

Exegetical Brief: Romans 6:3 - "Baptized Into His Death"

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Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

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Some take the phrase "baptized into his death" to be speaking of baptism as a means of grace, that is, it speaks of the blessings of Christ's death that God gives to us in baptism. Others take this phrase to be speaking of what baptism signifies for our daily lives, that is, it speaks of our putting off the evil deeds and desires of our Old Adam by daily contrition and repentance. Both are scriptural concepts. So the issue is simply which of the two fits better in this context.

In the preceding verse, verse 2, Paul insists that Christians can't possibly live in sin any longer because they have died to sin. What does "die to sin" mean? Dying to someone or something indicates a total break in relationship with that person or thing. This is evident from Paul's words in verse 10 where he speaks about Christ dying to sin. In verse 9 Paul says Christ rose from death and can't die again because death doesn't have any mastery over him any more. The reason (causal γαρ) is given in verse 10. Christ took sin on himself once. But never again! He is done with it forever, and so death is not in the future for him ever again.

In verse 11, Paul says we died to sin in exactly the same way Jesus did. Earlier in verse 4, Paul indicated that the time when we died to sin was when we were baptized. In verse 5 he explains (explanatory γαρ) that our death to sin in baptism is exactly the same as Christ's death. In verse 6 he spells out what our death in baptism was when he describes it as the crucifixion of our Old Adam so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. Obviously, Christ did not have an Old Adam, so the parallel between our death to sin and Christ's death to sin is simply a total break in any relationship with sin. This is the thrust of what Luther says in Fourthly of Baptism. He quotes verse 4 and then uses verses 5 and 6 in his explanation to summarize the break with sin that baptism signifies for us in our daily lives.

Now back to verse 3. The preceding verse speaks of dying to sin. The following verses speak of our dying to sin in baptism in exactly the same way that Jesus died to sin-never to have anything to do with sin again. What then does "baptized into his death" mean in verse 3? The context strongly suggests that it is speaking about our death to sin, that is, we have a new attitude toward sin. We don't want to serve sin anymore in our daily lives.

When we were baptized, according to verse 3, two things took place. We were "baptized into Christ"-as Paul says in Galatians 3:27, we were clothed in Christ's righteousness and have our record before God cleansed of all sin through him. We were also "baptized into his death"-our Old Self was crucified so that we are no longer slaves to sin-we want nothing to do with sin any more. This latter truth is what makes it impossible, as Paul says in verse 2, that any Christian would have the attitude that he will continue to live in sin. He died to sin in his baptism.