

Sermon 41: Romans 6:5-6: Crucified with Christ

OUTLINE

Union with Christ

Crucified with Christ

INTRODUCTION

One of the sad memories I have of South Africa is from my late teens to early twenties. I didn't get my license to drive until I was 23 and until then I used to walk, hitch-hike and catch the local taxis. This took me down many back roads, through velds and I had a lot of contact with the Black folk. I was always keen to engage in conversation and it wouldn't be long until the older men around 70 years old would call me 'Baas'. Nelson Mandela was President, the ANC was the ruling power, the NP was overturned and the black people were now in power, and yet they still called me 'Baas'. I would insist that I am not their boss that we are equals, and if anything given the new government I should be calling them 'Baas.' These memories are sad because I am amazed at their gentleness and humility and because they were not thinking in terms of the new situation they were in, but continued to think as if the old government with its ways was still in power. Their greatest dreams had been realized but they carried on living as if nothing had changed. The truth is this slowness to come to grips with, and live out of a new state of affairs is a problem most Christians face. The truth that we have died to sin, that we are resurrected with Christ, that the old self has been crucified and we are now filled with the Spirit and to walk in the new lives we have been brought into. The truth of who we are in Christ and the life of holiness we are to live are slow in coming, even though we live in a new state of affairs.

It is these very important truths that Paul is dealing with as we continue our look at Romans 6. You will remember that Paul is answering the charge that the Gospel of grace does not encourage sin but in fact kills it. Last time we looked at this passage we saw that our baptisms are an illustration of what happens to anyone who is born again, they die and live with Christ. Living in sin is impossible and holiness is possible because we have experienced a union with Christ which includes a union with His death and resurrection. These truths are of immense significance for our holiness but are slow to be believed and acted upon for two reasons: firstly, ignorance. We read the Bible we see the words but we don't know what they mean. Secondly, confusion. Many of us have heard a lot of false teaching about how to be holy. Every second movement is offering a silver bullet to give us that edge so that we can live the victorious Christian life. As we work our way through this vital chapter I am hoping to dispel the ignorance and the confusion. I want to show us that everything that we need for holiness is already ours in Christ. I am hoping in our exposition of this chapter to deal with all of the main aspects of what the Bible teaches about holiness. Those things that we need to know and do in order to live a Christlike life. Today we are going to address two massive realities that are foundational to our holiness. Without the truths we are going to be considering today holiness of life is impossible. Union with Christ and the crucifixion of our old selves, these are the truths.

Now before we get our teeth into our designated text let's take a quick top view so that we get the generalities as well as the particulars. Paul is demonstrating why it is impossible that a Christian live in sin 1-2. He has appealed to the reality of our dying and living with Christ that our baptisms illustrate 3-4. This is an instant God wrought reality in the life of every believer, not just the extra holy. Verses 5-10 make up the next chunk of thought. Verse 5 is a restatement about our union with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the rest of the section is an expounding of the implications of this. Verses 6-7 unfold the idea of dying with Christ; and 8-10 the idea of rising with Christ. V 11 is a very important verse for what we are considering because Paul tells us, 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' The key word is 'consider' which means to reckon something to be true, to understand something to be the case, to realise a new state of affairs. This is exactly what we are concerned to do, we want to realise/reckon/consider the implications for our holiness; what it means that we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

United with Christ

First up we want to consider v5, 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' Please notice with me Paul's method. He wants to promote a life of holiness, but first he turns to doctrine, to the doctrine of union with Christ. Like an Architect he first addresses the foundation, and then builds upon it. The foundation is the teaching that we are united with Christ. This is something that has happened to every person who is born again at the moment they are born again. It is something invisible that we need to have explained to us, it is something that has happened spiritually that lies outside our ability to penetrate with the senses to give a full explanation of. And without this vital foundation the life of holiness that we are to live would be absolutely impossible. Following on from what he has shown baptism to illustrate, Paul lays out the thought conditionally; notice the word 'if.' If we are united with Christ then certain things must necessarily follow. Before we map out the implications of what must occur if we are united with Christ let's first consider the idea of union with Christ in the first place.

