

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROMANS 6:3-11.

Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN LIVING.

1. In this epistle lesson Paul gives Christians instruction concerning the Christian life on earth, and connects with it the hope of the future and eternal life, in view of which they have been baptized and become Christians. He makes of our earthly life a death – a grave – with the understanding, however, that henceforth the risen man and the newness of life should be found in us. And he treats of this doctrine because of an error that always prevails: When we preach that upon us is bestowed grace and the forgiveness of sins, without any merit on our part, people are disposed to regard themselves as free from obligation and will do no works except those to which their own desires prompt them. This was Saint Paul's experience when he so strongly commended the grace of Christ and its consolation (ch. 5:20), declaring that "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly," and that where there are many and great sins, there also reigns great, abundant and rich grace. The rude crowd cried: Oh, is it true that great grace follows upon great sin? In that case we will cheerfully load ourselves with sin so that we may receive the greater grace.

GRACE DOES NOT GIVE LICENSE TO SIN.

2. Such argument Paul now confutes. He says: It is not the intention of the Gospel to teach sin or to allow it; it teaches the very opposite – how we may escape from sin and from the awful wrath of God which it incurs. Escape is not effected by any doings of our own, but by the fact that God, out of pure grace, forgives us our sins for his Son's sake; for God finds in us nothing but sin and condemnation. How then can this doctrine give occasion or permission to sin when it is so diametrically opposed to it and teaches how it is to be blotted out and put away.

3. Paul does not teach that grace is acquired through sin, nor that sin brings grace; he says quite the opposite – that *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,”* Romans 1:18. But because the sins of men which are taken away are so grievous and numerous, the grace which drowns and destroys them must be mighty and abundant also. Where there is great thirst, a great draft is needed to quench it. Where there is a mighty conflagration, powerful streams of water are necessary to extinguish it. In cases of severe illness, strong medicine is essential to a cure. But these facts do not give us authority to say: Let us cheerfully drink to satiety that we may become more thirsty for good wine; or, Let us injure ourselves and make ourselves ill that medicine may do us more good. Still less does it follow that we may heap up and multiply sins for the purpose of receiving more abundant grace. Grace is opposed to sin and destroys it; how then should it strengthen or increase
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4. Therefore he begins his sermon by inquiring, in this sixth chapter (verses 1-3): “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?” In other words: How is it possible that because grace should destroy sin ye should live unto sin? And then, further to illustrate this, he says: *“Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”*

5. He speaks here in figurative language to clearly and forcibly impress this matter upon us; ordinarily it would have been sufficient for him to ask: “We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?” that is to say, Inasmuch as ye have been saved from sin through grace, it is not possible that grace should command you to continue in sin, for it is the business of grace to destroy sin. Now, in the figurative words above quoted, he wishes to vividly remind us what Christ has bestowed upon us. He would say to us: Do but call to mind why you are Christians – you have been baptized into Christ. Do you know why and whereunto you have been baptized, and what it signifies that you have been baptized with water? The meaning is that not only have you there been washed and cleansed in soul through the forgiveness of sins, but your flesh and blood have been condemned, given over unto death, to be drowned, and your life on earth to be a daily dying unto sin. For your baptism is simply an overwhelming by grace – a gracious

overwhelming – whereby sin in you is drowned; so may you remain subjects of grace and not be destroyed by the wrath of God because of your sin. Therefore, if you let yourself be baptized, you give yourself over to gracious drowning and merciful slaying at the hands of your God, and say to him: Drown and overwhelm me, dear Lord, for gladly would I henceforth, with thy Son, be dead to sin, that I may, with him, also live through grace.

THE POWER OF BAPTISM.

6. When he says, “*All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death,*” and again, “*We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death,*” he speaks in his own Pauline style concerning the power of baptism, which derives its efficacy from the death of Christ. By his death he has paid for and taken away our sins; his death has been an actual strangling and putting to death of sin, and it no longer has dominion over him. So we, also, through his death have obtained forgiveness of sins; that sin may not condemn us, we die unto sin through that power which Christ – because we are baptized into him – imparts to and works in us.

