

The True Baptism of the Spirit

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Romans is a tremendous revelation of what happens in the believer's life when he comes to Christ. The opening two verses of Romans 6 make it very clear that the apostle is dealing with the question of whether the believer can go on living in sin after he has come to Christ. Can he go on in a lifestyle that is basically wrong and sinful? Can he live as an alcoholic, or a swindler, or an adulterer, or a homosexual, or a slanderer? Is it possible to maintain such a lifestyle and be a Christian? The apostle's answer – as we have already seen in the first two verses – is, "By no means!" {Rom 6:2a NIV}. It is impossible, Paul says, because, as he puts it in these four little words, "We died to sin," {Rom 6:2b NIV}. Paul's conclusion is: "How can we go on living in it any longer?" {Rom 6:2c NIV}.

In Verses 3-14 {of Romans 6} we want to see how the apostle begins to unfold this conclusion so that we might understand in detail what that change means in our lives.

When you become a Christian, when you really, truly receive Jesus Christ as Lord, something happens that makes it impossible to go on living a lifestyle of evil. We died to sin – and this is what we are examining in this message. The apostle uses two marvelous visual aids that God likes to employ to help us to understand truth. One of them is baptism; and the other, which may be more difficult for you to see, is grafting – as a plant or a branch is grafted into a tree.

Let's see what the apostle says about **baptism** in Verses 3-4. Beginning at Verse 1:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. {Rom 6:1-4 NIV}

It is always interesting to me that when some people hear the word *baptism* they immediately smell water.

When I was a boy in Montana, I had a horse that could smell water from farther away than any animal I ever saw. You could be riding across the dry, parched plains, when suddenly he would prick up his ears, lift up his head, and quicken his pace, and you knew that he smelled water somewhere and he was heading for it.

There are people who are like that. Whenever they read these passages, and see the word *baptism*, they smell water. You can just see them prick up their ears, lift up their heads, and head for it. But there is no water here. This is a dry passage.

This passage is dealing, of course, with the question of how we died to sin, how we became separated from being in Adam, how we became joined in Christ. No water can do that. That requires something far more potent than water. It is,

therefore, a description for us of what is called “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” elsewhere in the Scriptures.

John the Baptist, who made his reputation because he baptized in water, said, “I indeed baptize you with water, but there comes One after me, greater than I, who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,” {cf, John 1:33}. That is what Paul is talking about here – the baptism of the Holy Spirit – which places us into Christ.

Paul says exactly the same thing in First Corinthians 12:13: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink,” {1 Cor 12:13 NIV}. Notice how he emphasizes twice that all believers were baptized into one body. We were placed into Christ. You are not a Christian if that isn’t true of you. Therefore, people today who say you need to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit after you become a believer do not understand the Scriptures. There is no way to become a believer without being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Spirit happened first, historically, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon 120 people who were gathered in the temple courts, fusing them into one body, joining them to the head, which is Jesus, and thus formed the church, one body in Christ, all members one of the other and members of the Lord Jesus himself. That is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not something that is felt; it is not something you can know through your senses when it takes place; it is something the Spirit does to our human spirit. Yet this baptism is very essential to becoming a Christian. It is part of the process by which we share the life of Jesus Christ.

Notice some things that Paul says about the baptism of the Spirit in this passage:

- First, he says that we are expected to know about it. “Don’t you know that we were all baptized into Christ, into his death?” Paul asks. He expects these Roman Christians, who had never met him or been taught personally by him, to know this fact. It is something new Christians ought to know.

Now, how would they know it? Here is where water baptism comes in. Water baptism teaches us, by symbol, the meaning of this baptism of the Spirit. The one is the shadow,

or figure, of the other. The people Paul was writing to had been baptized in water after their conversion and regeneration, and Paul supposes that their water baptism had helped them to understand the reality of what the Spirit had already done to them.

