

Sermon 42: Romans 6:8-11: Considering ourselves in Christ

OUTLINE

Christ's death and resurrection for us

Our death and resurrection in Christ

INTRODUCTION

What did the philosopher George Berkeley and the French Psychologist Emile Coue and the founder of Christian Science Mary Baker Eddy have in common? They all held to a view where thought/mind determines reality. George Berkeley was a well-known British philosopher who basically denied that matter existed. Berkeley stressed that things exist because I perceive them, so the pulpit I am preaching from is real because we are all seeing it as real, and when we all leave and no one is left in the room is it still here? Yes because God sees it. Coue is famous for developing the method of self-help and healing that uses auto suggestion. 'Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better.' This was his famous maxim that the patient had to recite to themselves every day. He believed that organic changes could be affected by thought bringing about healing. So that by correct thinking we could all be self-healers. Mary Baker Eddy believed and taught that it was by the mind that we became sick and by the mind that we became well. 'We weep because others weep, we yawn because others yawn, and we have small pox because others have small pox; but mortal mind not matter carries the infection...Palsy is a belief that attacks mortals through fear, show mortal mind that no muscular power can be lost—for Mind is supreme—and you will cure the palsy.' In each instance the mind is the maker of the reality. Christianity is the exact opposite. Christianity is not a fairytale where we manufacture facts and try by the power of our own wills and minds to cause them to become true. No, we think and believe certain things because God has acted and made certain things true.

As we consider the fact that we are dead in Christ and resurrected in Christ and how this bears upon our ability to be holy. Christian holiness is grounded in the reality of what God has made us to be in being united with Christ in His death and resurrection; so that we are no longer under sin's dominion and are able by the application of Christ's resurrection by the Holy Spirit to not be enslaved and produce the fruits of the Spirit. When Paul tells us in v11 to consider ourselves dead and alive in Christ this is not an exercise in wishful thinking where we have to imagine something in order to make it real. No, we are being called to recognise a God wrought reality in us that we are now to live out of. The foundation of our holiness is not the strength of our own imaginations but the power of Christ's resurrection as it is applied to us by the Holy Spirit as we are made to sink deeper into our union with Him.

Today we are carrying on looking at the foundation of our holiness: our union with Christ, and Paul is going to cause us to think hard about Christ's experience of life and death. And then in light of what has happened to Christ, and by implication what happens to us as

being united with Him. He will then give us the very first command in the book of Romans so far in v11.

Let me orient you to something as we begin. We are talking about our holiness and why grace makes it impossible for a Christian to live in sin. The unexpected but right thing that Paul does is he talks all about what happened to Jesus. Now that might strike you as odd, here we are talking about our holiness and Paul goes into great detail about Christ's death and resurrection. The reason for this is that our holiness is not grounded in our efforts but in what happened to Christ being applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Holiness is only possible because of something that He has done that we could never do for ourselves and our path to becoming more like Christ has to begin with an inspection of His inspection and how that bears upon us. We look at the following verses in 2 parts. Firstly, we will look at 8-10 at Christ's experience, and then we will look at the first command of the book and what it means to consider ourselves one in Christ's death and resurrection.

Christ's death and resurrection for us

In v8 Paul moves from the topic of our dying with Christ and introduces the fact that we also live with Christ. One of the sad things about this verse is that when people have read it they have only applied the benefits of Christ's resurrection to us in the future when we are finally glorified and receive resurrection bodies. They think that Christ's death takes care of my sin and I am forgiven, His resurrection takes care of the new body I need one day, but they see no provision for our personal holiness from Christ's death and resurrection, no bearing on the present overcoming of sin. The main reason that it has been misread is due to the apparent future tense in the words 'we will live with Him.' But this is what we call a logical future tense not a chronological one. In other words Paul needed to use the future tense though he was speaking of the present because he had just used a past tense when referring to having died and a logical future tense would be necessary to distinguish it logically. V11 makes very clear that Paul does not see Christ's resurrection as having only a future reference but a present impact on our holiness in the present, 'So you also must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' You see, we not only died with Him and wait to be raised but we are to see ourselves as having experienced that raising with Him already. Forgive me for stressing what might seem to be a minor point but you will see it is just this very fact that Paul says we need to consider.

