

w e e k 10 *t e n*

Discover

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? **2** By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? **3** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** 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.

5 For 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. **6** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - **7** because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. **10** The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. **12** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. **13** Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. **14** For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.



Discover

I was baptized in November of 2002 at the age of eleven. A very standard age for children raised in the churches of Christ. The key word I would use to describe my baptismal experience was awkward.

I was a timid eleven year old that desperately avoided the gaze of...everyone. My father baptized me on a Sunday afternoon just before our evening service with only my parents and the ministers of the Hot Springs Church of Christ present. To my horror, said ministers promptly spread the news of my baptism throughout the auditorium as the rooms' carmel pews slowly filled with the smaller but faithful evening crowd. My cheeks burned hot each time awareness sparked a smile and a hug from the members of my community. I bent my head towards my chest desperate for my damp hair to hide my face as my name boomed from the pulpit during announcements. So, so awkward.

I celebrate any time a young person chooses to enter the covenantal waters of baptism and embrace a new life with God. But as an adult, I recognize that there was so much significance lost to my hypersensitive preteen mind preoccupied with "fitting in" as the new kid in the youth group. A few months prior, a new job opportunity prompted our move from a rural farming community in northern Arkansas to a subdivision in one of the larger cities in the state. I spent the first eleven years of my life craving Mrs. Lucinda's chicken n' dumplings at potluck, asking Mr. Ward for stale communion crackers, and rolling down the hill next to the parking lot with my friend Chelsea dressed in our Sunday best. I spent the first eleven years of my life swaddled in the hymns and prayers and communal care of the same church. Is it any wonder that my baptism in this new community felt awkward. I was welcomed into the family of God by strangers whose names escaped my mind.

As I reflect back on this event, I wonder if, despite my limited understanding of the implications of baptism, I knew this event was an invitation into the sense of belonging, of community, of family that I craved among the people of God? In Romans Six, Paul invites us to revel in the vast significance of baptism. We are buried with Christ in baptism in order that we may be raised with Christ to walk in a new life. The implications are limitless! But I find there is one phrase I neglect as I focus on life and death, on burial and resurrection.

The ESV translates this phrase in verse two as "all of us." "Do you not know that all of us who has been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Romans 6:3 This phrase, "all of us," lingers in the text. All of us were baptized into his death and all of us were raised to walk in newness of life. "Now if WE have died with Christ, WE believe that WE will also live with him." Romans 6:8 I confess that prior to writing these words, I unconsciously replaced any mention of "we" in this text with "I" "Now if I die with Christ, I believe that I will also live with him." It is not improper to note the individual implications of our participation in the gospel through baptism. But if I solely focus on the implications for only myself I am incapable of noticing the shocking and radical communal impact of Paul's invitation to "all of us."





Discover

We are reminded that Paul is addressing the Jewish and Gentile believers, two factions within the church that are struggling to belong to one another. The Jewish believers emphasized circumcision as the event, the ceremony, the experience that allowed a child to embody the story of Israel, the people of God. Circumcision invited participation in the community. The Gentiles inherited their own diverse ways of engaging a plethora of deities. Many of these practices included sacrifice as an exchange that prompted a conversation with a god. The Gentiles were criticized for the use of their bodies in these rituals. The Jewish and Gentile believers embodied very unique methods of drawing near to God, of claiming connection to the divine. Paul addresses the Gentile believers in Romans 6:13 "Do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, only present yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to love." To the Jewish believers, Paul concludes that "for sin will have no dominion on you, since you are not under the law but under grace." Romans 6:14 Paul addresses this divided people with different perspectives of how to encounter God. Paul addresses this divided people in desperate need of a shared story to define their community.

Paul reminds these people of their baptism, an experience that immersed each of them in the Gospel. Each member of this body was united with Christ in his death and his life. This is their shared story. This is what makes these two factions one people. Baptism bonds the people of God in the church in Rome in the same way my awkward, isolated pre-teen self instinctively knew baptism was my invitation to belong, to be a part of the community. Our baptism allows us to embody the Gospel, our shared story that reminds us again and again that all of us are freed from the grasp of sin and raised to walk in the new life that we share with one another.



Pray

Monday

Romans 5:1-11 “Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

God,

I exist in this physical world. Everything surrounding me is finite and touchable. It is challenging for me to grasp the mystery of you; who you are, what you do and why you do it. Why would you provide for my salvation when I hated you and selfishly ignored you just so I could have my own way. I hurt myself and others. How is it that Jesus' victory over death can somehow make me right before you? How does baptism and faith in Jesus kill my old self and give me a new life? How does your Spirit live in me and work in my life? I am in awe of your great love and the mystery of your ways.

Tuesday

Romans 5:1-11 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God,

I don't know how to adequately express the praise, gratitude, and thankfulness that you deserve? I have done so little to deserve your attention and love and yet you lavish me with your affections. I broke our relationship and yet you took the steps, through Jesus, to bring us back together. You restore me as your child. What a joy it is to know your peace because I have been undeservingly rescued from death and wrath. What a wonder and pleasure it is to live this new life with Jesus. Help me to rejoice when I suffer knowing that Jesus also suffered. Just as you brought salvation to all through Jesus' suffering, you will also do unexpected and amazing things through my suffering. You are truly worthy of all praise, love and adoration.

Wednesday

Romans 5:12-21 “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”

God,

Adam and Eve had such an amazing and beautiful place to live and an even more amazing intimate personal friendship with you. How I wish that I lived there. How I wish that Adam and Eve had not messed it up for everyone. Of course, I know that if they hadn't done it before me, I would have eaten from the forbidden tree and brought sin into the world. What a disaster we have made of the Earth because of the self-destructive choices that have multiplied throughout history. It is incredible that Jesus' act of righteousness brought grace and forgiveness to all people for all time. It is staggering to dwell on the power of that kind of grace. If his grace is that powerful then I certainly need that in my life. I choose to yield my will to you today and everyday.



Pray

Thursday

Romans 6:1-14 “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.”

God,

I read that “if I have been baptized into Christ that I have joined him in his death and resurrection to new life” and that “in that death my old self was killed which freed me from slavery to sin”. How do I change, how do I transform in order to “consider myself dead to sin and alive to Christ?” How do I yield myself to you fully? Just as death had no command over Jesus, please prevent sin from having command over my life. God I yield and dedicate my existence and full being to being the good and love that you want to bring into the world and lives around me.

Friday

Romans 6:15-23 “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.”

God,

I don't want to be a slave! I want to be free! But I don't seem to have a choice. The things that I think give me freedom lead to bondage, dependence, and destruction. Why does that look like freedom and why am I trying so hard to get it? How can my perspective be so messed up? The other choice is yielding to you, which does not feel or sound like freedom. As I commit my heart to you and give myself to your transforming love, you free me from the guilt and control of sin and give me abundant life now and throughout eternity. Please, impress on my soul - “the result of sin is death but your free gift is life in Christ now and forever.”



Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 I invite you to make space to reflect on your own baptismal experience. How did your baptism connect you to your community? What was or was not emphasized during your experience?
- 2 According to Paul, baptism immerses us in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This story is our shared story that unites all believers. What strikes you about this aspect of baptism?
- 3 How do we continuously die to sin and walk in a newness of life after our baptism?
- 4 In what other ways do we attempt to unite ourselves with a group or to feel a part of a community? Are these attempts helpful or can they prompt division among the people of God?