7. Yea, he further declares that we are not only baptized into his death, but, by the same baptism, we are buried with him into death; for in his death he took our sins with him into the grave, burying them completely and leaving them there. And it follows that, for those who through baptism are in Christ, sin is and shall remain completely destroyed and buried; but we, through his resurrection – which, by faith, gives us the victory over sin and death and bestows upon us everlasting righteousness and life – should henceforth walk in newness of life.

8. Having these things through baptism, we dare no longer obey – live unto – the sin which still dwells in our flesh and blood in this life; we must daily strangle it so that it may have no power nor life in us if we desire to be found in the estate and life of Christ. For he died unto sin, destroying it by his death and burying it in his grave; and he acquired life and the victory over sin and death by his resurrection, and bestows them upon us by baptism. The fact that Christ himself had to die for sin is evidence of the severe wrath of God against sin. Sin had to be put to death and laid away in the grave in the body of Christ. Thereby God shows us that he will not countenance sin in us, but has given us Christ and baptism for the purpose of putting to death and burying sin in our bodies.

9. Thus Paul shows us in these words what has been effected by Christ’s death and burial, and what is the signification of our being buried with him. In the first place, Christ was buried that he might, through forgiveness, cover up and destroy our sin, both that which we have actually committed and that which is inherent in us; he would not have it inculcate and condemn us. In the second place, he was buried that he might, through the Holy Spirit, mortify this flesh and blood with its inherent sinful lusts; they must no longer

have dominion over us, but must be subject to the Spirit until we are utterly freed from them.

10. Thus, we still lie with Christ in the grave according to the flesh. Although it be true that we have the forgiveness of sins, that we are God's children and possess salvation, yet all this is not perceptible to our own senses or to the world. It is hidden in Christ by faith until the judgment day. For we do not yet experience in ourselves such righteousness, such holiness, such life and such salvation as God's Word describes and as faith expects to find. Wherefore Paul says in Colossians 3:3-4 (as we have heard in the Easter sermons), *"Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory."*

11. On the other hand, we are outwardly oppressed with the cross and sufferings, and with the persecution and torments of the world and the devil, as with the weight of a heavy stone upon us, subduing our old sinful nature and checking us against antagonizing the Spirit and committing other sins. *"For if we have become united [planted together] with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin."*

12. This is another distinctly apostolic discourse. Being baptized into Christ's death and buried with him, to which Paul had just referred, he here calls being united, or planted together, with Christ in the likeness of his death. Christ's death and resurrection and our baptism are intimately united with, and related to, one another. Baptism is not to be regarded a mere empty sign, as Anabaptists erroneously hold. In it is embodied the power of both Christ's death and resurrection. Hence Paul says, "we are planted together with him," engrafted into him as a member of his body, so that he is a power in us and his death works in us. Through baptism he dedicates us to himself and imparts to us the power of his death and resurrection, to the end that both death and life may follow in us. Hence our sins are crucified through his death, taken away, that they may finally die in us and no longer live.

13. Being placed under the water in baptism signifies that we die in Christ. Coming forth from the water teaches, and imparts to, us a new life in him, just as Christ remained not in death, but was raised again to life. Such life should not and can not be a life of sin, because sin was crucified before in us and we had to die to it. It must be a new life of righteousness and holiness, Christ through his resurrection finally destroyed sin, because of which he had to die, and instead he brought to himself the true life of righteousness, and imparts it to us. Hence we are said to be planted together with Christ or united with him and become one, so that we both have in us the power of his death and resurrection. The fruits and results of this power will be found in us after we are baptized into him.

14. The apostle speaks consolingly of the death of the Christian as a being planted, to show that the Christian's death and sufferings on earth are not really death and harm, but a planting unto life; being redeemed, by the resurrection, from death and sin, we shall live eternally. For that which is planted is not planted unto death and destruction, but planted that it may sprout and grow. So Christ was planted, through death, unto life; for not until he was released from this mortal life and from the sin which rested on him and brought him into death on our account, did he come into his divine glory and power. Since this planting begins in baptism, as said, and we by faith possess life in Christ, it is evident that this life must strike root in us and bear fruit. For that which is planted is not planted without purpose; it is to grow and bear fruit. So must we prove, by our new conversation and by our fruits, that we are planted in Christ unto life.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

15. Paul gives the reason for new growth. He says: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin." It does not become us, as baptized Christians, to desire to remain in our old sinful estate. That is already crucified with Christ, the sentence of condemnation upon it has been pronounced and carried out. For that is what being crucified means. Just so, Christ, in suffering crucifixion for our sins, bore the penalty of death and the wrath of God. Christ, innocent and sinless, being crucified for our sins, sin must be crucified in our body; it must be utterly condemned and destroyed, rendered lifeless and powerless. We dare not, then, in any wise serve sin nor consent to it. We must regard it as actually condemned, and with all our power we must resist it; we must subdue and put it to death.