Some time ago, Ron Ritchie told me of an experience that he had on Easter Sunday during a baptism service in the ocean near his house. I tell you, you really have to love Christ to be baptized in the frigid waters of the Pacific! A woman came up to him and asked him to baptize her nine-year-old daughter. Ron was reluctant to do so without finding out whether the girl really understood what was happening, so he began to question her and to teach her about the reality behind the water baptism. He was gesturing as he talked to her, and noticed that, as he was using his hand, the shadow of it fell on the sand. So he said to the little girl, “Do you see the shadow of my hand on the sand? Now, that is just the shadow; the hand is the real thing. And when you came to Jesus, when you believed in Jesus, that was the real baptism. You were joined to him, and what happened to him happened to you. Jesus was alive; then he died, was buried, and then he arose from the dead. And that is what happened to you when you believed in him.” He pointed to the shadow on the sand and said, “When you go down in the water and are raised up again, that is a picture of what has already happened.” The girl immediately caught on and said, “Yes, that is what I want to do because Jesus has come into my life.” So water baptism is a picture, a symbol worked out for us, to teach us what has happened to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus.

- Notice also that the apostle says, “This is how we died to sin.” The great statement of this passage is that when we became Christians, we died to sin. Paul is still discussing the question, “Can a believer go on sinning?” “No,” answers Paul, “because he died to sin.” How did we die to sin? This is how, Paul explains: The Spirit took us and identified us with all that Jesus did. Now, I don’t understand that. That means that somehow this is a timeless event. The Spirit of God is able to ignore the two thousand years since the crucifixion and

resurrection and somehow identify us, who live in this 20th century – as he has all believers of past centuries – with that moment when Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead. We participate in those events. That is clear.

I don't think we need to struggle with this, because something similar has already been referred to in Chapter 5. There we are told that this is what happened to us in Adam. By being born into this human race, we became part of what Adam did. Way back at the dawn of history, Adam sinned, and we sinned in Adam. I don't fully know how that is true, but I certainly believe it. Every evidence of history demonstrates it to be true. Men sin from the moment they are born. Babies sin. Babies are filled with sinful attitudes and sinful reactions, as we have already shown. If nothing enters their life to help them control these things, they grow up to become criminals and rapists and murderers, because sin is there from the beginning.

Therefore this is not theological fiction; it is fact. Adam sinned, and we sin. Adam died, and men ever since have died. Every funeral throughout the ages has testified to the reality of that fact. The apostle is saying that what was true in Adam has now been ended and now we are in Christ, by faith in Jesus Christ.

Once Adam's actions affected us; but now what Christ did becomes our actions as well. Christ died, and we died; Christ was buried, and we were buried with him; Christ rose again, and we rose with him. So what is true of Jesus is true of us.

Here Paul is dealing with what is probably the most remarkable and certainly the most magnificent truth recorded in the pages of Scripture. It is the central truth God wants us to learn. We died with Christ, were buried, and rose again with him. That union with Christ is the truth from which everything else in Scripture flows. If we understand and accept this as fact, which it is, then everything will be different in our lives. That is why the apostle labors so to help us understand this.

- Notice one other thing about this paragraph: the purpose for which all this happened. Paul says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as

Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Remember, Paul is answering the question "Can a believer go on sinning?" His answer is, "Absolutely not." We cannot because we have died, have been buried, and have risen again with Jesus, and therefore we too may live a new life. If you are a Christian, there will be a noticeable change of behavior because of a radical change of government. If you do go on living as you were before, then your profession of Christianity is false. There must be a change, and there will be, if there has been a change in the heart.

Verses 5-10 introduce a new figure for us and reveal a deeper revelation of what has happened to us. Paul now uses the figure of **grafting**. Verse 5:

If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. {Rom 6:5 NIV}

In other words, you can't pick and choose. You can't die with Christ and not be risen with him. If you died with him, you must be risen with him as well. Paul uses a word from botany here. The word *united* means "to graft a branch into another." Some of you have fruit trees and you have done grafting. You have taken a branch from a nectarine tree and grafted it into a peach tree. The branch is tied together in such a way that the life from the trunk of the tree flows into the branch and they grow together until finally you can't tell the difference between the graft and the natural branch. The life is fully shared. This is the figure Paul is using here to describe our tie with the Lord Jesus. His life becomes our life. We are no longer in Adam, in any sense. The tie is totally broken. We are now in Christ, and he is our life from now on.