The Bible teaches us four ways in which we are united with Christ.

Firstly, there is the predestinarian sense in which we are united with Christ. This is taught in verses like Eph 1:4-5, 'even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.' This is talking about that moment in eternity past when God considered us for salvation in Christ. We were not physically present as if in some type of time leap. No, we were being considered united with Christ in the mind of God. In other words our salvation, even when it was contemplated before creation by God was done in Christ not apart from Him.

Secondly, we can speak of representative union. This was when Christ as our substitute was living and dying on our behalf as our representative and federal head. Like the High

Priest going into the holy place with the 12 stones on his breast, so Christ was representing us in His life and death. We were not physically present with Christ when He represented us, but we were legally present as He represented us.

Thirdly, we speak of existential union. This is that moment when someone is born again and they enter existentially, that is in their experience, into the life and death of Christ. This is the moment that Paul is talking in Romans 6. He also talks about it in Eph 2:5-6, 'even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ---by grace you have been saved--- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' He also talks about it in Colossians 3:1-3, 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.' It is this union that is the foundation for so much in our Christian experience. Justification is the legal aspect of our being united with Christ so that we are seen as part of Him and thereby His righteousness is credited to us. Sanctification is the transformative aspect of our union with Christ where we are made to partake of His life in definitive sanctification, experiencing the breach with sin in His death; and on-going transformation into the likeness of His character in progressive sanctification. Adoption is the filial aspect of our union with Christ where in His Adamic sonship He is the first of many brothers. We have often seen these doctrines on their own and abstracted from Christ, but really it is union with Christ which gives the reality behind these teachings and enriches our understanding of them when we see them in their relation to union with Christ.

Fourthly, there is eschatological union. There will be a day when we will be united with Christ forever; to dwell with Him in real and unbroken fellowship deepening our communion with Him for all eternity. This will be a time when every veil will be finally torn away. The veil of ignorance, the veil of sin, the veil of separation it will all be gone and we will dwell in the presence of God forever. The Westminster Larger Catechism question 90 puts it like this:

'Q. 90. What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgement?

- A. At the day of judgement, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on His right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with Him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and in soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all of eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and the day of judgement.'

Paul says that dying and rising with Christ and the future certainty of this wonderful resurrection is ours 'if' we are indeed united with Christ. We are not born to our mothers united to Christ. No, when born we are alienated from Christ, strangers to God. It is only when we are united to Christ by faith that these benefits are ours. It is not our baptisms that unite us to Christ but the Spirit when we hear and believe the Gospel. Some have been baptized as children but let me make very clear that baptism does not affect union with Christ. People who have been baptised as children are not united to Christ by their baptisms. The only form of being united to Christ the NT speaks about is the spiritual one that includes a resurrection from the dead in regeneration and a dying to the power of sin. Baptism is the outward showing of those who have indeed been raised from spiritual death to life in new birth.

Paul makes an application of the relevance of having died with Christ for us in the second half of v5, 'we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' If we have died with Christ in being united to Him by the Spirit. This is only the beginning of our salvation, the end is guaranteed, we will also most certainly resurrected with Him. Paul can't keep from talking about the certainty of our futures and the security of our position in Christ. However, Paul is not content to merely show how Christ's resurrection secures our future but is engaged in a discussion about how being raised with Christ affects our holiness in the present. He will extrapolate on this idea in v8-10.

We have seen so far that if we have put our faith in Christ we have been united to Him. This means an existential participation in His dying and resurrection. The first implication we have seen is that our final resurrection is guaranteed but how does our union with Christ's life and death affect our ability to be holy now?

Paul begins to answer this question in v6

Crucified with Christ

'We know that our old self was crucified with Christ.' We are concerning ourselves with those truths that we are slow to grasp and implement, but Paul begins with these words, 'we know.' We know that our old selves have been crucified! Do you know this, do you know what this means?

