

## Handout: Romans Chapter 7

### **BIBLICAL EVENTS WHICH PREFIGURE BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*Christ himself died once and for all for sins, the upright for the sake of the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. They refused to believe long ago, while God patiently waited to receive them, in Noah's time when the ark was being built. In it only a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water. It is the baptism corresponding to this water which saves you now... 1 Peter 3:18-21*

Biblical events that prefigured our baptism in Christ:

| <b>SCRIPTURE<br/>PASSAGE</b>                    | <b>EVENT</b>  |
|---|---|
| Genesis 1:1-2                                   | 1. Creation: when the Holy Spirit brought life and order to the waters of chaos.  |
| Genesis 6:9-18<br>1 Peter 3:20-21               | 2. Noah and his family were saved from the waters of the flood that cleansed the earth of sin, which St. Peter tells us prefigures our baptism in 1 Peter 3: 20-21.   |
| Exodus 14:1<br>1 Corinthians 10:1-2             | 3. The children of Israel, fleeing from the Egyptians, passed through the waters of the Red Sea—passing from the old life of slavery into their new life as God's Covenant people; which St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 is a form of baptism.  |
| Exodus 30:17-21<br>Numbers 19:11-13             | 4. The water purification rites of the Old Covenant:<br>-When the priests cleansed themselves with the water from the laver so that they were ritually cleansed and able to enter the Holy Place of the desert Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem.<br>-The ritual purification for coming in contact with the dead. |
| 2 Kings 5:1-19                                  | 5. When the prophet Elisha told the Syrian general Naaman to dip himself 7 times in the waters of the Jordan River to be healed.  |
| Ezekiel 36:24-27                                | 6. Ezekiel's prophecy that Yahweh will pour clean water over His people and they will be cleansed and filled with a new heart and a new spirit when God places His very spirit within them.   |
| Joshua 3:14-17                                  | 7. The crossing of the Jordan River when God parted the waters and the priests stood midway across the River with the Ark of the Covenant as the children of Israel passed through the waters of the Jordan, leaving their old lives behind to become citizens of the Promised Land.  |
| Mathew 3:4-5; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3-4; John 1:31 | 8. The baptism of John the Baptist which called the faithful of Israel into the baptismal waters of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah's ministry proclaiming the Kingdom of God.  |

The first catechism of the Church, known as the *Didache*, or “The Teaching”, written not later than 120AD records: *Regarding baptism. Baptize as follows: after first explaining all these points, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot in cold, then in warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, let the baptizer and the candidate for baptism fast, as well as any others that are able. Require the candidate to fast one or two days previously.*” [ *Didache*, 7. 1-4 ].

**Please notice that no where in these instructions is it permitted to baptize without water!** Jesus taught that no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through “water and the Spirit.” In Titus 3:4-8 St. Paul instructs St. Titus: “*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior for humanity were revealed, it was not because of any upright actions we had done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own faithful love that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, justified by his grace, we should become heirs in hope of eternal life. This is doctrine that you can rely on.*” Paul’s statement reaffirms Jesus’ instruction to Nicodemus in John 3:3-3-6: “*In all truth [amen, amen] I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. [...]. In all truth [amen, amen] I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human, what is born of the Spirit is spirit.*”

A profession of faith does not replace water baptism as the spiritual rebirth into the family of God [see John 3:5 and for more information see the study on the Gospel of St. John chapter 3]. Faith is the first step in the process of salvation and baptism is the second step in what is a life long journey toward eternal salvation.

The necessity of water in the Sacrament of Baptism: CCC # 694; 1213-17; 1228; 1238-39; Infant baptism = CCC# 1252

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## Handout #2: Romans chapter 7

Martin Luther's doctrine of salvation is based on passages from Romans chapter 7:14-23 concerning how flesh and spirit wrestle. As a Catholic priest Luther was tormented by his inability to overcome his fallen nature. His failure, he concluded, was from an inability to overcome his fallen condition because man is depraved and simply cannot avoid sin. The doctrine he formulated came to be known as the doctrine of "total depravity." Luther reasoned that human nature is so steeped in sin that sin is unavoidable and man's only hope for salvation is through confessing his faith and believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior. He became convinced that even our good works are nothing but "filthy rags" and therefore cannot count towards our salvation. He also became convinced that faith alone, the "cloak of righteousness," covers the sins that corrupt the soul of man and to support this doctrine he changed the Bible text to reflect this belief in Romans 3:28, *salvation by faith alone*, adding the word "alone" in contradiction to James 2:24.

