

Matt Henry
Romans 6:1-11
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“Baptism Is the Beginning”

God’s grace and peace to you...

The first thing I want to do today is congratulate all of you who are here today. Through your diligence and effort, each one of you has 100% perfect worship attendance for the entire year! I commend you!

I always appreciate the fresh start of the new year, and since we find ourselves at the beginning of the year, it makes sense to go to the beginning of our life in Christ. Baptism is that beginning. So we’re going to consider how God has established this personal and direct connection between us and Christ. What does it do? What does it mean? I would imagine that most of you are baptized, but probably some of you are not, so wherever we are at, there’s something to marvel and appreciate about baptism if we are to grow and change and become more like Jesus.

So the first thing I want you to do, is consider this T/F statement: “Baptism is a matter of life or death.” Answer it in your head. And don’t draw that symbol that is a hybrid between the T and the F. I have confirmation students. I know that trick. But I bet you have an answer because it just popped in to your mind automatically.

Another thing that may register in our mind when we hear baptism is “water and the Word.” Those are the ingredients. So why the Word? That’s where the power is. The power and authority for the Sacraments is always in the Word of God, not in the person giving or receiving. When God spoke at Creation, He spoke the word and it was. His Word brings things into existence. In Baptism, His Word brings forth and creates a Trinitarian result: that person is now a child of the Father who is connected to Jesus and now bears the Holy Spirit. God is all over baptism. This is all from the Word and every time we begin worship with the invocation, it’s a remembrance of God who worked these wonders in our baptism.

God could have chosen any element for baptism, but He chose water for at least these reasons. One, it’s the most abundant element on the face of the earth. Meaning, it’s available. God wants everyone to be saved. Two, water is essential for life. No living thing can exist without water. No water, no life. There are no exceptions to this rule in biology!

The way that we look at baptism is to note how the change it makes, it does something. It is not a symbol. Baptism is performative—meaning, it brings something about. It creates a reality that was not there before. It changes our status and identity. It connects us to Jesus. And in Romans 6, the big effect of

baptism is that It kills us and makes us alive by joining us to Christ's death and resurrection.

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. 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” (Rom. 6:3-5). Baptism is a time machine in that what Christ did in the past is done to us so we can say we have died and been raised. It's odd!

“Baptism is the promise of death and new life.” (Kolb) And this goes back to why water is used. Not only is water integral to bringing about life, but water—the very same thing—can bring about death—as is drowning, right? So what needs to be drowned and die? Our old sinful nature, our old Adam. But what needs to be raised up? Our new nature that is in Christ—the new you! So go back to that true or false question. Is baptism a matter of life or death? No! Baptism is a matter of life AND death. It accomplishes both in a single moment. That's hard to do! But that hasn't kept people from trying.

I watched the most amazing documentary this week about cryogenics. This is the process of freezing someone so they may be brought back to life later when

the technology exists. But here's the catch—right now as the technology stands, the person can't die and then be frozen, they have to be frozen while alive. Right now, the only human beings that can be frozen and still revived are embryos. So they are doing this in Russia because euthanasia is legal there. People volunteer to be frozen and sign a contract. As this documentary went on, it described the reasoning and motivation for cryogenics. It wasn't fear of death. The philosophy underlying cryogenics is something called transhumanism. The idea is of transhumanism to fuse the body with technology and thereby reach immortality and perfection, transcending the human condition. Transhumanism, like Gnosticism, has a massive disdain for the human condition. It sees food as bad and sex is overrated. Anything to do with the physical condition it deems inferior. We see these things as gifts of God—what God created is good including the human body and the things He made to sustain creation are good. But if someone thinks the body is bad, then they will stop at no lengths trying to escape it and still live.

There's this company in Russia called Krio Rus. I think they chose Russia not just because of the euthanasia laws, but because in order for something like cryogenics to be accepted or sought out by the people, transhumanism needs a godless society. Transhumanism needs atheism. For \$30,000, Krio Rus will freeze

an entire human body in one of their liquid nitrogen pods in perpetuity. But if one so chooses, they will freeze just their head for half the price in the hopes that maybe one day, they'll upload that person's brain into a computer. In the frozen pods are 30 heads, 20 bodies, 6 dogs, 3 cats and 1 hummingbird. And the guy in charge said this, "I do not believe that cryonics will work. But I do not believe that it will not work. The time has come for people to accept that death is no longer about dying and being buried in the ground. It's really about choice."

Now I have to admit friends, as I ponder the resurrection, I have thought about how God will reconstitute and resurrect all human flesh. I never considered the fact that he may have to hit the defrost button.

God's choice is to make baptism available to all people. It is a universal and transcendent grace. I believe that baptism works and it works best without ice cubes. The only way that we can be dead to sin and alive to God in the same moment is through Christ Jesus. Because through this sacrament of baptism, the crucifixion and resurrection are both applied to us! This is pure grace because we can't die to sin ourselves. Let me prove it. I want you to right now to die to sin. Try really hard! You can't do it, can you? It has to be done for us. So while we are well aware that Jesus gives us the gift of eternal life, you might just have forgotten His first gift to you was a death to sin that He died on our behalf. Verse

6, “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. For the one who has died has been set free from sin.” That’s the thing about dying. It’s very hard to die and still be alive. But that’s what baptism does over and over again!

This idea of dying but still being alive makes me think of video games. It used to be you had three lives and that was it. But game makers got smart. They realized they could keep the kid involved and captivated by the game if they gave him unlimited lives. So that’s how the games are today—unlimited lives. A character dies, new life. Dies again, new life. In some aspect, baptism is like that because it also has contained in it not just eternal life, but unlimited lives. In that we die to sin daily and are raised to newness of life daily. This is why Luther said about baptism, “Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing thereafter.” (Large Catechism) We’re only baptized once at the beginning, but the effect of baptism is life-long and runs through the middle and even the end.

Baptism is for you. At the beginning of this message, I joked with you how you were 100% perfect just for showing up. Baptism is like that. It gives us both a perfect death and a perfect life—for it is the death and life of the perfect Christ

that is given to us. When we show up at the font, we make ourselves available to Him to accomplish miraculously a simultaneous death and life. “So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Our baptism speaks this Word to us and says it is so.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.