

life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

A rather important issue that divides expositors of this portion of the epistle is whether this segment refers to water baptism or Spirit baptism.

Since this passage is dealing with the justified person's continuance in sinning (verse 1), and since this baptism is connected with death to sin (verses 2-4), the question must be asked, "If this is referring to water baptism, does water baptism, either in itself, or by means of the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit, accomplish the death to sin being spoken of? Does water baptism bring about this death to sin?"

Of course, one may say that this is referring to positional death to sin, and that water baptism symbolizes this death to sin. The only problem is that Paul says that this baptism of which he is speaking actually brings about the death to sin of which he is speaking! And very few who view this passage as referring to water baptism would wish to hold that water baptism brings about even our positional death to sin!

If this passage refers to Spirit baptism, what is spirit baptism? Simply put, Spirit baptism is the act of the Holy Spirit in uniting us to Christ by faith. The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ and to the benefits of His atonement.

This baptism is instrumental. It actually brings us into saving relationship to Christ and unites us to the benefits which He has purchased for us. And interestingly, water baptism can signify and symbolize this.

In verse 2 Paul says that we died to sin. How did we die to sin? "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death." Paul is not saying that we died on the cross and rose out of the tomb (Christ alone did that), but that just as Christ died and rose again physically so we died and rose again spiritually. Of course, this is true only for those who have been baptized into Christ, those who have been united to Christ by the Holy Spirit through faith.

This union with Christ is foundational, basic, crucial to each step in sanctification. If we are not joined to Christ, we cannot share in the benefits of His saving work. If we are united to Christ, we have already begun to share in the blessings of salvation, and need to consider what steps to take to enter in even more fully. This brings us to the first step in sanctification.