The problem with Luther's position is that it denies free will. The English Catholic statesman, St. Sir Thomas Moore, who was a contemporary of Luther, in response to Luther's teachings argued that as a result of this doctrine of total depravity: *the evil in the world is ascribed to God and not to His creatures*. Scholar Gerard Wegemer writes that St. Thomas More observed: *At the same time, the 'one special thing' they use to spice everything else is a doctrine of liberty that teaches that 'having faith, they need nothing else.'* Wegemer continues that Moore concluded Luther's denial of free will *plainly sets forth all the world to wretched living*. Moore argued that if there is no "free will" and our actions are not within our own control there is no incentive to struggle against the temptation to sin. In addition, if our actions make no difference in the outcome of our salvation then why should we even care? St. Thomas More considered Luther's denial of the doctrine of "free will" to be *the very worst and most mischievous heresy that was ever thought upon, and also the most mad* (*Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage*, Gerard Wegemer, Scepter, pages 123-25).

Martin Luther's denial of man's free will remains a stumbling block for many Protestant Christians today. This misinterpretation of Romans chapter 7 is especially harmful to the state of Protestant Christian salvation when united with the false doctrine "once saved always saved." God calls us to use our free will to choose between what is good and holy and what is harmful and evil. It is the call of "perfection" that Christ called every Christians to live in the Sermon on the Mount when He said in Matthew 5:48: *Be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect.* We strive for moral perfection in order to be united more perfectly to our heavenly Father by imaging in our lives the purity of the Jesus Christ living in us. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: *The way of perfection passes by way of the cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism [self-denial] and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes* (CCC# 2015).

We were all born with the tendency to sin. It is an open wound on the spirit of humanity which came about as a result of original sin. We were forgiven original sin and all

personal sin in our baptism and rebirth into the family of God but the stain of sin remains in the form of our concupiscence, our tendency to sin. Paul taught that we make up for this deficiency in the suffering of Christ [Colossians 1:24] where we offer our struggles, sufferings and good works to Jesus where they are multiplied and united with His and help toward our salvation and the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church: *It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church...* Jesus willingly suffered in order to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and anyone who is called through baptism to continue His work must share in this suffering. Paul is not saying that he has added to the redemptive value of the cross or that Jesus' suffering was incomplete. He is instead uniting himself to Christ's Passion through the trials he faces in his apostolate. This is part of God's plan for the development and growth of the Church as the Body of Christ. Luther's "dunghill" of humanity is for the Catholic fertile soil to allow the works of Christ to work through us in our joys and in our sufferings. Our cooperation with God's grace is what allows the miracle of grace to produce "good fruit"—God's works working in our lives and yielding a harvest of blessings. We are transformed and Christ dwelling within us overcomes our fallen natures and our tendency to sin. We cannot overcome sin and do works of righteousness on our own. We need God's grace through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. **Grace perfects nature** and our nature is strengthened by the practice of virtue, *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come* (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are not covered, we are transformed and we must live as though our transformation has the power to generate goodness as God's will lives in us.

But, what about free will? Can the Christian of his own free will rupture that union?

**Question:** Compare the list in Romans 8:35-36 and 38-39 with the list in Romans 1:26-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Is the Romans 8 list a list of sins or trials?

**Answer:** Paul is listing trials not sins in 8:35-38—a clear distinction from what he had to say about the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The misinterpretation of this passage led Martin Luther to believe that even sin couldn't separate us from Jesus Christ. Luther concluded that man suffered from a total depravity of nature but Christ's sacrificial death covered our sinful nature like snow covers a dunghill. This is a doctrine the Catholic Church rejects. Catholics believe that we are not simply covered, as in the covering of sins in the Old Testament but that we are reborn and transformed. Our new life in the Spirit provides the fertile soil in which the Holy Spirit continues to provide Christian growth as long as we seek to imitate Christ in our lives.

