

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER BAPTISM?

Baptism changes our relationship with God because it unites us with Him. Through our union with Jesus Christ, our position in His sight is totally changed. Without a relationship with God we are lost. With it we are found!

The apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Ephesus, started by telling them how different their life had been before they accepted the gospel of salvation, before they believed and were baptized. To see the full force of his argument it's a good thing to tabulate the two states, so you can see the difference side-by-side. You can do this exercise for yourself by reading Ephesians chapter 2 and identifying the two descriptions, then comparing your findings with this:

Before you found Christ	After you accepted the gospel
<p><i>“You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1-3)</i></p>	<p><i>“God ... made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (2:4-8)</i></p>
<p><i>“You were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12)</i></p>	<p><i>“You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:19-21)</i></p>

This shows how great the difference is between someone who is baptized and someone who is not. Without belief and baptism, which result in God's gracious forgiveness of our sins, we are cut off from all aspects of His purpose. However religious we are and however well behaved, being good is never good enough. There is only one way of salvation.

But what about any change within us? Does anything happen to the way we feel, and how does this fit in with the birth of the Spirit, that Jesus spoke about to Nicodemus? That is what the apostle Paul now writes about in his Letter to the Romans – which we are using as our guide to the gospel of salvation.

❖ You are Dead – So Die!

Chapter 6 of Romans is all about the way we should live after baptism. As we have seen, baptism is a burial in water, an association with both the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In symbol we end our old life – life “in Adam” – and begin a new life – life “in Christ”. There are two quite separate aspects to this change that must take place: one that takes place now, and one that will take place at the return of Jesus to earth. It's important to understand these two phases:

1. Living “in Christ” means that we must be spiritually renewed. That was mentioned in chapter 14. What Paul now explains is that this change does not happen automatically. We do not come out of the waters of baptism as different people with another nature, one which is entirely free from sin. We have to be born again, and we have to live differently.
2. If we begin a new life in Christ at our baptism – if we are spiritually born again – then we will be completely changed one day, by God's power, when we are made like the Lord Jesus Christ. At the second coming of Christ those who are found acceptable will be changed to have an immortal and sinless nature. We will then be reborn by God's Holy Spirit power and will have a spiritual body. Here's the apostle Paul in another of his letters:

*“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.** For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. **For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality**” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).*

When that change takes place those privileged to enter the kingdom of God will have been reborn in two ways – by water (through their baptism) and by the Spirit (when their bodies are made immortal by God’s power). But what happens in the meantime?

❖ **Challenged to Live**

What the apostle Paul concentrates upon in Romans chapters 6 to 8 is the challenge that faces us when we have been baptized into Christ. That is why we are now looking at those three chapters together. In them Paul explores the change that must take place in the baptized believer’s life. It is clear that baptism is an important step for everyone but, from what Paul now says, we can see what an absolutely vital one it is if we want to become part of God’s eternal purpose by:

- ✓ *joining His family,*
- ✓ *becoming part of Abraham’s spiritual offspring, and*
- ✓ *sharing the inheritance that God gives to all His children.*

Here’s the recurring theme. ‘*If you have died in symbol in the waters of baptism*’, says the apostle, ‘*make sure that you consider yourself dead to sin in all its tempting guises*’. Or, in the inspired words of the record in Romans chapter 6:

*“One who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**” (6:7-11);*

*“**Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness**” (6:12-13);*

*“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now **present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification**” (6:19);*

*“Now that you have been set free from sin and have **become slaves of God**, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (6:22).*

Paul is dealing here with the change that has to take place inside the baptized believer. Baptism is the outward act when we make public our desire to change the way we live, when we resolve that we want to live with the Lord Jesus Christ, as a member of the family of God. We all have to work with God and the Lord Jesus to make that change happen inside. Paul’s words are all about the inner transformation that must take place if we are to make our baptism meaningful all through our lives.

It would be a strange thing indeed if all we had to do to become God’s children was to work out what to believe, say that we believed it, be immersed in water, but then carry on living just as we had before – regardless of God and Jesus. That would be like someone who was taught to drive, learning the rules that apply to all road users, passing a driving test and then driving regardless of everyone else and oblivious of the highway code. Some people do live like that; but not necessarily for very long!

❖ **Picture Language**

There were no cars or driving tests in the time of the apostle. So, to help us understand just what has to change inside our minds, the apostle uses three different examples to describe what the change feels like, things that we can all relate to. We have seen one of these pictures already when he described the change that must take place as though we had become God’s obedient slaves.