16. Paul here makes a distinction. He says, "*Our old man was crucified with him [Christ],*" and "*that the body of sin might be done away.*" He intimates that the "*old man*" and "*the body of sin*" are two different things. By the term "*old man*" he means not only the body – the grossly sinful deeds which the body commits with its five senses – but the whole tree with all its fruits, the whole man as he is descended from Adam. In it are included body and soul, will, reason and understanding. Both inwardly and outwardly, it is still under the sway of unbelief, impiety and disobedience. Man is called old, not because of his years; for it is possible for a man to be young and strong and vigorous and yet to be without faith or a religious spirit, to despise God, to be greedy and vainglorious, or to live in pride or the conceit of wisdom and power. But he is called the old man because he is unconverted, unchanged from his original condition as a sinful descendant of Adam. The child of a day is included as well as the man of eighty years; we all are thus from our mother's womb. The more sins a man commits, the older and more unfit he is before God. This old man, Paul says, must be crucified – utterly condemned, executed, put out of the way, even here in this life. For where he still remains in his strength, it is impossible that faith or the spirit should be; and thus man remains in his sins, drowned under the wrath of God, troubled with an evil conscience which condemns him and keeps him out of God's kingdom.

17. The “new man” is one who has turned to God in repentance, one who has a new heart and understanding, who has changed his belief and through the power of the Holy Spirit lives in accordance with the Word and will of God. This new man must be found in all Christians; it begins in baptism or in repentance and conversion. It resists and subdues the old man and its sinful lusts through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul declares, “They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts,” Galatians 5:24.

18. Now, although in those who are new men, the old man is crucified, there yet, Paul says, remains in them in this life “the body of sin.” By this we understand the remaining lusts of the old man, which are still felt to be active in the flesh and blood, and which would fain resist the spirit. But inasmuch as the head and life of sin are destroyed, these lusts cannot harm the Christian. Still the Christian must take care not to become obedient to them, lest the old man come to power again. The new man must keep the upper hand; the remaining sinful lusts must be weakened and subdued. And this body of ours must finally decay and turn to dust, thereby utterly annihilating sin in it.

19. Now, he says, if ye be dead to sin under the reign of the spirit and the new man, and adjudged to death under the reign of the body, ye must no longer permit sin to bring you under its dominion, lest it inculcate and condemn you. But ye must live as those who are wholly released from it, over whom it no longer has any right or power. For we read, “He that hath died is justified from sin.” This is said of all who are dead. He that has died has paid for his sin; he need not die for it again, for he no longer commits sin and evil deeds. If sin be destroyed in man by the Spirit, and the flesh also is dead and gone, man is completely released and freed from sin.

20. Paul comprehends the whole existence of the Christian on earth in the death of Christ, and represents it as dead and buried, in the coffin; that is, the Christian has ceased from the life of sin, and has nothing more to do with it. He speaks of sin as being dead unto the Christian and of the latter as being dead unto sin for the reason that Christians no longer take part in the sinful life of the world. And, too, they are doubly dead. First, spiritually they are dead unto sin. And this, though painful and bitter to flesh and blood, is a blessed, a comfortable and happy dying, sweet and delightful, for it produces a heavenly life, pure and perfect. Secondly, they are physically dead – the body dies. But this is not really death; rather a gentle, soothing sleep. Therefore ye are, Paul would say, beyond measure happy. In Christ ye have already escaped death by dying unto sin; that death ye need die no more. It – the first death, which ye have inherited from Adam through sin – is already taken away from you. That being the real, the bitter and eternal death, ye are consequently freed from the necessity of dying. At the same time there is a death, or rather only the semblance of one, which ye must suffer because ye are yet on earth and are the descendants of Adam.

SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL RESURRECTION.