The theological point that undergirds the whole thought of Paul is that we are inseparably united to Christ and all that was true of Him becomes true of me. We see that he has already spoken about my having died with Christ. Now he is going on to stress that I am a partaker in his resurrection. In Eph 2:5-6 Paul tells us that we are not only raised from the dead but we have ascended with Christ and are seated in the heavenlies with Him, '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.' There is a mystery here that we will have to wait to have fully unfolded to us, but the Holy Spirit so unites us to Christ that we are to see our lives as Paul puts it in Col 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.' The Holy Spirit makes the distance between us irrelevant so that we are seen as branches in a vine drawing our strength and sap from Him. Paul tells us that we are like a body attached to a head, and while being attached to that head we are nourished and fed by it, feeding and nourished on Christ as the Spirit applies His life to us, 'Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.' (Eph 4:15-17). It is not something you will fully understand but if you can see the reality of it and the benefit it brings then it can lay the foundation for your confidence in your war against sin.

Like a husband and wife the church and Christ are united, and just as a couple will go through the same trials and the same triumphs together, we are united with Christ and go with Him through death and the grave, dying and resurrection. Paul speaks first about Christ's experience no longer being under death's dominion in v9, 'We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.' Christ never will or can die again, death no longer has dominion over Him. He was never under death's power as God the Son, but due to the fact that He was born 100% human as a child of Adam, and subject to the law. When Christ took the guilt of His church's sin upon Himself, the wages of sin is death and death had a claim upon Him. As our representative who owned our guilt He had to own the consequences of that guilt as well—death! But having paid for those sins in full and having no guilt of His own to disqualify Him, death had no right to keep Him and He was resurrected and death no longer has any jurisdiction over Him. The wrath against sin has been fully paid in His death for our sins and there is no more wrath left to demand another death sentence—death has no more dominion. With sin fully paid for death has lost all its power.

The good news is the same is true of any who is united with Christ. Just as there can be no accusation levelled at Christ to die again in payment for sin as if something had been overlooked; likewise justice can never demand our deaths again for we have already died in Christ and death has lost all its power over us, for where sin is fully forgiven death has to give up its claim. Imagine yourself as an outlaw running from a sheriff called Death. He has several warrants for your arrest in order to sentence you to death, but you die, what happens to all of those warrants? They are now useless and the sentence that was due to be passed on you is by default fulfilled. You can't arrest a dead man and make him stand for his crimes death has put him beyond the reach of the law, in this instance death has fully satisfied the law. You have died with Christ and death no longer has any dominion over you.

Now you might want to argue and say, 'But Nick, if death has no dominion why do Christians still die and not like Enoch get raptured into heaven?' I guess it all depends on what you mean by death. Death in the Scriptural sense is a full one, to be dead includes a relational aspect in that we are separated from God, it includes an ontological aspect in that

we are slaves to our depraved natures and dead to God's ways, it includes the ceasing of bodily functions when soul is separated from body, and it includes eternal torment in hell. Death includes all of these things. So if we say death has no more dominion we mean that we are no longer alienated from God, that we are no longer dead in sin but have been regenerated and the remaining effects of sin are experiencing eradication in sanctification which will be completed in our glorification. We will not go to hell and all that leaves is what the world calls death but for Christians is merely a doorway to paradise. What the world calls death Paul calls the falling asleep of the saints body. Their spirits are dwelling in perfect bliss with Jesus and their bodies are waiting as if in sleep for His final coming. There is no finality in what we call death, all the sting is gone. We speak now of the death of death in the death of Christ, it is death that is dying and passing away not us, to live is Christ, to die is gain. You will outlive death because of Christ, death which seemed so permanent and had us under its power is now broken, fading and temporary.