❖ **Slaves (6:14-23)**

In the ancient world a slave was owned by his master. He had no time off for himself and no rights of his own; he was his master’s property. Notice however that Paul does not say that God has acquired us and *made* us His own; he urges us to *give* ourselves to God – to become His slaves. He wants us to surrender our liberty in God’s service. Just as Jesus was God’s servant, so the apostle urges us to give our time, energy, talent and all that we have in the service of the One who has purchased us for Himself. We can serve God by devoting ourselves to those things that have to do

with righteousness and holiness.

That's a powerful thought but also a very demanding one, so the apostle tempers it by using two other pictures in the next two chapters.

❖ **Marriage (7:1-6)**

We may not be able to identify with Roman slaves, unless we take the trouble to find something out about them, but we can readily understand Paul's next point of comparison. Before baptism, he explains, we are like people who are very unhappily married, to a companion that is making life so miserable that we just want to die. Now, he says, that is just what happens in baptism – we die to the old relationship and are free to marry again, this time in a happy and fulfilling relationship:

*“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, **so that you may belong to another**, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Romans 7:4-6).*

This change of partners would have had a special meaning to any Jewish readers who had been living with God under an Old Covenant relationship, trying to keep the Law of Moses. But it is also true for us all who were under “*the law of sin and death*”, as Paul describes the ruling principle by which we all live and die ‘*in the flesh*’ (Romans 8:8).

The helpful thing about this picture of a new relationship in Christ is that we can all understand how readily someone would want to make the change from an unhappy existence into a new life with a loving and caring partner. People change when they get married and learn to live together; that's what makes marriage such an exciting and enjoyable experience. But they change because they want to please their partner and because they learn together how best to live in a way which shows their love for one another. The change is not something they *have* to do; it's something they *want* to do, because of love.

That's how it is with baptism. We do change after we have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as our partner for life. The idea that we are married to him is an idea the apostle uses again (Ephesians 5:22-33) and it is a Bible-long theme that those who establish a relationship with God are as though they were married to Him. It makes this new relationship sound wonderfully close to both Father and Son, when we seek to live “*in the new life of the Spirit*” (7:6).

❖ **God's Children (8:14-29)**

The third picture Paul uses is one we have all experienced because we are all somebody's children. He uses the idea of the family to help us realise that when we are baptized into Christ we become God's children, members of his family and brothers and sisters in Christ. God has begotten only one Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, but in association with him through baptism we are adopted into the same family:

*“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs** – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (8:12-17).*

Notice that here Paul takes the trouble to mention that we should not think of ourselves as slaves who have been bought by a Master. If our minds are properly attuned to what God is doing with us and in us, we will realise that God has adopted us as His children. We too become His sons and daughters. By saying that we can address God as “*Abba! Father*”, the apostle tells us just how special this new relationship really is, for the language is that which a child would use when speaking to his or her father. A modern equivalent would be “Daddy”; it's that close a relationship that is on offer.

❖ **“Led by the Spirit of God”**

We haven't yet looked at what the Bible means by the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit as it is sometimes described. We have reached that point in the Letter to the Romans where Paul begins to talk a lot about it, so we need to begin to think about what it means. So far in the letter Paul has only made three references to the Spirit, as follows:

- 1 “... his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to **the Spirit of holiness** by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:3,4);

2 “God is my witness, whom **I serve with my spirit** in the gospel of his Son” (1:9);

3 “A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, **by the Spirit, not by the letter**. His praise is not from man but from God” (2:29).

These three references give us a helpful starting-off point, because the word translated “spirit” in both Old and New Testaments has a range of different meanings. Sometimes it relates to us and sometimes to God or to the Lord Jesus. We’ll take them one at a time:

✓ **Romans 1:3,4**

God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead by using His power and might. That is made very clear in a series of verses you might want to look up.

As in many other places in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is declared to be the power of God in action – you could say it describes “God at work”. But you will notice that Paul called it the “*Spirit of holiness*” in Romans 1:4, not only because God is holy and this is His power, but because the power of God was being specially directed to achieve holiness. God raised His Son from the dead so that His great plan of salvation would be made available to mankind, who could thereby become holy and righteous in His sight.

✓ **Romans 1:9**

When Paul said that he serves God with “*my spirit*”, he meant that he was using *his* mind and all *his* faculties – what you could call “*the inner man*” – to do the best he could for God. He was not just using his body in service but everything he possessed. The Bible talks a lot about the spirit of man, both to describe the life-force we have, which comes from God, and the way our mind and affections operate, for good or ill.