Some Protestant churches, confused in their understanding of faith and works, have come to understand through the teachings of Martin Luther that nothing, not even sin can separate us from our salvation. Some Protestant churches have understood this doctrine to mean once one is "saved" their salvation is eternally secure. This is often called the doctrine of "eternal security" or "security of the believer." Luther did not see sin as a hindrance to salvation as long as one prayed and confessed sins [quoting from the letters of Martin Luther]:

- *It does not matter what people do; it only matters what they believe. God does not need our actions (Luther's Works, Erlangen, vol. 29, page 126).*

- *Be a sinner and sin boldly, but have stronger faith and rejoice in Christ, who is the victor of sin, death, and the world. Do not for a moment imagine that this life is the abiding place of justice: Sin must be committed—sin cannot tear you away from him, even though you commit adultery a hundred times a day and commit as many murders (Letter from Luther to Melancthon, August 1, 1521).*

Luther was not advocating sinning so grace could abound all the more but that repentance eliminated all the stain of sin and offered complete restoration with no ill effects, and as long as one prayed and confessed the sin the sin could not cost one's salvation to be lost since the sin had already been forgiven by Jesus through His sacrifice on the Cross. Luther believed that so long as one was truly "saved" through a profession of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord—salvation through "faith alone"—one was saved no matter what the sin. St. John the Apostle, however, taught that not all sins can be healed by prayer. Read 1 John 3:3-10; 5:16, and CCC# 1854-61. Mortal sin requires confession to a priest who hears the confession "in the person of Christ". Sin can be forgiven, even mortal sin, but the accountability for sin must also be addressed through an act of penance. Forgiveness is one thing but accountability is another. Confession, genuine contrition, forgiveness and an act of penance are all necessary for restoration of fellowship with God.

Some of our Protestant brothers and sisters point to Romans 8:38 as a proof text for the doctrine of "eternal security" or "security of the believer": *For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.* But this verse speaks of God's love not our salvation, and this verse lists demons [principalities], and angels, and things of creation but it does not list sin. To each of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, which represent in the "perfect" number 7, representing in essence all the churches that form the one true Church of Jesus Christ, Jesus warns that only those who persevere to the end and "prove victorious" will receive the gift of salvation. If salvation is already assured why is such a warning necessary and why is there a need for perseverance?

St. Paul certainly warned the faithful of the Christian churches in his letters that they must guard their salvation:

- *Philippians 2:12: So dear friends, you have always been obedient; your obedience must not be limited to times when I am present. Now that I am absent it must be more in evidence, so **work out your salvation in fear and trembling.***
- *2 Corinthians 5:9-10: For at the judgment seat of Christ we are all to be seen for what we are, so that each of us may receive what he has deserved in the body, matched to whatever he has done, good or bad.*
- *Romans 2:6-9: For those who aimed for glory and honor and immortality by persevering in doing good, there will be eternal life; but for those who out of jealousy have taken for their guide not truth but injustice, there will be the fury of retribution.*

- Romans 11:22: *Remember God's severity as well as his goodness; his severity to those who fell, and his goodness to you as long as you persevere in it; **if not, you too will be cut off.***

Paul writes of safeguarding his own salvation as one who is running a race with a clear goal—that goal being salvation. He concludes the passage by writing: *I punish my body and bring it under control, to avoid any risk that, having acted as herald for others, I myself may be disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27).

And just prior to this passage in Romans 8:38-39 Paul wrote in Romans 8:24-25: *In hope we already have salvation; in hope, not visibly present, or we should not be hoping—nobody goes on hoping for something which he can already see. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait for it with persevering confidence.* Paul is writing that we “hope” for heaven because, no matter if we have been justified through out baptism and faithful in our journey to ultimate salvation, we know we still have a change to lose it through our own free will by entering into sin. We must therefore; cling to the promises of Christ, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God and only we can separate ourselves from the salvation Christ has won for us.

*Spiritual souls are not separated by torments, but carnal souls are sometimes separated by idle gossip. The cruel sword cannot separate the former, but carnal affections remove the latter. Nothing hard breaks down spiritual men, but even flattering words corrupt the carnal.* Caesarius of Arles [470-542], *Sermons* 82.2

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