

Pentecost 7 / July 27, 2025

Colossians 2:12

*"Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God."*

Buried in Christ

Raised through the powerful working of God

Have you ever been to a good funeral? Unless it was the funeral of someone you profoundly disliked, the answer would probably be 'no!' The words 'good' and 'funeral' go together like up and down or darkness and light. They are so dissimilar that we find it hard to think of them together, let alone speak them in the same sentence. Funerals are a stark reminder of sin, that the wages of sin is death and that death comes to everyone, because all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Funerals mean being parted from loved ones. They express human grief and sorrow at death. The most difficult part of a funeral is the burial, when the body of the deceased is lowered into the ground and the grave is covered over with earth. In days gone by, the actual burial was a universal part of funeral services. The pallbearers, close friends of the deceased, would lower the casket into the grave with ropes. Friends and family would then take shovels and fill the grave with earth, until it was covered over.

It was the worst part of the funeral! Fits of grief were not uncommon. People sensing the full weight of the situation, would weep hysterically. Some would even try to jump into the grave with the deceased. The actual burial was so difficult for grieving family and friends that it has been largely dispensed with in present day funerals. Instead, the casket is now placed on top of the grave, where it remains until the mourners have dispersed. When everyone who had an emotional attachment to the deceased is gone, the casket is lowered into the ground by funeral directors and covered with earth by cemetery workers. There is nothing good about a funeral, especially the burial.

However, in our lesson from Colossians, Paul speaks of baptism as a 'burial.' He says that in baptism, believers have been buried with Christ. He said the same thing in Romans chapter six, asking, *"Don't you know that all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* And of course, baptism is a good thing. It is the rebirth of water and the Spirit of which Jesus spoke in His conversation with Nicodemus recorded by John in the third chapter of his gospel, when He said, *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, He cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Christian baptism is the burial of something bad, sin and the sinful

nature with its ill effects. Christian baptism is the beginning of something new, the birth of a new nature fashioned after the righteousness of Christ. Christian baptism is a good burial. Something bad is buried in Christ's righteousness. Sin is covered over in forgiveness. Our baptism is a burial which is good and brings joy. Christian baptism is freedom from the chains of sin, the pardoning of our sins, and a rising to newness of life, which will be made full, when God calls us from our graves and gives us our share of Christ's resurrection to everlasting life.

We may not think baptisms and funerals have much, if anything in common. But our baptism into Christ is a sharing in His dying and a participation in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. Our baptism is both a funeral and birth. Baptism is the funeral of something we should hate. It is the burial of our sins and the drowning of our sinful nature. Baptism is the burial of the "Old Adam" the sinful nature inherited from our first parents. Baptism is the birth of a child of God. Through baptism we experience a spiritual rebirth and receive adoption as children of God. Baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the beginning of a new life of righteousness. It is God's perpetual promise of forgiveness and a foreshadowing of our share in Christ's resurrection to a new and eternal life in which righteousness reigns

Christ calls us to return to our baptism daily for refreshment, cleansing and life. He says in John chapter 5, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."* We come to Christ in our baptism to drink of the waters of forgiveness and life. Baptism is an ever-flowing stream of grace, welling up to a fountain of eternal life. Baptism is God's promise to put to death our sinfulness and to bury our sins in forgiveness. Baptism is God's promise to call us from our graves and give us eternal life in the resurrection of Christ. Continuing in the letter to the Romans Paul says, *"If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His."* What a great and glorious day it will be when sin and death die! The only tears that will be shed at the funeral of sin, death and the devil will be tears of joy and gladness. It will be the dawning of eternal life through Jesus Christ!

Baptism like faith is a gift of God's grace. As Paul says in our text, the blessings of baptism do not come because of our will to believe. They are not received by virtue of our good works and obedience. They are given by the powerful working of God and are received through faith by all who believe. The power of baptism is the death and resurrection of Jesus. As God and Man, Jesus died to pay the debt of our sin and removed its guilt. As God and Man, Jesus rose to proclaim our

forgiveness and to testify to the new life we have with Him now through faith and will have fully in eternity, in body and in spirit. The blessings of baptism are continually dispersed throughout the body of believers by the Holy Spirit, in the forgiveness of sins, the power to resist sin and the desire to live in accordance with God's will, revealed in His holy law. Baptism is God's power at work both to create faith in the human heart and to cause faithfulness in the lives of believers. So, Paul wrote in Romans chapter eight, we were buried with Him in baptism, so that we might walk in newness of life through Him.

