

“Baptismal Life,” Romans 6:1-4  
Tom Johnson, January 10, 2010

Paul is in the middle of a conversation about the gospel. He’s talking about the radical grace of God—the free, underserved, unmerited, unearned grace of God. God sent his Son into a sinful, broken world. He sent his Son to live, die, and rise again—so that sinful people can have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This forgiveness and eternal life is freely given by faith—not by works. There is nothing we can do to purchase our salvation. It is a gift! What Jesus did for us covers all our sins—past, present and future.

This grace is radical. There is nothing we can do to lose our salvation. And God will continue to forgive our sins to the end of our days. We can walk away from this comfort—we can stop trusting in this loving God—but he will never walk away from us—he will never stop loving us.

And so Paul anticipates the question—the question any reasonable person would ask about such a radically free forgiveness and eternal life. “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”

Paul, are you nuts?! How can salvation be so radically free? Is God nuts? If I will be forgiven no matter what I do—why not do whatever I want? Isn’t this a get-out-of-jail free card? Isn’t this the best fire insurance one could have—even covering arson by my own hand—so we may as well play with fire?

Why not play in filth as much as we want since we know we’ll be cleansed? Why amend my life if God will accept me unchanged? Why should worry about striving for holy living if I will fail anyway? Why can’t I just live my life in spiritual recklessness if I know I will spiritually survive?

“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” Paul’s answer: “Are you nuts?” “Certainly not—by no means—are you kidding?” “How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Paul writes, “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” (Rom 6:3,4).

Paul does not simply remind us of what Jesus has done for us—that he died for our forgiveness and rose for our eternal salvation. He reminds us that we are baptized—that we are baptized into this death and resurrection. We have a spiritual tether that ties us to the cross and ties us to the empty tomb of Christ. Baptism is the superglue that binds us to the power of Jesus.

We don’t just believe in the gospel. We are bound to the gospel—by the water, Word, and Spirit of Holy Baptism. We have been adopted by the King of kings. We bear the name of the Triune God.

How can we continue to behave as if there is no connection between the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the conduct of our daily lives? You are the Baptized!

When the water splashed and ran down your forehead—it struck a death blow to sin and the devil. When you came to the baptismal font, God drowned the old Adam—the old self that recklessly and thoughtlessly sins.

Paul wants us to keep in mind that there are too errors that people commonly have when it comes to the Christian life.

One error is that we must minimize our sin—and maximize our good works in order to earn salvation—that we must purchase eternal life for ourselves. The truth is that Jesus has earned and purchased our salvation for us—it is free.

The other error is that since Jesus has done it all for us, we do not need to worry about how we live—that my faith in Jesus has no effect on my behavior—that my Baptism was nothing more than a ritualistic bath—I was once wet but now I have dried off. The truth is, we never dry off!

The early Church insisted that people be Baptized in “living water”—water that is moving, churning, pouring, and flowing. Early baptismal fonts were water fountains where water continually flowed, trickled, and splashed.

They didn’t want Christians to view their Baptism as coming to a pond—a little bowl of water—sprinkled or poured by water and then we walk away. Soon we are dry. And we may think that our Baptism has evaporated away just as quickly as water evaporates from a puddle.

But you’ll remember that Jesus did not come to a pond or a puddle—Jesus came to a river. John the Baptist baptized in the River Jordan. Baptism is a water flowing with the Word and Holy Spirit. It moves and follows the path of our daily lives.

You’ll remember that Jesus promised the woman at the well living water, not water laying stagnant at the bottom at the well, but water flowing from a spring—the Spirit gushing out of the life and death of Jesus into our lives.

You’ll remember that the pool Bethesda did not heal until it was stirred or troubled—it became a living water. And so it is with the water of Baptism. It is ordinary water until it is troubled and stirred by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. And once it flows over us in Baptism, it continues to flow over and along the banks of our lives forever.

We are knee deep in our Baptism—wading in the water of God’s grace for the rest of our lives—with the living water giving us our identity as daughters and sons of God—the flood of God’s grace giving us strength—its current pulling us and driving us to our heavenly home.

We wade in the water of Holy Baptism from the moment we left that baptismal font until we go home to glory. We wade in the water of Baptism continually drenched with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as we gather together as believers.

We wade in the water of our transformed lives, splashing a little water of grace here and there out of our lives—blessing those around us—giving evidence to the world around us that we are saturated with forgiveness and eternal life.

We wade in the water of Baptism now that will lead us to the River of Life—where Jesus is—the new paradise that John saw in his vision of heaven—“the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1).