✓ **Romans 2:29**

We have not yet looked at the special role of the Jew in the purpose of God, except to note that Abraham’s offspring were to be a special nation. Here Paul is saying that what makes someone special in the sight of God is not what has been done to him outwardly but what happens to him or her inside. In the same way, it was not the outward code of laws given by God which was meant to make the Jews special. It was their response to that law which would have changed their thinking first and then their doing. Here “*the Spirit*” means that inward change that God wants to achieve in the hearts and minds of His people. It is something to be achieved by a change in the way we think and feel.

❖ **The Inner Man**

Chapters 7 and 8 of Romans are all about the fundamental change that needs to take place within a baptized believer. God wants us to be holy within and then to live in a way which *shows* the change that has come about inside our hearts and minds. That can’t happen overnight; it is a process that takes a while to achieve and with which we need God’s help. Paul says that his life after baptism started with quite a struggle inside himself. It was as though he was at war inside!

Romans chapter 7 describes this struggle. Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without effort and our nature, inherited from Adam, is not inclined towards God, but is in opposition to His will. Mankind has become so accustomed to having its own way that changing direction takes some doing. This is how Paul described the change then taking place in his own life:

*“We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but **sin that dwells within me**. For I know that **nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh**. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. **For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members**. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:14-24).

This is another of those fact-filled passages that requires some careful analysis and you may be surprised by what you discover.

Paul describes his nature in several different ways:

- ✓ “of the flesh, sold under sin”
 - ✓ “sin that dwells within me”
 - ✓ “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”
 - ✓ “sin that dwells within me”
 - ✓ “the law of sin that dwells in my members”
 - ✓ “this body of death.”
- He sees another principle at work, however, which he describes as “*the law of my mind*”. His own desire is to do God’s will; to do what is right, to do good, to obey the law of God.
- The apostle asks for deliverance from this wretched state.
- Nowhere does the apostle talk about the Devil or Satan as the problem he has to overcome. Indeed, there is no reference to the Devil at all in the Letter to the Romans, and only one mention of Satan, which we have already considered. The problem of sin is deep-rooted in the human condition.

❖ Holiness Within

Paul is not left in the wretched state he has just described and neither is any baptized believer. God has a plan and purpose which achieves what it sets out to accomplish. He wants people to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, and that means being holy and without fault in His presence. It’s not going to be an overnight transformation because becoming holy takes time and ultimately it requires a change of nature. For look at the end result: God “*is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy*” (Jude 1:24).

How can it be done? How does the process of achieving holiness change the way we think, feel and behave? That is what the apostle now explains in Romans chapter 8.

The transformation starts with forgiveness and with our realisation that once we have been baptized, and have a saving faith by which we live, the sacrifice of Christ releases us from the power of sin. This is a terrific thing to realise and appreciate. It means that instead of being condemned criminals in the sight of God, we are forgiven sinners who have a living and abiding relationship with Him. This realisation leads to a remarkable change of mind as, over time, we come to understand more and more about God’s purpose and the great love that God and Jesus have towards us. The outcome is a growing confidence that the God who has begun to work with us will continue until He has completed that work.

These are some of the comments the apostle made as he pondered the change that he knew was taking place in him, and you can still hear the wonder and amazement he felt as he contemplated it:

*“There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has **set you free** in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (8:1,2);*

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but **those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit**. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (8:5,6);*

*“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But **if Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, **the Spirit is life because of righteousness**. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (8:9-11);*

*“And we know that **for those who love God all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose” (8:28);*

*“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? **Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, **nor anything else***

in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord
(8:31-39).

❖ **Living “according to the Spirit”**

These are extracts from the chapter and you may want to read all of what Paul said, although we will be looking at some other parts later. We noted earlier that the apostle referred to the Spirit just three times in the early chapters. His use of that term now increases dramatically and he uses it in a lot of different ways. His theme is the change that comes about within the believer as a result of a saving faith and baptism into the name of Jesus. Previously he has explained how we can be baptized “*into Christ*”, now he wants to tell us how Christ can be formed in us – how we can start to live the way he did.

