

The Work of the Cross

"Now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome eternal life." Romans 6:22

In this verse, the apostle Paul reveals the progressive work of the cross of Christ in the life of a believer. In order to examine the complete work of the cross in this verse, we will start at the end, which is also the purpose of Christ's death. Paul declares the outcome of Christ's death on our behalf is *eternal life*. The Greek word for "*life*" used here is *zoe*, which means God's divine life. Therefore, the objective of Christ's death on the cross was to bring us into God's eternal, divine life, not only in the age to come, but into His divine life here on earth. Paul also addresses what is necessary for us to receive this eternal life.

Paul declares that *sanctification* is required. The Greek word for sanctification is *hagiasmos*, which means holiness or spiritual and moral purity. It is evident from this context that Paul is not speaking about our initial sanctification when we were saved by Christ; he is speaking about the need for us to live a sanctified or holy life in Christ. Paul teaches here that sanctification, which results in eternal life, is the fruit of being God's bonds slave. We have now reached a crucial point in Paul's unfolding of the complete work of the cross. How can we serve God with a pure heart and remain unstained by the sin of the world? Here, Paul gives us the divine answer: we are able to be God's bonds slaves when we are freed from sin. "And having been freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness... for when you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness (Romans 6:18 & 20)."

Previously, in Romans 6:6-8, Paul explained how God freed us from sin. Since we were born into sin, we could only be freed from sin through death. "For he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:7)." Therefore, when we were born again, God spiritually included us in the death of His Son. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that

when you were baptized (*immersed*) into Christ, you were baptized (*immersed*) into His death (Romans 6:3)?" Knowing and believing this divine truth is so critical to receiving the full benefit of Christ's Atonement and inheriting eternal life that Paul repeats this fact several times in Romans Chapter Six. When Christ died, we died with Him (Romans 6:8). When Christ was crucified, our sinful nature was crucified with Him (Romans 6:6). When Christ was buried, our sinful nature was buried with Him. "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism (*immersion*) into death (Romans 6:4)."

If you do not believe to the point of acting on the divine truth that you have died with Christ, you cannot experience freedom from sin and unbroken fellowship with God. It was essential for God to remove our sinful nature. The purpose of Christ's death on the cross was to reconcile us to God. However, this reconciliation is only possible if we no longer have a sinful, unholy nature. Therefore God used the death of His Son to exchange our sin nature with His holy nature. "God made Him who had no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21)."

We have now seen how Paul presented a progressive series of divine facts in his teaching on the doctrine of our co-crucifixion with Christ. Let us review these facts: 1) Christ died for us and spiritually included us in His death; 2) Therefore when Christ died, our sinful nature died with Him; 3) Since we no longer have a sinful nature, we have been freed from the power of sin; 4) Since sin is no longer master over us, we are now free to be God's bonds slaves; and 5) As we present ourselves daily as slaves to God, our lives will yield the fruit of sanctification and we will inherit His eternal life.

But in order for us receive this full provision of Christ's crucifixion on our behalf, these divine facts must be linked together by the bond of true faith, which is an acting faith not just an assenting faith. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God

is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' (Romans 1:17)." Therefore, if we do not believe (and act on) the truth of these divine facts, then Christ's death will be of no benefit to us. "For we have also had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the word they heard did not profit them because it was not united by faith in those who heard (Hebrews 4:2)."

For example, we must believe (and act on) the truth that Christ died for us so that we can experience salvation and forgiveness of sins. We must also believe (and act on) the truth that our sinful nature died with Christ so that we can experience deliverance from the power of sin. We must then believe (and act on) the truth that we are freed from sin so that we can be God's bonds slaves. And we must believe (and act on) the truth that we are God's bonds slaves or we will not experience sanctification without which we cannot know the Lord and inherit eternal life (Hebrews 5:9; 12:14)." This is the gospel that Paul preached and practiced: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20)."

Paul declares that he "lives by faith" in this truth that he preaches. Again, this is an acting faith, not merely assenting. In fact, without action, faith is dead (James 2:26). We cannot claim to believe without corresponding action. When we act on what we believe, we bear fruit and prove we are Christ's disciples (John 15:8). This is what it means to believe that we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, which results in our sanctification. Our knowledge of the truth must result in our acting on the truth. This is real faith and only then is eternal life possible.

"God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14