with Christ. But Paul was writing with this assumption. Now obviously Paul was aware of baptized people who professed to be Christian but who were not truly converted and he addresses people like them in this epistle. But the point is this, for Paul baptized people are converted people who are in saving union with Jesus Christ. I do not see how any reformed person could have this assumption regarding those who were baptized as infants.

cannot be justified without also becoming sanctified. But at the same time, one must understand clearly the distinction between these two aspects of our salvation. Justification has to do with the believer's forgiveness from sin, his deliverance from the *penalty* of sin. But sanctification has to do with the believer's deliverance from the *power* of sin.

In these first four verses Paul has made the transition from addressing the first and most foundational aspect of our salvation, which is the believer's *justification*, to another vital and important aspect of our salvation, which is the believer's *sanctification*. We saw how Paul had intimated the change in subject toward the end of Romans 5. Paul concludes his discussion of his major theme that has occupied him since the early portion of his epistle, from Romans 1:16 through 5:21. With the conclusion of Romans 5, He comes to an end of his discussion on the justification of the ungodly before God. He now turns his attention to the sanctification of the believer through the reign of grace. The transition of Paul's theme from the believer's forgiveness of sins in justification and the believer's victory over sin through sanctification was suggested at the end of Romans 5.

<sup>19</sup>For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the *many will be made righteous*. <sup>20</sup>Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, *grace also might reign through righteousness* leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:19-21)

It is extremely important for us to know how justification and sanctification relate to one another. Much significant error in professing Christendom, even serious heresy, is due to the failure to understand the distinctions as well as the common traits that justification and sanctification have with one another. And so, it is very important to understand how these two aspects of our salvation, our justification before God and our sanctification by God, are similar but also quite different from one another. Let us take a few minutes to describe these similarities and their differences.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. In what ways are our justification and sanctification alike?

(1) They are like one another in that they are both the result of the working of God. They have the same author. It is God who justifies, and it is God who sanctifies. With regard to the first, we read in **Romans 8:33** that God is its author: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? *It is God that justifies*" (Rom. 8:33). We read in several places that God is also the author of the work of sanctification that He carries on within the soul. God said to Moses, "*I am the Lord that does sanctify you*" (Exo. 31:13; Lev. 20:8).

(2) They are like one another in that they originate of the free and sovereign work of God's grace. Justification is an act of free grace, and so is sanctification. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5). They are both of grace--freely and sovereignly bestowed by God.

(3) They are alike in that they always are seen together in every person who is the object of God's grace. There has never been a person who was justified, but that he was also sanctified. There never has been the case that a man experienced God's inward work of sanctification, but that he was also justified before God. Paul described the Christians at Corinth, "Such were some of you (i.e. flagrant sinners), but you are washed, but you are *sanctified*, but you are *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

(4) They are like one another in that both of them are the fruit of the Word of God. God justifies sinners through their belief in the truth. Jesus said to His own, "Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). God also sanctifies His people by the Word of Truth. He prayed to His

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<sup>9</sup> This section has been delivered in the past. It is contained in #FBC453, which was delivered on December 9, 2007.

Father, “Sanctify them by Your truth; Your Word is truth” (John 17: And also Ephesians 5:6 of Christ’s work in His church, “That He might sanctify and cleanse His Church, with the washing of water by the Word.”

(5) They are like one another in that both are necessary to eternal life. God has declared that no man will escape God’s condemnation on Judgment Day unless He is justified. He has also declared that no one will pass the scrutiny of God’s judgment unless he is sanctified. They are of equal necessity to the possession of eternal life.

## **2. In what ways are our justification and sanctification differ from one another?**

We have seen that in some ways they are much alike, but in other ways they are quite distinct from one another.

**(1) Justification is an act of God about the *standing* of a man before God; but sanctification is the work of God concerning the *nature* of a man.** It has been said in this way: Justification is an act of God as a Judge about a delinquent, absolving him from a sentence of death; but sanctification is an act of God about us, as a physician, in curing us of a mortal disease.

