

United in Christ's Death and Resurrection

“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Romans 6:5

In this verse, the apostle Paul proclaims the central truth of Christ's Atonement. All those who belong to Christ are united with Him in His death and His resurrection. This divine fact has profound and eternal provisions. However, we must remember that all of God's promises and provisions are conditional upon our faith. God has given us all His blessings and provisions *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3). However, these only become ours *if* we abide (stay united by faith) *in Christ*. Romans 6:5 contains this big *if*. The big *if* means that this promised provision of Christ's Atonement will only be ours in personal experience *if* we believe and act on the divine truth that we have died with Christ. This is the way faith works. For example, Christ died for the whole world. However, you can only be saved *if* you believe and embrace the truth that Christ died for you. In the same way, God included you in Christ's death; however, you will only share in Christ's resurrection life *if* you believe and embrace the truth that you died with Christ. In other words, *if* you do not believe and act on the truth that your old man of sin (your sinful nature) has died and been buried (removed) in Christ, you will not experience the provisions and benefits of Christ's indwelling life (even if you have been born of the Spirit).

Let us take a moment to review the divine facts of the new birth. Before God could inhabit us with His Holy Spirit, He had to remove our unholy nature. In other words, before God could make us a new creation, He had to first deal with the old creation. God had to take care of not only its fruit (our sinful actions); He had to remove its very root (our sinful nature). This is why Christ not only bore our sins on the cross with Him; He also bore our sin nature on the cross with Him. Therefore, when Christ died, we also died with Him, so that we might receive Christ's resurrected life. The Bible says, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).” God had to bury (*remove*) our old man of sin (*our sinful nature*) before He could raise us up as a new man in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17).”

God's work of sanctification starts in our spirit with this powerful liberating truth of Christ's crucifixion. Only when we know (*believe and act on*) the truth that we no longer live, can Christ's resurrection power within us transform our soul. If we do not believe and act on this divine truth of the cross of Christ, we have no other alternative but to try to live the Christian life by the best of our natural ability (the strength of our soul). Tragically, many Christians do not know (to the point that they believe and act on) the divine truth that they have died with Christ. As a result, many Christians mistakenly believe they are living by the indwelling power of Christ's life when they are actually living by the strength of their soul-life (their natural personality). Since many Christians are spiritually ignorant of the truth that they have died with Christ, they seek to fulfill

their soul-life through “Christian” service instead of losing their soul-life for Christ’s sake. This misunderstanding is often the mistake of new and immature Christians; however, if this ignorance and unbelief in the fullness of Christ’s Atonement persists, it is not harmless. Jesus said we can only follow Him and inherit eternal life if we carry our cross and lose our soul-life in this world (Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:26-27; John 12:25). This is why it is crucial for every Christian to know (and believe and act on) the Biblical truth that they have been crucified with Christ and that their sinful nature no longer lives, so that Christ can sovereignly live in them by faith (Galatians 2:20).

Romans 6:5 states, “If we have become *united* together with Him in the likeness of His death.” Another translation of this verse reads, “If we have been *planted* together with Christ in the likeness of His death.” The Greek word for “united” is *sumphutos*, which could be more precisely translated as “grafted.” Therefore, this verse could be translated, “If we have been *grafted* together with Christ in the likeness of His death.” Paul has already declared that we have been baptized or *immersed* into Christ’s death in order to convey this truth of the cross; now he uses the illustration that we have been *grafted* into Christ’s death to help us more clearly see that God has spiritually included us in Christ’s death. When a branch is successfully grafted into a living root, it receives the life of that root that enables it to produce healthy fruit. In Romans Chapter Eleven (verses 16-24), Paul once again draws from this illustration that we have been grafted into Christ. Paul instructs the Gentile believers that they, who were at one time wild branches, have now been *grafted* into the holy root – Christ, “and if the root is holy, the branches are too (Romans 11:16).”

To sum up, by the power of Christ’s crucifixion, God spiritually cut us off from the old creation (Galatians 6:14) and, by the power of Christ’s resurrection, God spiritually grafted us into His new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) so that we might become partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Therefore, *if* we believe and act on the divine truth that we have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also experience Christ’s resurrection life. Jesus said, “Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:4-5).” May God open up our understanding to see that we have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death, so that we might also be united with Him in the power of His resurrection life and bear much fruit.

In our next devotional study, we will look at one of the most important verses in the New Testament.

Tomorrow: Romans 6:6

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