This is one of the most important concepts to understand. In order that we might understand it, Paul now gives us both sides to this parallel – death and resurrection. Verses 6-7 explain what it means to die in Christ; Verses 8-10 explain what it means to be risen with him.

We want to look at these verses very carefully because it is so important for us to know the meaning of the death and burial of the Lord Jesus and our death and burial with him. Verses 6 and 7:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. {Rom 6:6-7 NIV}

Paul is tracing this parallel. Jesus was crucified, and we were crucified too. Our old self, the old man, the man who was in Adam, the tie with Adam, has been broken by death. All that we were as a natural-born human being ended when we believed in Jesus.

Paul is referring to *the essential you*, the spirit within you. We need very much to understand biblical psychology. Biblical psychology tells us that basically we are spirits dwelling in human bodies. Your body is not you. Even your soul, which is produced by the union of the body and the spirit, is not wholly you. You are your spirit.

Next, Paul explains that Jesus was crucified in order that the sin which was in his body on the cross should come to an end, that his body be rendered powerless with respect to sin. You say, “Now, wait a minute. There’s something wrong here. There was no sin in Jesus.” That is true. Scripture is very careful to help us see that in Jesus there was no sin. He did not sin; there was no sin in him until the cross. But this tells us an amazing thing about our Lord when he was on the cross. There, Paul says, “he was made sin for us,” {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}. You see, sin, in the believer, is located in the body. Therefore, it was described in Jesus in terms of the body. His body became possessed and controlled by sin. That is why his body died. His body was rendered powerless with regard to sin. That is why he was buried.

Why do we bury a corpse? We bury it because it is useless, inert, inactive. There is nothing it can do any longer, and so we bury it.

That is why Jesus was buried – to prove that the sin in his body was ended. The body was useless, unresponsive. Paul says that is what happens to us. When our spirit has died in Christ, then the body of sin will be rendered powerless.

What does Paul mean by this term “body of sin”? He means the physical body that is dominated and controlled by sin. In Adam, sin filled the whole of man – our spirit, our soul, and our body. Therefore, we had to sin. That is why, before you became a Christian, even when you tried to be

good, you couldn’t. Something always went wrong and you ended by fouling up in some way. You were a slave to sin, and no matter how much you wanted to be different, you couldn’t be. But now that bond has been broken. In Christ your spirit is freed:

- It has been united with Jesus;
- It has risen with him, and
- It is free from sin.

This explains that rather interesting passage in First John 3:9, which says, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God,” {cf, 1 Jn 3:9 NIV}. John is talking about your spirit, the essential you. In that sense, it is proper to say of believers, “We cannot sin.”

What Paul makes clear in Romans 6 is that sin remains as an alien power trying to dominate and control our bodies and our souls. It is the presence of the spirit in the body that produces the soul, just as electricity in a light bulb produces light. The soul is our conscious experience and is produced moment by moment as we live, as light is coming from a light bulb moment by moment. Paul makes it clear that our spirits were freed from sin. They do not sin, and cannot sin, because they are linked with Christ, so that we may be able to control the sin which is in the body.

From here on, we do not have to sin. If we do, it is because we allow it to happen. But we are no longer slaves to sin. Throughout the rest of this account Paul deals with this theme. The body is the means by which we are tempted to sin. There is nothing inherently sinful about our bodies – they are perfectly all right – but somehow an alien power remains in them, and that is where we are tempted all our life long.

