

“Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”

Do you struggle with sin? I’m not asking a theological question about sin in general – I’m talking about an on-going battle in your life with specific sins (sins you just keep committing, sins against your spouse, your parents, your coworkers). Do you struggle with sin?

As one who is baptized into Christ – you should struggle with sin. On the one hand, you ARE redeemed by Christ, washed in His blood – yet, on the other hand, sin remains part of your fallen nature – it clings to your flesh – it saturates everything around you – and it constantly seeks to have dominion over you. If you are not struggling with sin, then you have become its slave.

Now, I fully expect you to disagree with what I just said. You might even try to prove that you are not a slave, after all, just look at your wonderful life. However, God says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Is your wonderful life just a cover-up, a deception – a denial of what is true – like an addict that claims he doesn’t have a problem? You may be aware of your sin – but you think that it’s not really a problem, that you have control over it – that you can stop any time. And so, you go on living in it – because, that is what you desire – or, should I say, that is what your slave-master Sin desires.

The reality of this struggle in the life of the Christian is evident in the Apostle Paul’s words to the Romans. He’s speaking to Christians, to the baptized – and yet he speaks of continuing in sin, living in it – the old self, the sinful nature, being crucified so that “we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

There is no need to speak this way if sin and it’s slavery are not real – if the Christian really doesn’t need to take sin seriously. But God says that “the wages of sin is death.” Sin doesn’t just pay dividends at the end of life – it doles out its destruction now. OUR sin hurts other people – it makes them suffer – it abuses them. Sin is real – and so is the destruction it disperses.

We are all tempted to deny our sin – that’s one of the devil’s favorite ways of deceiving us. Christians, however, are particularly prone to another temptation – a wicked deception – in which the devil actually uses Jesus against you!

If he can't keep you from hearing about the grace of God that is yours in Christ Jesus – then, like all of God's gracious gifts – he will try to get you to misuse it, abuse it, and take it for granted. It doesn't take much to encourage your sinful flesh to continue doing what it desires – but the great deception comes when the devil leads you to "continue in sin" – because, after all, Jesus forgives you.

Notice what the devil does – he gives you permission to do what your sinful nature wants to do. He tries to hide, or get you to ignore, the harm that sin does to you, and those you sin against. He gets you to go against the will of God by misusing Christ's forgiveness, suggesting that it's okay with God for you to "continue in sin." That is the struggle.

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" Don't you know that this baptism [Christ's] is your baptism – that the Son of God has come to take your place, including here?

He steps into the waters of the Jordan River – filthy with the sins of "all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem" – polluted by all your sin, and the sin of the whole world – and He soaks it all up into His flesh. Your sin is His. Your sin is on Him. He is harmed, He suffers, He is abused, betrayed, denied, forsaken, and cursed – for you.

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means!!!" In the strongest way possible, God says NO. Christ has redeemed all sin by His blood – so, how can you live in it? ALL sin – even the sins you will commit tomorrow – are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, some would denounce that kind of preaching – saying such words are dangerous – that they will incite an unruly mob of sinners, doing whatever their hearts desire --- and people are going to get hurt!!

Dangerous? Yes, because the devil is ready to misuse them, against you – but true words, none the less. All sin IS redeemed in Christ's blood – which means there is nothing left to be paid, nothing left for YOU to do. Your salvation is not dependent upon you getting clean, straightening up your life, sobering up from your drunken sinfulness.

Your sin IS redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ – the ransom price has been paid in full. Now what? LIVE in it!! Why? Because this is what God desires for you – it's the life He wants you to live. Why? Because it means true freedom for you from sin and death – because

is it good for you, and for your neighbor (it's good for your wife, your fellow citizen, even your enemy).

Don't misunderstand what God's Word is saying. You WILL continue to sin – but you are not to continue to LIVE in it. Live IN CHRIST, instead.

Holy Baptism is living in Christ. Rather than living in denial – it is living every day with the truth that I am a sinner who continues to sin – and therefore, my old sinful nature must continually be put to death, crucified, drowned to death with Christ in Baptism – put to death by daily contrition and repentance.

To deny my own sinfulness – or God's work of putting to death and making alive in Holy Baptism – is to deny that Christ had to be baptized, and put to death, to redeem my sin.

And so, the daily, on-going, life-long, continual struggle with sin – is lived in the waters of Holy Baptism, living by faith in Christ's baptismal promises. Through this washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, all your sin is blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ – and where sin is redeemed, the bondage of death is broken – and there is life, new life, the very life of Jesus Christ Himself.

The Easter joy of Christ's resurrection is yours each day – for baptized into Christ – you are baptized into His death and His resurrection. Your sin is buried with Him, and you are resurrected a new man, a new creation – set free from the guilt and shame and slavery of your sin – set free to walk in newness of life.

Dearly beloved – Christ's baptism is your baptism – His death is your death – His resurrection is your resurrection – and His life is your life. You ARE baptized into Christ. What does this mean? You live, considering yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.