The two phrases which have proven to be the most misunderstood in this portion are 'old self' and 'body of sin'. Let's begin by examining what old self does not mean. Paul does not mean that the old self is the old Nick, and that in crucifying the old self I am no longer me. Nor is Paul suggesting by this language that we have a new self and an old self dwelling in one person, a type of hypostatic union of two natures. It is true that we still have indwelling sin, but Paul is not referring to our remaining sin by the term 'old self'. Paul has been drawing a contrast between who we were in Adam and who we are now in Christ, of being under the reign of sin but are now under the reign of grace. The old self is who I was in Adam. We must not think of the old self as the old Nick but rather as the Adamic Nick. The contrast is not between the new and old me, but what I was in Adam and what I am in

Christ. The emphasis is not merely on me and what I was but where I was under the dominion of sin. I am no longer in Adam is the intent, not I am no longer Nick. I am very much who I used to be, but now I am under the reign of grace in Christ not the reign of sin in Adam.

Let me open this up a little more. What was our condition in Adam? We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were under the condemnation of the law. We were alienated from God. We were the playthings of Satan at the mercy of his power to tempt us. And we were slaves to our desires, puppets on a string. That is what we were in Adam. But that old self has been crucified, he has been put to death, and just as death ends a marriage death ended my citizenship in Adam and now I am in Christ not Adam. So no longer am I dead in trespasses and sins but I have experienced a resurrection in being born again. I am no longer under the condemnation of the law but justified. No longer am I alienated from God but I have been adopted. No longer am I under Satan's dominion but have been translated in the kingdom of God's Son. And no longer am I a slave to sin but a temple of the Holy Spirit. We were citizens of a kingdom on our father Adam's passport, but then we were adopted into a new family and a new citizenship and all of the old laws that bound us, the old jurisdiction that was over us, all of the old records against us and the oppressive conditions are now over. We are now on Christ's passport and have all the new benefits of a citizen of His kingdom.

The process of crucifying the old self was not a long drawn out procedure, but I was instantly taken out of Adam into Christ. When it comes to living in Adam or Christ there is no dual citizenship. It was an action that God did and I do not do for myself. This is important to emphasize for there are those who talk about crucifixion being a long drawn out process of torture, but Paul is using the words of crucifixion to indicate death not torture. To indicate a finality to the end of that era by a death not a life-long process of sanctification. To confuse the crucifixion of our old selves with the process of becoming holy is to undermine what Christ has done on the cross for us. We must not muddy the water of this fact that we are dead in Christ. We have died legally and this also has implication for our being dead to the power of sin as well. To say we are still in part alive is to say we are still in part in Adam and as long as we say that we introduce doubts and uncertainties about our final salvation. And when we do this we are inviting numberless problems to our Christian lives.

The key application to this truth as it relates to holiness is given to us by Paul himself in the second part of v6, 'in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.' And here is the real rub of what we are wanting to look at. In Christ we have died and resurrected. This means that we are no longer under the legal conditions of Adam as being guilty, alienated and under the devil's jurisdiction. However, the gospel is so wonderful it not only deals with the guilt of sin but also the effects of sin. For example, the Gospel provides for new bodies that will not have all of the sinful inclinations that we presently experience. One day when Jesus comes again we will have glorified bodies just like His. But here is the fantastic news that Paul is sharing with us: although we will only be fully free from the effects of sin in our bodies when we are one

day glorified, we have experienced a break with the power of sin so that although sin still dwells in us, we are able to put it to death. We will never experience perfection but we can experience progress.