Imagine this scenario. You have a criminal that comes before a judge to be tried. He is charged with high treason. He is found to be guilty. He is worthy of death. But this same guilty man is also a diseased man. He has a disease of which he will not recover, but he will most certainly die. Not only does he need to escape from the condemnation of his guilt, but he needs healing of his deadly disease. Justification is God’s answer to his guilt; sanctification is God’s answer to his sinful condition from which he must be delivered. God acts toward the sinner in absolving him of his guilt; God works in that same man to cure him of his sinfulness. Both are necessary. Justification, therefore, is an act of God as a gracious Judge, but sanctification is a work of God as a merciful Physician. It has been pointed out that David joins them both together in Psalm 103:3, “(God) Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.”

(2) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that justification is an act of God’s grace *on account of the righteousness of another*, even Jesus, but sanctification is a work of God in which *he infuses righteousness into us*. The first, justification, speaks of imputation: God imputes or reckons the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be that of the believing sinner. This is God’s work *for* us. The second, sanctification, speaks of infusion, in which God works *in* us to make us holy.

(3) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that *our justification is complete, or perfect, but our sanctification is incomplete*. Justification occurred when the sinner first truly believed on Jesus Christ as his Savior. Justification is complete, knowing of no degrees. It is the same in every believer, new and old alike. The newest believer among us is as justified before God as the one among us who has believed longest. There is not degree of our justification. You are either justified or you are not. Our justification cannot be diminished or increased. It cannot be interrupted or it cannot cease to be. But sanctification is an imperfect, incomplete, changeable thing in every believer. One believer is more sanctified than another. It knows of many degrees between persons and even in the same person. A true believer may not become more justified than he is presently, but he can become much more sanctified than he is currently. A saint who has died and gone to be with the Lord is no more justified there than he was when he was a believer here on earth. But then he will be completely sanctified, far above the condition in which he now finds himself.

(4) Justification and sanctification differ from one another in that *our justification involves no work of our own*, but is based solely upon the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, *but our sanctification involves very much our work*. As God has commanded through Paul,

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, ***work out your own salvation*** with fear and trembling.

And yet, we know and confess that this work we do is in no way meritorious and in no way contributes to our justification. Justification involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ ***alone*** for our righteousness. Our sanctification also involves our believing, trusting, resting in Jesus Christ, but it is as we go forth with all of our effort. We rest in Jesus Christ for our justification, but we work with all our light toward our full sanctification. The Scriptures liken it to striving, fighting, running, sowing, seeking, journeying, enduring, overcoming, and even exerting violence in order to enter the kingdom of heaven . There is no salvation for the believer unless you trust Jesus Christ alone for your justification. But there is no salvation for you if you refuse or fail to “***work out your own salvation*** with fear and trembling.

Now, herein lays one of the great differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. This is one of the major errors of Roman Catholicism that renders the “gospel” they preach as “another gospel” (cf. Gal. 1). It teaches that a sinner becomes justified before God after and because God has ***infused*** righteousness in him/her. The Bible (and historic Protestantism) states that the sinner becomes justified before God through faith alone, apart from works, because God ***reckons*** Christ’s righteousness to the believer. According to Rome, the “Christian” is not justified until he himself is made righteous; the Bible teaches that the believing sinner is regarded as righteous because of Christ. Rome teaches that justification is the result of a long process which God works in a believer through this life, on thereafter through purgatory, until he is finally and fully holy, then he becomes justified in God’s sight. This is terrible error that renders that one who believes this to still be condemned in his sins. Paul wrote, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

But were Rome’s great error is to see sanctification as the basis of justification, ***the great error of evangelicalism is that as long as you have you justification*** (and that comes through a one-time decision), ***you can have salvation irrespective of sanctification***. Oh, yes, sanctification is taught as a good thing, a desirable thing, and there are many consequences for failing to live so as to be sanctified, but it is generally taught that it has nothing to do with salvation. As a result, few if any live the Christian life with view to this great end, even the salvation of our souls.