



Baptism is like a Funeral

*"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?"*

(Romans 6:3)

Baptism is like a funeral. But it's one with a surprise ending: it ends with a resurrection. The word "baptism" finds its roots in a word that was used for describing the sinking of a ship. Over time, it took on the meaning of cleansing. Both these meanings are connected to Christian baptism.

Imagine Jesus' baptism by John in the streams of the Jordan. That plunge into the running waters was like death. The moment that they swept over him was like a burial. The rising back into air and sunlight was like a resurrection. Our baptism, too, is like a funeral. And it is also like a resurrection. For by faith inwardly, and by baptism outwardly, we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Paul has written that all people are condemnable. Those who sin must die. Sin's paycheck: death! But in Christ there is hope. Not only is there forgiveness of sins, there is hope for the future. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all. Christ bore sin's penalty. He met its claim, and received the just reward.

We need to go to the beginning. We know the story: Adam and Eve were created good and in God's image. They were created for a life of perfect communion with God. The test of that communion was a test of faithfulness, *"Don't eat of the tree, or you will die."* But they did eat. They wanted autonomy and independence. What they got was a life outside of communion with God. We call that the original sin. We have a personal communion with Adam in the guilt of our first parents. The Belgic Confession says original sin is so abominable and vile that it is enough to condemn the whole human race. We inherit a sinful condition that is sufficient to condemn all and God's justice demands that this sin be punished.

God in Christ has borne the burden of Adam's sin, and every sin that found its root there. For every sin finds its root there, and is from that woeful source. *"Jesus was made to be sin for us,"* Paul says elsewhere. There, and only there, was sin dealt with — at Golgotha — in the humiliation and crucifixion of the Messiah, the crucified God. There sin was discerned in all its horror. The iniquity of us all was on him. The punishment that we deserved was on him. By his stripes, we are healed.

Then he went into the grave. And we with him, united by baptism to him in his death. Baptism is like a funeral! For we were baptized into his death. He, the second Adam — he of no sin — took the punishment for sin. Now sin has no more claim on him, it can demand no more of him.

Christians are people who have died to sin, and their baptism emphasizes that death. Sin has no claim on us anymore. In Romans 6 Paul is saying that it is quite impossible for anyone who understands what baptism means to acquiesce cheerfully to a sinful life. The baptized have died to that.

Baptism is therefore a beautiful sign of the sure promise of God. Not just that sinners die with Christ, but that our baptism is like a funeral. And this funeral has a surprise ending, because it ends with a resurrection!

Paul says that we are joined to Christ. We are united with him in his death. More than that, we are raised up with him to a new life. We are crucified with him, we died with him and are buried with him. And wonder of wonders! We are made alive with him. His death and burial were followed by resurrection to a new life. So also our death in him is followed by our new life. The power of death and sin lies broken, so we too, may live a new life. Not just live, but move, make progress, go places. We may walk a new life, lead a different kind of life in him.

The death of Jesus was not the end. His story does not end with a funeral. So with us. We are joined to him in baptism, and the old is buried. We are raised with him, and we get a new life. For Christ died and rose again, and we with him!

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