

The Two Resurrections of the Christian

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Romans 6:5

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection:

On this glorious day we celebrate the life of Christianity. It is this one blessed event called the resurrection of Christ that separates our faith from every other religion in the world. Our founder is alive; all other religions' founders are dead or soon to be. The life we celebrate is the life of Jesus Christ. From death's cold and cruel grasp Christ triumphed. The universal tyrants, sin, death, and the law, were deposed. Without the resurrection, Christianity is dead, and these enemies are very much alive.

But also we celebrate our resurrection today. By the resurrection of Christ we too have risen. But you object, "I'm not dead yet. Don't you mean we celebrate the fact that one day we will be resurrected as Christ was?" It is true that because of Christ we who believe in Him to the saving of our souls will be resurrected if we should die before He returns. However, I am not so much referring to a future event as I am speaking of a resurrection that has already occurred.

In Paul's epistle to the Romans he teaches us that the believer will undergo two resurrections. The first resurrection occurs at the precise moment we are joined with Christ. The second resurrection will be the precise moment Christ returns riding the clouds. Our text is Romans chapter six and verse five.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:5).

Here Paul speaks of our union with Christ. How sweet are the words, "union with Christ." They speak volumes which no theologian can properly or thoroughly discuss. They represent the very core of the faith. They are the sum of everything the Christian enjoys. Paul speaks of our union with Christ in strong doctrinal statements. He sees it as fundamental to our justification but not limited to it. It is the key to all that we are and all that is within the title "Christian."

Paul's teaching about our union with Christ revolves around two major events—the death of Christ and His resurrection. Not only have we been joined to Christ personally, but also we have been immersed into and wedded to these two events as well.

First, we see Christians are in union with Christ Jesus by being:

JOINED TO CHRIST IN DEATH

“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death...” (Romans 6:5a).

We have been joined to Christ in the one event called the crucifixion. The words used by Paul to explain this union are the words “planted together.” These two words are one Greek word, which means, “to grow together.” The picture behind this concept is not burial, which the word “planted” normally would convey, rather it is the idea of grafting two plants into one. It is the word used when a farmer or horticulturalist would take a branch from one plant and graft it to the stock of another plant. Thus, Paul says “We have been grafted with Christ (or united) in the likeness of His death.” We are joined to Christ so that we may participate in His death. In order for us to receive the benefits of our Lord’s meritorious death we have to have some connection with Him. Our connection must be either by relationship or by a mystical union, but this is not an either/or proposition, instead, the Scriptures say it’s both.

Paul is making one essential point in the sixth chapter of Romans, which is that Christians cannot continue to sin like they did before they were transformed into Christians. Paul does not say they cannot sin; what he said is they cannot keep living a sinful, rebellious, and disobedient life. The direction of their life cannot be in this way. Look at verse one,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (Romans 6:1).

The true Gospel of God, which Paul preached, had a very exalted view of grace. However, some misunderstood Paul to mean by grace that if you had received God’s grace you were exempt from the evil consequences of sin and the more you sinned the more grace you would receive from God. He answers the objection that says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” in verse two,

God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (Romans 6:2).

Paul states what was to him a law, a principle of the work of salvation that a man converted has changed in his relationship to sin. He says that the Christian has died to sin. This is Paul’s thesis statement.

In the world of academics when a person writes an essay or position paper he begins by stating his or her thesis. A thesis is a statement that the author will make and support with argumentation and evidence. The entire sixth chapter of Romans is an argument proving this second verse. No man who has been born again can live in relationship to sin as he did before he was converted. It is an impossibility. If he can live in sin without the chastening rebuke of God, he is not a Christian and has never been.