I think I can illustrate this for you. When you sit at the table to eat, you are satisfying a very normal appetite that God gave to your body. It needs food; it needs replenishment of energy. There is nothing wrong with eating. But when we get to the table and find plenty of food on it, each one of us has something within us that makes us eat too much. We eat more than we should. We say that we have a weight problem. What we really have is a sin problem. There is this sin within us that wants to take a natural function of the body and push it beyond what it ought to – and thus it

becomes sin. That is why, when we sit at the table, many of us are going to sin by becoming gluttons and gourmands. (Do you know what a gourmand is? He is someone who eats greedily, who delights in luxurious food, someone who lives for the taste of food.) We are all tempted this way because sin, as a principle, is still in control of the functions of the body. But our spirit opposes it, and we don't have to give in. That is the point.

The body requires rest from time to time. The body of Jesus grew weary and needed rest. But somehow there is in us a principle that wants to overindulge, and we become lazy, slothful, apathetic. We want other people to work and to serve us while we rest. This is so natural that it is even hard to know when we go over the line.

The mind, that amazing instrument of the body, functions in such a way as to reason and to logically deduce and to produce an amazing variety of inventions and technological advances. Yet the mind, with its ability to think and reason, can easily move beyond what it should into evil thoughts and prideful reactions and attitudes of jealousy and lust. We sin with our minds.

Consider the tongue, that member of the body that is so little, James says, yet can be "set on fire by hell," {Jas 3:6 NIV}. With our tongues, designed to be that by which we bless God, we curse him instead. The tongue is like the rudder of a ship, that turns the whole life in the wrong direction because of the words that we speak.

Consider the glands and hormones. Physiologists tell us that they are linked somehow with our actions. Just as the brain is linked with the mind, so the glands are linked with emotions. They are responsible for the way we feel, often. They pour out hormones into the bloodstream and affect the body. Some hormones make us over-react. Instead of normal fears that are designed to protect us from evil, we become paranoid, worried, filled with anxiety; we become lustful and indulge in wrongful attitudes. We become angry, so that we hate and feel jealousy. We indulge in what the Bible calls "inordinate affections," {Col 3:5 KJV}. Even our loves become twisted. That is sin in the body – no longer in the spirit, but in the body. I don't have to describe this in terms of our sexual appetites. These are normal, legitimate, valid appetites, made by God to be satisfied; but something within us wants to satisfy them too soon, or with the wrong person, or sometimes in the wrong way.

That is where evil comes from – the body, not the spirit. I hope this is clear, because it is a very important picture, one that will govern the rest of the book of Romans, as well as all the New Testament. The regenerated spirit cannot sin. It is born of God and it cannot sin. It has been set free of sin in order that we may begin to exercise control over the body of sin, so that it may be rendered inactive and we no longer need to be slaves to sin.

Not only have we been set free to choose not to sin, but a new power to resist sin has been given to us. Verses 8-10:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. {Rom 6:8-10 NIV}

Once we have reckoned ourselves dead to sin with Christ, there is nothing left but to go on to life. Jesus does not go back into sin; he does not go back into death. Sin and death are over, as far as we are concerned, because that is what is true of Jesus. He lives now, and he lives under the will and by the power of God. Therefore, Paul says, the same thing is true in our lives. Not only do we need to recognize that we died to sin with Christ, but also that his life is in us now. His power is available to us. When we decide not to sin, we have the power to carry it out, because Christ is living in us.

Therefore, it all comes down to two simple steps that are described in Verse 11. This is the first time in the book of Romans that we are asked to do anything; this is the first exhortation in all of Romans. Up to now, everything Paul has written has been about what God has done for us. In Verse 11 we are asked to do something. What is it?

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. {Rom 6:11 NIV}

When you feel temptation in your body or your mind, then there are two things you are to do:

- First, remember that you don't have to obey sin. You just don't have to. You are free to re-

fuse it. You are free to say, “No, you don’t have the right to use that part of my body for a sinful purpose.” And,

- Second, remember his power is in you to enable you to offer that same part of your body to God, to be used for his purposes.

