

WHY BAPTISM?

Romans 6:1-7

Critical Searching Inquiries Series
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It is important to remember that everything that Jesus did he did in a context—Jesus lived and ministered in a Roman world. And at that time, in the transition when a civilian became a soldier, he went through what was known in Latin as *Sacramentum*.

It was a sacred oath in which that soldier pledged total allegiance to the ruler Caesar. In other words, their life was no longer their own. All self-interest was to be completely subjugated to the ruler-ship and interest of the emperor, Caesar.

So the early Christians would draw a parallel with this military practice. In our baptism we take the solemn oath of *sacramentum* where our self-interests are subjugated to the interests of Jesus. The meaning is that in our baptism we become completely his.

What I want you to see is that baptism is not something that just happens one time. It is something we continually renew. The Catholic Church—how many of you came from a Roman Catholic background?—you do not enter a Catholic church without dipping your hand in the waters of baptism, making the sign of the cross, and reminding yourself of these dimensions.

The first dimension is that baptism means death. Before there is resurrection, before the power of God can work in us there needs to be death. The reality is that the biggest inhibitor to our relationship with God is this thing called self. And this self gets in the way everyday.

Romans 6 says that this self in us is ruled by sin. It's a power in our humanness that's much greater than our own will power. So before there is a resurrection there needs to be a death. There is a brokenness in us that we don't understand—where people will walk all over others or will spread lies to try and save oneself, etc.

Because of this brokenness we will do things that we don't even believe in. I have had pastor friends who have had to resign from their ministries because of inappropriate relationships. And yet am I, or are you, capable of the same thing? Yes, definitely. There is a brokenness in me that I do not understand.

Now, my friends, religion does not work. Religion does not work because religion believes in God and acknowledges God, but is resourced by self. It is trying to do the will of God and yet is trying to do it with my own strength.

Verse 6 reminds us that my own strength is not powerful enough to overcome this brokenness in us called sin. We do things we don't even believe in. Trying to do what is right is not enough—nor is trying to do the right ritual, or say the right prayer, or whatever.

So what prescription is needed in our lives? Verse 6 is a radical prescription. It says that the self must be crucified with Jesus. And yet here's the problem. I have a strong will inside of me and I want it two ways—I want it God's way and my way. And yet this does not work.

Why? Because my way is mostly centered in me wanting to always be happy. And yet people leave their spouse and children to feed this appetite of self. If you think about it, my friends, I'm not really a very nice person when I'm caught up in myself and neither are you.

The world, however, says that this is what life is meant to be and yet just look at all the pain in our world today. Is life going well today with people living for self, and self-gratification, and self-happiness, and self love? No. It is a chaotic world when people put themselves first. And yet this is the temptation we all face.

It is only when you crucify self. It is only when you come to that place where you realize that self is never going to work, that you then realize that you need to be renewed in your baptism everyday. You need to die everyday to the self in order to find true life.

Everyday I need to make the decision to deny myself, to say "no," to say "don't get me in trouble" self. It's not about my happiness, about my wants; it's not about my appetites. It is to turn away from myself and turn to God.

Everyday there needs to be a new heart conversion; to say "yes" to Christ's ownership and purpose. To brand his name on my heart so whenever temptation comes I am reminded that I belong to Jesus.

Do you remember a time when a new purpose came into your life? A time when your focus in life changed? A time when you concisely said "yes" you are going to follow Jesus each day and grow in his love?

One of the problems with many of us church people today is that we have thought that just going to church regularly, or a few times a year, is all that is needed. Or the idea that if I just do religious things, just go through a ritual like baptism and Holy Communion, just give some money and time, that then I'm a good Christian on my way to heaven.

And yet in this I still often want it both ways—my way and God's way. It is only as I say "yes" to Jesus, give him ownership, and renew this each day that I am living for Jesus. Death is needed before resurrection. I need to die to myself before I can be resurrected.

Look at verse 3: *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* This needs to be a present reality right now. It means it can't be my way but God's way. And verse 4 says: *"We were therefore buried with him."*

You know, my friends, once there has been a death you've got to do something with the body. If you want to keep the corpse around there's going to be a problem. There's going to be a stench. And when you die to your old self you also don't want the corpse around.

A person who is in Alcoholic's Anonymous—you need to stay away from bars and old life. Person with gambling problems—you need to stay away from casinos. Person with sexual struggles—you need to stay off of internet sites. Person in an inappropriate relationship—you need to stay away from that person and other places where there are easy temptations.

Baptism is making a public announcement, it is putting an obituary in the newspaper. It is saying that I am not that old Nathan Thompson. God is doing a new thing. To experience the power of God in our lives you can't simply put those old things in the attic. God is doing a completely new thing in you and me.

And the good news is that when you bury it, what is evil going to find when it comes knocking? It is going to find new life in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the meaning of baptism—it is more than just water. John said he baptized with water, but the one who comes after me, Jesus Christ, will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Spirit.

Now this is often what many people miss. The Holy Spirit, the Bible tells us, is the one who gives the gift of faith in our lives. Every person who receives this gift, who puts their faith in Jesus as the Christ is given the Holy Spirit, who is the very presence of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And this Holy Spirit is the same Spirit with which God resurrected the corpse of the man Jesus from the grave. Romans 8:11 says: *"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you...he will also give life to your mortal bodies."*

Any time I try to have power over this broken nature of mine, on my own strength I am going to completely lose. That is because sin is more powerful than self. But the Holy Spirit rules over sin. Sin is always stronger than self and self-will but Spirit is greater than sin.

The good news is that in the Spirit I am now free to not let sin rule in me. Romans 6:12 says, *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."* The good news is that I don't have to let sin reign in my mortal body because I have been set free from sin.

How do I have that power? It comes by immersing myself in the Holy Spirit. Have you ever noticed when people, especially my age, go swimming in a lake or pool how we often dip our toe in, then sprinkle some water on our arms and body. Then we may go in slowly, on tiptoes, agonizing as the water goes up our bodies. Half way in and out is an uncomfortable place.

To let go and jump in, of course, there is going to be an immediate shock to the system, but soon you adjust. And the same thing is true when you open your life up completely to God. To try to dip our toes or feet in a little bit, or to stay half way in and out, you can easily torture yourself. God calls you and me to open our lives completely to his Spirit—to jump in with both feet.

Perhaps some of you have gone scuba diving or snorkeling in coral waters. They tell me that it is only when one is willing to leave the surface and go deeper that you are set free to see the full beauty. And in the same way, it is only when we leave the surface and go deeper in our faith, and breathe in the new life of God's Spirit, that we will know the full power of God.

God calls you to immerse yourself in his Holy Spirit. He calls you to let go of those ways you may rebel from God or are trying to keep him away. He calls you to stop rationalizing and compromising why you don't want God to take over, or how you want to live your Christian life with yourself in control. God calls you to immerse yourself in him.

Please bow in prayer with me as we pray this morning to let go, and to let God...