Again, it is important to bring forth what the exact Greek words are in this, Paul's thesis statement. The phrase "that are dead to sin" is two words and they are in the past tense. Their meaning is "We who died." In other words, Paul is not saying we are dying to sin, nor is he saying that after being saved, at some point in later time we died to sin. I bring up this point because this is what some folks believe about the Christian life. They believe that it is their duty to die to sin. They are admonished and admonish others to crucify the old man and put to death sin. But this is never stated in the New Testament. The Christian is never told to die to sin or to crucify the old man. He is never encouraged in this vein, but rather is told to believe that this has already been accomplished for him. That is why this phrase is in the past tense. The child of God has already died to sin and the old man has already been crucified. That is exactly his point here in verse two, and he clarifies it in verse six,

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Romans 6:6).

Again you must know that the Authorized Version does not render this verse closely to the Greek that Paul used. It surely means the same, but it doesn't quite say it the same. Paul's Greek says, "our old man was crucified." It too is in the past tense. Surely the Authorized means this when it places the timing of the crucifixion of the old man with the death of Christ. The point is the old man has already been dealt with and is dead the moment the sinner is converted by the grace of God.

So in verse two is Paul's thesis that he is going to prove. The Christian cannot continue the same relationship to sin. The Christian has died to sin. He explains what he means by our having died to sin in the following verses. He also, with pinpoint accuracy, tells us the precise time this death occurs. In verse three,

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (Romans 6:3).

We died to the power of sin and its rule over us when we were baptized or immersed into Christ Jesus. A great many folk have interpreted this verse to mean when we were baptized in water. In other words, water baptism is a symbolic ordinance illustrating the truth of identifying with Christ's death. They believe Paul is saying that our dying with Christ and this union is only symbolic and water baptism is the visible symbol used to illustrate. Others teach that water baptism literally places you in Christ, that the act of baptism carries with it a special grace that truly washes away sin and joins the sinner to Christ. But neither view is a correct interpretation of this third verse. This is not what Paul said and therefore is extraneous to the text. Paul is not talking about water baptism. He did not say, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into water were baptized into his death?" The element into which we are baptized is different from water. Romans chapter six and verse three says the element is Christ and not water. We are baptized into Christ. When does this occur and how does it occur? It happens the moment one believes upon Christ to the saving of one's soul.

The answer to how it occurs is that it is a spiritual and mystical union. In I Corinthians 12:13 we find Paul's explanation of this spiritual baptism, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." It is a spiritual baptism where the Holy Spirit immerses us into Christ and His body.

Paul says that this baptism is not into the Spirit but by the Spirit. It is a baptism into Christ's death, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3). It is not something you experience or feel, but rather it is a spiritual joining of the sinner to Christ, and since the sinner is joined to Christ, he is immersed into Christ's death as well. The Holy Spirit immerses us into the death of Christ, or, using the words of our text in verse five, He plants us together, grafts us into Christ and His death.

Now what does this mean? What does Apostle Paul mean when he says the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ and His death?

First, it means whatever death meant to Christ, it means to us. Now we do not mean to say that we experience what Jesus experienced on the cross. Again, let me say this is not something a Christian feels or experiences. Our text warns us of this when it says, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death." It does not say that our union with His death is exactly the same as His actual death. It says in "the likeness of His death." No one has ever died, nor will ever die, as He did. No martyr who has given his or her life for God has died as Christ died, although many Christians have been crucified. The reason Paul must insert the words, "in the likeness" is because no one could die as Christ died. He and He alone is God as well as man. Christ is the Son of God, eternal and divine in every aspect. Nor has any man the power to atone for sins in his death as Christ did in His. What our Lord accomplished in dying for sin no man can ever achieve by sacrificing his life. Therefore, our union and spiritual participation in Jesus' death is like His death but not equal to it.

Having said that, let me explain what I meant when I said that, first of all, to be joined to Christ and His death must mean that whatever death meant to Christ, it means to us. In verse ten Paul lets us see further into this meaning of death to sin when he says,

For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God (Romans 6:10).