Here are the different terms Paul uses when describing what the believer’s new life is like:

- ✓ **“in Christ Jesus”** (8:1,2)
- ✓ “the law of the Spirit of life” (8:2)
- ✓ “walk ... according to the Spirit” (8:4)
- ✓ “the Spirit” (8:5)
- ✓ “set the mind on the Spirit” (8:6)
- ✓ “in the Spirit” (8:9)
- ✓ “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (8:9,14)
- ✓ “the Spirit of Christ” (8:9)
- ✓ **“Christ in you”** (8:10)
- ✓ “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (8:11)
- ✓ “by the Spirit” (8:13)
- ✓ not “the spirit of slavery” (8:15) but “the Spirit of adoption” (8:15)
- ✓ “our spirit” (8:16)
- ✓ “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (8:23)
- ✓ “the mind of the Spirit” (8:27)
- ✓ “the Spirit intercedes” (8:27)
- ✓ “the Holy Spirit” (9:1)

At first glance this might appear a confusing selection of different terms, but we have learned how helpful it can be to analyse our findings and thus understand them better. Stand back from the detail and ask yourself what it is that Paul is writing about. He is writing about *the new life in Christ*. His theme is: What does it feel like inside when a person has been baptized into Christ and has changed his or her relationship with God?

❖ **Being Spiritually Minded**

We have seen that the first reaction is to wonder how to overcome temptation and how to be successful living as a Christian. ‘Not by personal achievement’ the apostle concludes (in chapter 7); it will result in despair if we try to ‘go it alone’. We have to become spiritually minded:

*“Walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their **minds** on the things of the Spirit. To set the **mind** on the flesh is death, but to set the **mind** on the Spirit is life and peace. For the **mind** that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:4-8).*

The things we think about are crucial in our journey to God’s kingdom. We have to turn from the things that naturally attract us and develop new appetites and desires for the things that please God. We are “*in Christ*” because we have been baptized; now we want Christ “*in us*.” Note those two different phrases in the above list, which have been picked out in bold type.

So how do we achieve that? By being “*born of the Spirit*” – spiritual rebirth, that’s how! The “*law of the Spirit of life*” (8:3) is the gospel and when we understand and believe the gospel we begin to “*walk according to the Spirit*”, “*set our minds on the Spirit*”, let the “*Spirit of God dwell in us*”.

The gospel is “*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:20) and when that power begins to work in someone’s mind it begins to change their understanding and to alter the direction their lives take. Paul said that they had “*become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed*” (6:17). This means that the gospel must start to change the way we feel about things as well. Baptism cleanses the conscience and purifies our innermost feelings and desires. It starts the process of making our life a fit dwelling place for God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ God at Work

Letting Scripture interpret Scripture, as we have learned to do, we find the same apostle explaining the same things when writing to the believers in Ephesus, a city in the Roman province of Asia Minor. He assured them that they would not have to live as Christians by themselves, without any help from God, but that the Father would continue to work with them to achieve their salvation. This is what he said:

*“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you **a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him**, having the eyes of your hearts **enlightened**, that you may know what is the **hope** to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:16-20).*

The key idea here for us is that God will help us to overcome through wisdom and knowledge. He has given us His Word so that we can be enlightened, and can increasingly understand the hope that we have been given. God will work together with us on this joint enterprise and we will be companying with the Lord Jesus Christ as we tread the path to God’s Kingdom. We have our part to do, but we are not without help and our helper wields all the power that is necessary to bring us to salvation. This power is the same power that first achieved the salvation and exaltation of the Lord Jesus – the power of resurrection: the power of God directed to achieve holiness.



*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:12,13).*

This work of God will reach its final phase when, at the coming of Jesus, the power of God will be openly revealed and the mortal bodies of baptized believers will be changed to spiritual bodies, like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the same letter to the Philippians, the apostle considers that time:

*“We await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, **by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”** (3:20,21).*

All this is what the apostle is writing about in Romans chapter 8, including that transformation which he there calls *“the revealing of the sons of God”* and *“the redemption of our bodies”* (8:19,23). We will return to that subject in a later chapter, but first we need to look a little more at the subject of God’s Holy Spirit, and the way it works in other ways as well.

Things to Read

-  As we have been thinking about Romans chapter 8, and will be returning to it later, reading that chapter, or reading it again, should be really helpful.
-  If you didn’t read Ephesians chapter 2 at the start of this chapter, read it now, and notice the careful comparison the apostle makes between how things were without Christ and how they can be once we accept him as our Lord and Saviour.

Questions to Answer

- 15.1 What does Paul mean in Romans chapter 8 when he contrasts living *“in the flesh”* with living *“in the Spirit”*? (8:1-11)
- 15.2 What did Jesus mean when he told Nicodemus (in John chapter 3) that he must be *“born again”*? Was he referring to baptism or to something else as well?