Now, that may mean a struggle, because the strength of sin is very strong. When we start to turn away from evil in our bodies, the habits of our lives are so deeply engrained that oftentimes it is very difficult, and we struggle. But we have the power not to sin because we have God himself within us – the living God.

I have mentioned before a group of ex-homosexuals who live in San Rafael and who have a great ministry with those who are involved in homosexuality. This week I received another one of their papers and I was struck by this paragraph. The writer is describing how tough it is to turn from these evil practices and be different once you have been deeply involved in them. He says:

This very weekend one of our brothers said to me, “How can I last through even one more year of this?” I said in response, “How can I last one more week?” But I will last, and so will he. For we have each other, and the sharing and fellowship and caring are God’s ingredients to healing – long-lasting healing – that will impart strength beyond endurance, as God does it in His time and in His way.

That says exactly what Paul says in Romans 6. There will be a struggle; it is not always easy, but we have the strength to do it and we have the right to do it. We have the freedom not to sin and the desire not to sin. That is what God has brought to us in Christ. Now you will see how the rest of this fits in. Paul is describing the two steps that we are to repeat over and over again, in dealing with evil in our lives.

1. First, in Verses 12-13a, Paul says to count yourself dead to sin:

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, {Rom 6:12-13a NIV}

Step #1 is to reckon yourself dead to sin.

2. Step #2 is found in Verse 13b: Offer yourself to God.

... but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have returned from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him [your tongue, your mind, your stomach, your hands, your feet, your sex organs – offer them to God] as instruments of righteousness. {Rom 6:13b NIV}

That is the way to win over temptation.

Then Paul closes with this fantastic statement in Verse 14. This, to me, is one of the greatest verses in all Scripture:

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. {Rom 6:14 NIV}

Why does Paul bring in the Law? He brings in the Law because he is dealing with one of the most basic problems of the Christian struggle, the thing that oftentimes depresses and discourages us more than anything else – the sense of condemnation we feel when we sin. You see, the Law produces condemnation. The Law says that unless you live up to this standard, God will not have anything to do with you. We have been so engrained with this that when we sin, even as believers, we think God is angry and upset with us and he doesn’t care about us. We think that way about ourselves, and we become discouraged and defeated and depressed. We want to give up. “What’s the use,” we say.

But Paul says that is not true. You are not under Law. God does not feel that way about you. You are under grace, and God understands your struggle. He is not upset by it; he is not angry with you. He understands your failure. He knows that there will be a struggle and there will be failures. He also knows that he has made full provision for you to recover immediately, to pick yourself up, and go right on climbing up the mountain.

Therefore you don’t need to be discouraged, and you won’t be.

Sin will not be your master because you are not under law and condemnation, but under grace. And

even though you struggle, if, every time you fail, you come back to God and ask his forgiveness, and take it from him, and remember how he loves you, and that he is not angry or upset with you, and go on from there, you will win.

I will never forget how, as a young man in the service during World War II, I was on a watch one night, reading the book of Romans. This verse leaped out of the pages at me. I remember how the Spirit made it come alive, and I saw the great promise that all the things I was struggling with as a young man would ultimately be mastered – not because I was so smart, but because God was teaching me and leading me into victory. I remember walking the floor, my heart just boiling over with praise and thanksgiving to God. I walked in a cloud of glory, rejoicing in this great promise: “Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”

Looking back across these more than thirty years since that night, I can see that God has broken the grip of the things that mastered me then. Other problems have come in, with which I still struggle. But the promise remains: “Sin shall not

have dominion over you. You are not under law, but under grace.”

Prayer:

How grateful we are, Father, for this word of assurance that though we are left to struggle with evil that is resident in our body, it has not touched our spirit, and it cannot do so. There is a part of us, the very essence of us, which does not sin, and which remains in control despite temporary failures that we experience in body and soul. Lord, we thank you for this assurance that the struggle is to an end, that we will be victorious, that those of us who are in Christ will not need to be depressed and discouraged and need not fail, for there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace. Thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.