Death then is something that we need not fear. I do not mean that we do not want to avoid the actual pain of dying, but rather that death as a great unknown as a power greater than Christ, these are the thoughts we need to conquer. Nothing can separate us from Christ not even death. Our union to Christ is closer than our union to our own bodies. Nicolaus Cabasilas has two pertinent illustrations of the permanence of our union with Christ. 'For example, the limbs of Christ (the church) are joined more firmly to Him than to their own bodies, for the martyrs laid down their hands and limbs with exultation and could not be separated from Christ even so far as to be out of earshot of His voice. In short, this union is closer than what joins a man to himself. Again, the children of God are closer to Christ than their own parents. Separated from our parents we survive; separated from Christ we die.'¹ Going through death united with Christ death cannot swallow us and take us off to hell we escape death as Christ did and we are ever joined with the Lord. United with Him even at His coming again, to never be again from His side (Col 3:4).

In v10 Paul talks about not only Christ's relationship to death but sin as well, 'For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.' There are a few landmines we need to avoid as we interpret this verse. For if we say that Christ died to sin doesn't that imply that once He was under sin's dominion? Can we speak of Christ being under sin in the same way that we were? In approaching this verse we want to hold fast the fact that our experience and Christ's are being matched by Paul, and we will have to apply to ourselves what we say this means for Christ. So firstly, we need to stress that dying to sin does not mean dying to the power of indwelling sin. Christ never had a sinful nature nor any indwelling sin to speak of. Secondly, dying to sin does not mean dying to the temptation of sin, for although it is true that Christ is not tempted in heaven and could not be tempted in His divine nature, we as Christians are still tempted and still feel the lure of sin and the statements Paul makes here have to work on both sides of the union. Thirdly, we need to stress that Christ died to the power/dominion of sin. Christ was not a sinner in Adam but He was born under the law as a child of Adam. Christ was never a sinner but He did take the guilt of our sins upon Himself. We must avoid that terrible teaching that sees Christ actually changed into the nature of sin, or taking on the nature of

¹ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History and Theology*, p123.

the devil as some have taught at this point. To try and understand the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures is hard enough and we must not confuse the issue by trying to say that Christ experienced a change of nature into the nature of sin. He took our guilt not our sinful natures. Then having assumed our guilt He then submitted Himself to take the consequences of owning that guilt—death. And when He died He paid in full the debt owing that our sins incurred and the debt was settled. Sin only had power over Him as long as He had its guilt unpaid for imputed to Him. However, as soon as He had died and sin was paid in full sin's power of jurisdiction was ended. In this way He died to sin. We travelled on His passport out of the dominion of death. We have crossed the international borders and have diplomatic immunity from the regimes demands. It can no longer bring to bear upon us all the crimes it had for us to pay because they were all paid for and our new ruler has granted us an amnesty. If the old order applies to the new ruler to extradite us for prosecution, the extradition order will be denied because we have received a pardon.

Christ can never be brought under sin again because it has been fully paid for, that is why Paul uses the phrase 'once for all' it means once and never again/for all time. There is no claim on Him, likewise with us. There can be no repeat of Christ's death, and likewise since we have died with Him there is no repeat to our deaths as well. This is what makes much of modern teaching on holiness redundant. Modern teachers are calling on us to crucify our old selves over and over again. We cannot do that we die once with rise and now we live out a crucified life but we can never repeat the crucifixion of the old self just as Christ can never die again. Let me put it radically, even if we become addicts of one sort or another after salvation we have not uncrucified ourselves, because Christ cannot be uncrucified. And when you seek to put that addiction to an end you do not have to do the impossible task of crucifying yourself but you are already unchangeably crucified. You are simply acting in a contradictory way to the reality that you have experienced in Christ.

The third experience of Christ's that impacts us is His living, 'but the life He lives He lives to God.' This simply means that Christ is no longer under the dominion of the law and its legal demands against Him as He bore the guilt of our sin; He is no longer under the dominion of sin in that He took its guilt on its shoulders and had to suffer the legal consequences for it; He is no longer under the dominion of death which is the penalty of the law for sin, for sin has been fully paid for and now death, sin and the legal demands of the law are done with as far as He is concerned He is now free of all those things living under the jurisdiction of God alone. Likewise we are done with the law, sin and death and have been brought into a place where God is our Father and all the devil's demands, sin's demands and the penalties of the law are behind us and we no longer have to answer to them.

