

**BAPTISM: DEATH AND LIFE**  
**Sermon for the Baptism of Jesus 2026**  
**Romans 6:1-11**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, Romans 6:1-11: **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 baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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.**

**<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. <sup>10</sup> For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Apostle Paul once urged the congregation at Corinth to avoid divisions among them.<sup>1</sup>

Even though Paul was speaking to a congregation that shared a *common confession of faith*, it was necessary to warn them, because, as we know, the sad reality of sin means there will always be divisions in the Christian Church. We see the tragic result of this in the many different Christian denominations today.

Even though there are many denominations, *we still share many things in common* with them. For example, many denominations recognise the Trinity. Most believe the Bible is, at least in some sense, God's Word. Most still believe in heaven; some still believe in hell. And many would share our beliefs about creation, Jesus' virgin birth, and His resurrection. But one of the doctrines of Scripture that seems to be a real dividing line for many Christians, a real watershed, if you'll pardon the pun, is ***Holy Baptism***. Just what it is, what it accomplishes, and what it means differs between many denominations. So, who has it right? There must be the correct teaching, but which one? Let's use our text today from Romans to find out.

As we begin, we first note that some denominations, like Baptists and Charismatic churches, teach that baptism is nothing more than a symbolic, empty, outward act that recognises or signifies a *spiritual change* within us.

Scripture never speaks of baptism this way; rather, it always speaks of baptism as actually *doing something*. Moreover, close attention to the original language of Scripture shows that baptism is not something we do—a human act or work—but rather something we receive—a gift from God. Look at the passive language of the Scriptures about “being baptised,” not “baptising yourself.” And if baptism

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10

is a gift from God, and God's gifts are for all nations, that means that **babies, too, can receive it**. Today, we have one of the most important passages in St. Paul's Epistle on baptism in Romans 6.

Paul begins with, "**What shall we say then?**"

Anytime you have a statement like this, you should ask what the author has been talking about right *before* this passage—the near context. So it is that in the first five chapters of Romans, Paul has been discussing first our predicament of sin, and then the righteousness of God that comes through faith, apart from the Law. He shows how we are freed from the Law by the redemption of Christ Jesus, and how our salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, and not in any works of our own. This is the Gospel, the Good News.

But such a pure and free no-strings-attached Gospel has led many to the question, "Well, then, can I just go on sinning? If salvation is free, if I don't have to do anything to get to heaven or be in God's good graces, then I can do what I want. I can sin and not worry about it!" Some have even accused us Lutherans of teaching this. But Paul makes it clear that the Christian response to the Gospel is not to go on sinning so that grace may abound. He writes, "**Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means!**" And he proves his point with baptism: "**<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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.**" You have died to sin. You have been baptised into Christ Jesus, and that means that you are baptised into His death. You are not the same as you once were. Something is different about you, *something big*.

One of the most important details about someone is whether they are still alive or have died. Having just entered by God's grace into a New Year, lists are usually published remembering worthy news events of the past 12 months. Another list that comes out is all the famous people who have died in the last year. It's one thing with celebrities, but quite another with people in your life, your loved ones. *Their life and death matter much more to you*. Nothing changes your life quite as much as when a child is born into the family, or when a loved one dies and is no longer with you. Birth and death are firm markers, bright lines in the course of time, turning points beyond which nothing is quite the same.

So too, with baptism. It's a life-or-death matter. We are "**dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**." Of course, it is only seen spiritually, for now. You can't tell, outwardly, if a person has been baptised. You can't see it like a mark on their forehead or a tattoo on their arm, but for those who have been baptised, *the name of God has been placed upon them*.

In our baptism, the seal of God has been placed upon us, and we are marked and redeemed by Christ the crucified. You know it, and more importantly, *God knows it*. And so, according to the Spirit, we have already died and been made alive in Christ. We have already been drowned and resurrected, but since this is a spiritual reality, it didn't only happen then; it happens every day. Our catechism puts it this way: *What does such baptising with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Where is this written? Saint Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "**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.**"*

The other aspect of baptism that Paul highlights here is our being united with Christ.

In His baptism, Christ is united with us. We get what Christ gets. We get His death, but also His life. Our Old Adam is drowned, and our New Adam arises—and that New Adam is the one who is united with Christ, *the Second Adam*. Just as Jesus is without sin, we are cleansed of sin. Just as He is righteous, so we are made righteous. We heard in our Gospel Reading today that at the baptism of Jesus, God said,

“*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17). By submitting to His own baptism, Jesus united Himself with us sinners to save us. By His baptism, Jesus identified Himself with us. He was initiating the great exchange—giving us what He has—His righteousness—and taking what we had—our sin, our guilt, and eventually, our death. Paul writes, “*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Again, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he reminded them that when they were baptised, they had “*clothed themselves with Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). John, in his vision of heaven, saw a great multitude standing before the throne and in front of Jesus. An elder asks John, “*These in white robes; who are they, and where did they come from?*” John answers, “*Sir, you know.*” The elder replies, “*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* <sup>15</sup> *Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.* <sup>16</sup> *Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.* <sup>17</sup> *For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*” (Revelation 7:13-17). White is the colour of purity, and Christ’s people are purified by His blood shed for them. Forgiveness is a single loving action that the Bible describes in two ways. In the same instant that God cleanses our filthy rags, He credits Jesus’ perfection to us as a white robe of righteousness, given at our baptism.

Because we have been baptised into Jesus’ death and resurrection, and now wear the white robe of righteousness, where Jesus goes, we go, not just to death, but to life. Therefore, even when we die, the grave has no hold over us, for it didn’t hold over Jesus. As Jesus rose on the third day, so we shall rise, bodily, on the last day. In so many ways, baptism unites us with Christ, identifies us with Him, as one of His people, *even the very body of Christ, the Church.*

Of course, Jesus would complete this process at the cross. There He would, in His body, put to death all sin. There, He would, by His death, literally take our place, and then, by His resurrection, burst open the grave not just for Himself, but for all of us who have been united with Him, He, with us, in His baptism, we, with Him, in ours.

And so Paul winds up by exhorting us: “**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**” Just as we can’t see our baptism, but trust in its power and promise, so also, we must consider what we can’t see to be true: we are “**dead to sin.**” Sin has no power over us. We are slaves no more. We have, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the ability to fight temptation, to flee from wickedness, and begin to live a life worthy of our calling. The paradoxical mystery is that we shall fall and fail, but the comfort of the cross of Christ is always at hand to restore us. For even as we consider and regard ourselves as “**dead to sin,**” we must also trust that we are, even now, “**alive to God in Christ Jesus.**”

The Christian life is different. It is as different as life and death. It is a life lived in the daily flood of baptismal blessings that flow from Christ and His cross. It is for young and old, rich and poor, slave and free, and for sinners of all nations, all who are subject to death and the tyranny of the Old Adam. And when this body of sin is finally placed in the ground, when our flesh and breath give up the ghost, then we shall see the full measure of our baptism’s power, when Christ returns to raise the dead and bring His people to eternal glory. Then, and there, death will finally and fully be undone. There and then, we shall know only life, united with Christ forever. Baptism is death and life, and that is the proper Scriptural teaching of baptism. Thanks be to God! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.