21. The first death, inherited from Adam, is done away with: changed into a spiritual dying unto sin, by reason of which the soul no longer consents to sin and the body no longer commits it. Thus, in place of the death which sin has brought upon us, eternal life is already begun in you. Ye are now freed from the dreadful damning death; then accept the sweet, holy and blessed death unto sin, that ye may beware of sin and no longer serve it. Such is to be the result of the death of Christ into which ye are baptized; Christ has died and has commanded you to be baptized in order that sin might be drowned in you.

22. The other, the “little death,” is that outward, physical death. In the Scriptures it is called a sleep. It is imposed upon the flesh, because, so long as we live on earth, the flesh never ceases to resist the spirit and its life. Paul says: *“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.”* Galatians 5:17. The spirit, or soul, says: I am dead unto sin and will not sin any more. But the flesh says: I am not dead and must make use of my life while I have it. The spirit declares: I believe that God has forgiven my sins and taken them away from me through Christ. But the flesh asks: What do I know of God or his will? The spirit resolves: I must be meek, pure, chaste, humble, patient, and seek the future life. But the flesh in reply makes a loud outcry: Away with your heaven! if only I had enough of bread and money and property here! Thus the flesh does continually, as long as it lives here; it draws and drags sin after itself; it is rebellious and refuses to die. Therefore God must finally put it to death before it becomes dead unto sin.

23. And after all, it is but a gentle and easy death. It is truly only a sleep. Since soul and spirit are no longer dead, the body shall not remain dead; it shall come forth again, cleansed and purified, on the last day, to be united with the soul. Then shall it be a gentle, pure and obedient body, without sin or evil lust.

24. These words of Paul are an admirable Christian picture of death, representing it not as an awful thing, but as something comforting and pleasant to contemplate. For how could Paul present a more attractive description than when he describes it as stripped of its power and repulsiveness and makes it the medium through which we attain life and joy? What is more desirable than to be freed from sin and the punishment and misery it involves, and to possess a joyful, cheerful heart and conscience? For where there is sin and real death – the sense of sin and God’s wrath – there are such terror and dismay that man feels like rushing through iron walls. Christ says, in Luke 23:30, quoting from the prophet Hosea (Hosea 10:8), that such a one shall pray that the mountains and the hills may fall on him and cover him.

25. That dreadful death which is called in the Scriptures the second death is taken away from the Christian through Christ, and is swallowed up in his life. In place of it there is left a miniature death, a death in which the bitterness is covered up. In it the Christian dies according to the flesh; that is, he passes from unbelief to faith, from the remaining sin to eternal righteousness, from woes and sadness and tribulation to perfect eternal joy.

Such a death is sweeter and better than any life on earth. For not all the life and wealth and delight and joy of the world can make man as happy as he will be when he dies with a conscience at peace with God and with the sure faith and comfort of everlasting life. Therefore truly may this death of the body be said to be only a falling into a sweet and gentle slumber. The body ceases from sin. It no longer hinders or harasses the spirit. It is cleansed and freed from sin and comes forth again in the resurrection clothed with the obedience, joy and life which the spirit imparts.

26. The only trouble is that the stupid flesh cannot understand this. It is terrified by the mask of death, and imagines that it is still suffering the old death; for it does not understand the spiritual dying unto sin. It judges only by outward appearance. It sees that man perishes, decays under the ground and is consumed. Having only this abominable and hideous mask before its eyes, it is afraid of death. But its fear is only because of its lack of understanding. If it knew, it would by no means be afraid or shudder at death. Our reason is like a little child who has become frightened by a bugbear or a mask, and cannot be lulled to sleep; or like a poor man, bereft of his senses, who imagines when brought to his couch that he is being put into the water and drowned. What we do not understand we cannot intelligently deal with. If, for instance, a man has a penny and imagines it to be a five-dollar gold piece, he is just as proud of it as if it were a real gold piece; if he loses it he is as grieved as if he had lost that more valuable coin. But it does not follow that he has suffered such loss; he has simply deluded himself with a false idea.