Christ, Himself, died to sin. This must be one of the most, if not the most, profound statements in all Scripture. God in the flesh on the earth, as holy and pure as God the Father in heaven, died to sin. Immediately, we are taken aback by this statement. The universe and its farthest unexplored regions do not hold as much mystery as these words. How could the sinless and perfect Messiah, God Incarnate, have any relationship to sin that He too must die to it? He had never sinned. He was spotless. He had walked through the dark wilderness of sin and came out unscathed and pure. What does it mean for Christ to have died to sin?

Since we know that He was sinless, it cannot mean that He in any degree was guilty of sin. And yet whatever it means, it must mean the same thing for us as well. This is the parallel that Paul is establishing, that whatever death to sin is for us, it is for Christ. We have been “planted together” in it. The key to understanding this is what Paul has already said in chapter five. In the fifth chapter of Romans verses twelve through twenty-one Paul is making a parallel comparison to Adam and Christ Jesus, the first Adam and the Last Adam. In chapter five and verse fourteen Paul writes,

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come (Romans 5:14).

After stating that Adam is a type of Christ, he proceeds to show what happens to all who are in Adam and to all who are in Christ. Sin, death, judgment, and condemnation are received by all who are in Adam. Grace, justification, righteousness, and eternal life come to those who are in Christ. There are only two classifications in this world, Adam's race and Christ's race. Every human is born into Adam's race. Every Christian is born into God's race.

Sin's mastery and death's finality are the realm of dominion that all of Adam's posterity live under. Sin so captivates the sinner that he is influenced and moved along by its strength. Have you ever noticed a man enslaved to his own passions and appetites? No matter how badly he desires to be free from them, he cannot escape. He knows they are wrong, but he so enjoys them and they are so much a part of his world that the only escape from them is to exit the world in which he lives.

He must be brought out from the dominion of sin if he is to be free from sin, and this is what dying to sin means, that one no longer lives under the rule and reign of sin. Now this is exactly what it means by Christ died to sin. He was freed from living in the realm of sin. Again, our Lord was never a slave to sin nor was He guilty of one sin; however, being made a man and born of a woman, He was born into the dominion and rule of sin. He, Himself, sinned not, but He was immersed into a sphere of living where sin surrounded Him. On every hand He could see and feel sin's terrible rule. We have no concept of the sorrow He felt as One being so pure, living in such an impure world. He came into a world enslaved to sin; He came into sin's territory, into the very den of sin, into its realm and domain. He occupied enemy territory and on the cross He died to it. While sin and death had no claims upon Him, He died unto both.

Therefore, for Christ to die to sin means that He came out from the realm and sphere of sin and, of course, forty days later returned to the Father from whom He had come. He has conquered sin, death, and condemnation by His death and resurrection.

Now in this same way the believer has died to sin. By faith in Christ and by the Holy Spirit baptizing you into Christ and His death, you are removed from Adam's race and born into the family of God. You are set free from the rule and reign of sin and brought into the realm of grace, righteousness, and life in the Spirit. You live in a different realm.

Second, to be joined to Christ in death means the Christian's relationship to sin has changed, and it can no more be the same. One of the things I would draw your attention to under this idea is that the Christian's sensitivity to sin has changed. Prior to our being joined to Christ we only had one sense about sin and that is we loved it. Sin's mastery is that it appeals to our base and carnal nature. We love to indulge ourselves, and we hate God's claim and sovereign right to rule over us. But the moment a man or woman is placed into the realm of Christ and the Spirit, his or her sensitivity to sin changes. They now are alert to it and much aware of its presence, whereas before Christ they were not. You were once without faith and without feeling. You had no sense of sin; you had no desire after holiness; you had no confidence in Christ; you had no love for the Father—the point is that the sinner is senseless to his danger. He sees no problem, he senses no peril. He is like a cow that has been called to the barn day after day to be fed, but today it is called to the barn to be butchered. The animal knows nothing of what awaits it, just as the sinner who is dead in sin and feels no alarm.

But now the new believer is keenly aware of it and hates it so. That is why Paul says in verse two God forbid that the child of God can keep living in disregard to God. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer therein?" Do you enjoy your sin or do you not? It is quite that simple. There is no difficulty in determining which realm you live in, whether the realm of Adam or of Christ.