So then, if we are a Christian we are already dead to sin and the modern teaching that calls us to crucify ourselves is redundant, it is not that we are to crucify ourselves, but rather live out the reality of having been crucified. Why is this point important to stress? Because crucifying yourself, which in biblical terms means removing yourself from the demands of the devil, the law, sin and death is impossible for you. It is something Christ has done, and any actions of holiness we now engage in are done on the platform of liberty that Christ has won for us.

Our death and resurrection in Christ

That was a lot of closely argued information, but what purpose does it serve? And now we come to the famous 6:11. It is famous because it is the first imperative/command that Paul gives us in the book of Romans so far. This verse is one of the most important verses in the Christian discussion on holiness because it sets the tone of grace over against the usual legalistic approach to holiness. When I mention the topic of holiness the first thing that instinctively jumps into our minds is rules/laws/commands. When we think about holiness we normally think of it in terms of what we need to do. And there is some truth in that, for there is much that we do, but in a true biblical understanding of holiness we begin not with what we have to do but with what God does. We cannot start with what we have to do because the flesh is weak and cannot produce the fruits of the Spirit. We could not believe in Christ as our Saviour apart from the regenerating and illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, so we should not even dream that holiness is possible apart from God. Do we think that we can produce the love of Christ in our hearts, the peace of Christ, the joy of Christ or that we can undo years of character development on a sinful selfish path? The importance of this first commandment in the whole book of Romans is that although it is a commandment, it is not a commandment that involves us doing anything but realizing the platform that God has created for us in making our holiness possible in uniting us to Christ's death and life.

So let me say what Paul says, as we take our first step in seeking to be holy, what is that first step? The first thing that needs to be done is to stop and see all that He has done that makes holiness possible. He has crucified your old citizenship in Adam; He has given you a new nature; He has filled you with His Spirit; He has ended sin's tyranny in your life so that you are no longer a dead puppet; He has ended the devil's jurisdiction by adopting you into His kingdom; He has united Him to Himself so that the power of His resurrection is present in your life like a dialysis machine transforming you into His image. Stop and realise what He has done, what He is doing, what only He can do. Realise that you are going into your fight with sin with the guarantee of final victory over sin in glorification given. You go into the fray knowing that you go in the power of His might. You go into the battle knowing that He is resident within you constantly strengthening you for what He has called you to do. Go into the fight knowing that the strength that is at work within you does not depend on the strength of your desire, the strength of your quiet times, the amount of sweat you put in, we all have Christ's power at work within us not our own individual power. So stop and realise I am no longer a slave to sin, a slave to the devil but I am in Christ and in the service of God alone. You are free to serve Him alone, with no fear, fully supplied for the task He calls you to.

So then friends the first step in holiness is one where we are confronted with such overwhelming gracious supplies that our first step necessarily develops into a fall to our knees in humbled adoration. You will notice that there are some more commands coming in v12-14, but here we have to stop and worship. In seeing this work of God for us and in us, we who are so poor in our own strength to be so well provided for when we are so undeserving, this is what fills the Christian's heart with joy, and the joy of the Lord is our

strength; with gratitude so that we offer our services to God as an offering of love not duty; with humility knowing that in my weakness He is my strength.

Christian science, Coueism, and Berkeley's subjective idealism all make the epicentre of human life, accomplishment and reality the human mind. Friends we are not the centre, the masters of the universe, or the authors of our own holiness. You cannot create these realities with your mind, they are real by God's doing in Christ. Holiness is only possible by poor undeserving beggars like us because God has given His Son in grace; He has united us to Him by His Spirit in regenerating grace; He has filled us with His Spirit making us more than we are worth, a temple for His glory; and in constant fellowship with Him, united to Him as a branch to the vine we are nourished and supplied and constantly carried in all that we do. Holiness is not the lonely, futile, impossible flesh dependant task we always thought it to be, but an outflow of that life that we have made to taste in being united to Christ.

So much more to say but we have to stop here.