27. Thus it is not the reality of death and burial that terrifies; the terror lies in the flesh and blood, which cannot understand that death and the grave mean nothing more than that God lays us – like a little child is laid in a cradle or an easy bed – where we shall sweetly sleep till the judgment day. Flesh and blood shudders in fear at that which gives no reason for it, and finds comfort and joy in that which really gives no comfort or joy. Thus Christians must be harassed by their ignorant and insane flesh, because it will not understand its own good or harm. They must verily fight against it as long as they live, at the cost of much pain and weariness.

28. There is none so perfect that he does not flee from and shudder at death and the grave. Paul complains and confesses of himself, and in his own person of all Christians: “For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice.” Romans 7:15. In other words: By the spirit, I am well aware that when this body comes to die God simply lays me to rest in sweetest slumber, and I would gladly have my flesh to understand this; but I cannot bring it to it. The spirit indeed is willing and desires bodily death as a gentle sleep. It does not consider it to be death; it knows no such thing as death. It knows that it is freed from sin and that where there is no sin there is no death – life only. But the flesh halts and hesitates, and is in constant dread lest I die and perish in the abyss. It will not allow itself to be tamed and brought into that obedience and into that consoling view of death which the spirit exercises. Even Saint Paul cries out in anxiety of spirit: “Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” Romans 7:24. Now

we see what is meant by the statement, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” The flesh must be dragged along and compelled by the spirit to obediently follow, in spite of its resistance and trembling. It must be forced into submission until it is finally overcome. Just so the mother so deals with the child that is fretful and restless that she constrains it to sleep.

29. Paul says, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified” – that is, we know that, in soul and spirit, we are already dead unto sin – “that the body of sin might be done away.” The meaning is: Because the body does not willingly and cheerfully follow the spirit, but resists and would fain linger in the old life of sin, it is already sentenced, compelled to follow and to be put to death that sin may be destroyed in it.

30. He does not say that the body is destroyed as soon as a man has been baptized and is become a Christian, but that the body of sin is destroyed. The body which before was obstinate and disobedient to the spirit is now changed; it is no longer a body of sin but of righteousness and newness of life. So he adds, *“that we should no longer be in bondage to sin.”* *“But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth, no more; death no more hath dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once; but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”*

31. Here he leads us out of the death and grave of sin to the resurrection of spirit and body. When we die – spiritually unto sin, and physically to the world and self – what doth it profit us? Is there nothing else in store for the Christian but to die and be buried.? By all means yes, he says; we are sure by faith that we also shall live, even as Christ rose from death and the grave and lives. For we have died with him, or, as stated above, “we have become united with him in the likeness of his death.” By his death he has destroyed our sin and death; therefore we share in his resurrection and life. There shall be no more sin and death in our spirit or body, just as there is no more death in him. Christ, having once died and been raised again, dieth no more. There is nothing to die for. He has accomplished everything. He has destroyed the sin for which he died, and has swallowed up death in victory. And that he now lives means that he lives in everlasting righteousness, life and majesty. So, when ye have once passed through both deaths, the spiritual death unto sin and the gentle death of the body, death can no more touch you, no more reign over you.

32. This, then, is our comfort for the timidity of the poor, weak flesh which still shudders at death. If thou art a Christian, then know that thy Lord Jesus Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. Therefore, death hath no more dominion over thee, who art baptized into him. Satan is defied and dared to try all his powers and terrors on Christ; for we are assured, “Death no more hath dominion over him.” Death may awaken anger, malice, melancholy, fear and terror in our poor, weak flesh, but it hath no more dominion over Christ. On the contrary, death must submit to the

dominion of Christ, in his own person and in us. We have died unto sin; that is, we have been redeemed from the sting and power, the control, of death. Christ has fully accomplished the work by which he obtained power over death, and has bestowed that power upon us, that in him we should reign over death. So Paul says in conclusion: *“Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.”*

33. *“Reckon ye also yourselves,”* he says. Ye, as Christians, should be conscious of these things, and should conduct yourselves in all your walk and conversation as those who are dead to sin and who give evidence of it to the world. Ye shall not serve sin, shall not follow after it, as if it had dominion over you. Ye shall live in newness of life, which means that ye shall lead a godly life, inwardly, by faith and outwardly in your conduct; ye shall have power over sin until the flesh – the body – shall at last fall asleep, and thus both deaths be accomplished in you. Then there will remain nothing but life – no terror or fear of death and no more of its dominion.

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