Paul's words in Colossians were occasioned by the teachings of some, who falsely said that the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life were not received entirely through faith in Christ and baptism into His death and resurrection. Faith and baptism they said were part of a bigger parcel, which included as of greatest importance, the observance of holy days, such as the Sabbath and New Moon Festivals; the performance of certain rituals, such as fasting; and the carrying out of pilgrimages to holy places and of course, offerings. These things have the appearance of religion, but they have absolutely no value in making us righteous before God. Rather than making us righteous they are an expression of the righteousness we receive as a gift from God in Jesus Christ! Paul wrote at the beginning of our text, *"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ."* Whenever something extra is demanded above the gift of faith and beyond the promise of baptism, both the gift of faith and the promise of baptism are made null and void. As Paul wrote in the letter to the Ephesians, *"It is by grace you have been saved through faith and not by works, lest anyone should boast."* Baptism is the pure grace of God received through faith!

Few things have caused more confusion in the Christian Church than baptism. Who should be baptized? At what age should people be baptized? How should people be baptized? At first the Jewish Christians thought that only Jews should be baptized. The Holy Spirit showed them through powerful signs that the promise of baptism is for all people. People in later centuries questioned whether children and infants should be baptized. They understood faith as an intellectual understanding and assent to God's promises. They observed that no specific command to baptize infants and children is found in scripture; forgetting that there is no command not to baptize them and overlooking that infants and children are naturally included in Jesus' command to make disciples and baptize all nations. It is true that most converts in the first century were adults and so they received baptism as adults.

However, the New Testaments shows that when adults were baptized, so were all the members of their household, which doubtless also included children and infants.

Jewish Christians had no problem baptizing infants. Baptism corresponded to circumcision as the means by which people were made members of the covenant community. Circumcision was administered on the eighth day of birth. Paul writes, *"In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by the putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism."* Baptism is the pure grace and gift of God, which is probably why sinful humans with the law inscribed onto our hearts, find it so hard to understand. Baptism is the promise of God and faith is the means through which the promise is received. Both are the gift of God, given by the Holy Spirit working through the word. Faith is more than intellectual understanding of the teachings of scripture. The psalmist professed faith even when he was a nursing infant, saying in Psalm 22 *"You made me trust you at my mother's breasts."* In baptism, God gives us the Holy Spirit and faith to believe, when we first receive it and as often as we return to it in repentance. Whether we are too young to understand, or too old to remember, in baptism God gives us the grace of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

There is no day more important than the day we were baptized. Odd as it sounds it is more important than the day of our physical birth. We were conceived and born into a world in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death. We were conceived sinful and born separated from God. In Psalm 51 King David wrote, *"Surely I have been sinful from birth, a sinner since the moment my mother conceived me."* We were born into a world where sin reigns and expresses its presence in suffering and death. In the sufferings of this life some people wish they had never been born. In the Old Testament, Job in the midst of his sufferings, cursed the day of his birth saying, *"Let the day perish on which I was born."* The prophet Jeremiah concurred saying, *"Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day my mother bore me, let it not be blessed."* life in this world can be hard even for people who have been blessed with the Holy Spirit, forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. We need God's promise in baptism to give us hope!

The day we believed as adults, were baptized as infants or children, we became alive to God in Christ Jesus. Whether we believed as adults or with the psalmist we had the faith of an infant, the day of our baptism was the day of our spiritual rebirth. The day of our baptism we received the *"washing of regeneration the*

*renewal of the Holy Spirit."* In our baptism we received reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. In our baptism the Holy Spirit cast out the evil spirit, set us free from enslavement to sin and the devil and made His home in our hearts so we would begin to live in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We were born into this world to die. Every birthday brings us closer to death! We were born into the kingdom of God through baptism to live eternally through the resurrection of Christ. Every baptismal birthday we come closer to eternal life. This life ends in death. The new life we receive through baptism into the death and resurrection Christ will be fulfilled in eternal life! The Lord who has begun this good work within us, will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ. In His Name. Amen