Paul is wanting to show us some of the present benefits for holiness that our dying with Christ has. It has the present implications of the body of sin being made ineffective so that the former enslavement to sin can be put off. Let's examine some of these phrases more closely. Firstly, 'body of sin'. This refers to the body not as God originally made it, for He made it good. No this is a description of our bodies when we were unbelievers as they are dominated by sin's desires so that we are fully enslaved by them. Paul is telling us that having been crucified with Christ so that we are no longer dead but alive, no longer under Satan but free in Christ, and no longer a puppet on a string but filled with the Spirit the old ways of being dominated by sin are even now able to be thrown off. Secondly, 'might be brought to nothing.' This can also be translated rendered powerless. Our bodies are now temples of Christ 1 Cor 6:15-20. They are no longer the property of sin. Therefore they are no longer free to serve sin's purposes. We have been removed from sin's employment, and in this way we are no longer its slaves. This does not mean that we cannot become enslaved, but that our legal contract of employment is terminated, and we have been removed from the premises. A Christian should not go back into the employ of sin we will throw our labour away. This phrase indicates the weakened state of the power of sin over us, that we are able to fight and win putting to death sins in the body and nurturing the fruits of the Spirit. Thirdly, 'so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.' Paul is not only talking about the future when our bodies are glorified the whole purpose of his present discussion is to show that the Christian cannot live in sin now. Paul is informing us that those old ways where we found ourselves enslaved to sins that were destructive can now be overcome. This does not mean that we no longer feel the lure of sin, or that we cannot be addicted to it, but rather it indicates a death blow to sin that now enables us to overcome it by the help of the Spirit.

This means that God has not only provided for the guilt of sin and the final removal of all sin in the end, but a real war with sin where progress can be made. As we consider this new reality there are two extremes that we need to constantly guard against. There is the extreme of perfectionism. If we think that victory comes without a fight and forget the remaining sin still in our bodies resisting us as we have to wage war for every inch we are naïve and will be wildly depressed very soon. We are not announcing a way of Christianity that will make every other Christian feel inferior because they can't stop sinning, no we will continue to strive against sin and fall into it until we are finally glorified. We are not promising an easy ride but certain progress. The other extreme is defeatism. There are those who are happy for their sins being forgiven who have been told that we are sinners until the day we die and so they put their feet up and resign themselves to a mediocre existence not applying themselves, not expecting much return. This too is wrong and a great discredit to the reality that Paul is revealing to us.

This is something that every single one of us needs to hear. Perhaps as you have been listening you will have been thinking, 'oh, I was never a drug addict or an alcoholic so this is

not important for me.' This message is not only for those who are addicted to different substances but for all of us because we are all addicted to sin. Do you find yourself as a parent overcome with anger and impatience at the mistakes of your children? Do you find yourself in the grip of a sullen mood that darkens your dealings with all around you? Do you constantly think of what a better car, better house, better wife, better life you could have? Do you find yourself deeply critical of others bearing resentment and openly slander them? In Adam these sins would dominate and control us, they would drown us and take our behaviour captive to their purposes resulting in child abuse, verbal/emotional/physical; in adultery, gambling, becoming a workaholic, a shopaholic, and constantly discontent and envious wishing bad on other people who have better things and privileges than you. However, in Christ we are able to not allow these continuing temptations to control us, to nip them in the bud, to nurture the fruits of the Spirit in their place.

In war morale plays a very large part in how the soldiers perform. Tired soldiers who are wounded find themselves able to push the limits of their endurance if they know that the tide of the battle has turned and victory is imminent. Nothing demoralizes an army more than knowing that they are fighting a war they cannot win. Friends, that is not the nature of our fight, we fight from a position of victory. We have died in Christ, the old self is crucified and the body of sin is now an exposed weakened foe that can be overcome by those in Christ. This is the information that we need as approach the topic of holiness, this is the vital information that we need to grasp and live in light of. Let us not fall into the slave mindset that sees a radical change in government but goes about living as if nothing has changed. I will end with a well known illustration that demonstrates these truths and how we are to view our fight against sin.

During WWII Hitler was dominating the fight in Europe until the allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy on what is now called D-Day. It was not the end of the war but it was the day that broke the back of Hitler's hold in France and turned the war. V-Day was still about a year off and the fighting was very rough in that year, but Christians like allied forces are fighting a defeated foe. There is still a lot of fighting, blood, death, defeat, but the general direction is one of victory. This is why the Christian cannot live in sin.