But this is not all that Paul said about the believer. In addition to having been "planted together in the likeness of His death" the text says that "we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." We have been immersed or joined to the second major event of Christ's life and that is His resurrection.

JOINED TO CHRIST IN RESURRECTION

"...we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"(Romans 6:5b).

As Christ has been raised from death, we too have been resurrected to new life. This is what the apostle says in verse four of Romans chapter six.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Christ had died to the realm of sin in that He was no longer subject to it. He had broken its power and chokehold. "That like as" and "even so" are words that Paul uses to show that for the Christian there has been a spiritual resurrection. The Christian has been made into something entirely new and different. He is a new person.

We make a good deal of the cross, but Paul equally emphasizes the resurrection here. Every year thousands of people climb a mountain in the Italian Alps, passing the "stations of the cross" to stand at an outdoor crucifix. One tourist noticed a little trail that led beyond the cross. He fought through the rough thicket and, to his surprise, came upon another shrine, a shrine

that symbolized the empty tomb. It was neglected. The brush had grown up around it. Almost everyone had gone as far as the cross, but there they stopped.

Far too many have gotten to the cross and have known the despair and the heartbreak. Far too few have moved beyond the cross to find the real message of Easter. That is the message of the empty tomb. It is a message of new life, and that is exactly what God has done for the believer. He has planted or grafted the Christian into the resurrected Christ. It is new life. "He that hath the Son hath life."

This is the second evidence of Paul's thesis statement in verse two. There is no way that if you are a Christian you can continue in sin. You have a brand new life that is a radical break from the life dominated by sin. You now have the power within you to resist sin's allurements and temptation. You have the ability to say no to its influence. And although you may now and again submit to it you can not live in it. This is the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 32:40.

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

This is the first resurrection of the Christian life.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins...Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus: (Ephesians 2:1, 5-6).

What then is your excuse for living in disobedience today? Do you profess to be a child of God? If you do, how can you keep your relationship with sin as before? It matters not how you answer because the Bible has already answered the question.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

But there is a second resurrection. In our text of verse five the resurrection of Christ is referring to this new found Christian life. However, it cannot be denied that there is a second installment of that new life yet to be received by the Christian. We have received only the earnest, but the remainder will be given to us at the bodily resurrection of all believers.

Henry Pritchett Jr. tells the story of a eight-year old boy named Phillip. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. He was a pleasant child--happy, it seemed--but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday school in the third-grade class with nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.

You know eight-year-olds. And Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted. Philip did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.

The teacher had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter one year. You know those things that pantyhose come in--the containers that look like great big eggs--the teacher had collected ten of them. The children loved it when he brought them into the room. Each child was to get one. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.

It was glorious. It was confusing. It was wild. They ran all around the church grounds, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom. They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them. All the children stood around the table.

He opened one, and there was a flower, and they ooh-ed and aah-ed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. And finally they got to Phillip's egg. The teacher opened the egg and there was nothing in it. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, "That's not fair--that's stupid!--somebody didn't do it right."

The teacher felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Phillip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Phillip said. "It's mine."

And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Phillip. There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Phillip said. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty!"

There was silence, a very full silence. And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day in spring. From that time on, it was different. Phillip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Phillip died a year later. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. Phillip died of an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off. The mystery simply enveloped him.

At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover over the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg--an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.

Because of Christ the empty tomb means new life--new life for the believer here and now--new life one day when Christ comes to awaken us out of the sleep of the grave.

Have you ever noticed a bird on a limb in the midst of a storm. While other creatures and humans run for cover, there the little bird is, perched on a limb or rooftop. It is as if it is saying to the wind, "Shake me off; I still have wings."

Because of Christ's resurrection, each Christian can look the experience of death in the face and confidently say, "Shake me off; I still have wings. I'll live anyway." And

*Some glad morning
When this life is o'er,
I'll fly away.
To a home
On God's Celestial shore.
I'll fly away.*

Amen.