

Alive in Christ

A Study on Romans 6:4-5

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If I were to say to you, “Stop living!” you would probably think, “I don’t want to stop living, and even if I wanted to I couldn’t.” You realize that God has begun physical life in you, and that you have no choice in the matter. He will take this life away from you at his appointed time. God gives life and he takes it away.

Just as it is impossible to stop physical life from growing, so it is impossible to stop eternal life from manifesting itself in the Christian. At the moment of salvation, God sovereignly places eternal and resurrected life in the Christian, and this life continues for time and eternity.

REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

The Apostle Paul has asked the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” In this context sin refers to the sin nature which everyone possesses from birth. The thought is whether a Christian can continue to be dominated and controlled by the sin nature as he was in his unsaved state. Paul is not asking whether a Christian will do acts of sin (for all Christians do acts of sin), but whether the truly saved person can go on yielding to, living by, and feeding his sin nature as he did as an unregenerate person.

Paul’s first answer is an emotional, “God forbid!” It is unthinkable, untenable and blasphemous to think that a Christian would want to continue in sin after having been gloriously saved by God’s grace. It is inconsistent with God’s grace for a Christian to continue to feed the sin nature after salvation.

Paul’s second response is a logical answer to the problem. He claims that the Christian has died to sin. Notice that the Christian has died to sin — sin has not died in the Christian. The Christian has died to sin in that God judged the sin nature in the Christian through the death of Christ so that its power has been broken. The sin nature has not been taken out of the Christian, but its hold on him has been broken so that he no longer has to be dominated by it. The true child of God no longer has to obey the sin nature, although he may do so at times.

Paul goes on to explain why the Christian cannot continue in sin. He says that every Christian was baptized into Christ. “Baptism” in this context means “identification with.” The Christian is identified with Christ or put into spiritual union with Christ, sharing Christ’s

death to sin and his resurrected life. Because of his union with Christ, the Christian is a partaker of Christ's death for sin where the sin nature was judged and its power broken. Therefore, the Christian cannot continue to be dominated by the sin nature, although he does sometimes do acts of sin. There is a progressive change of life in every Christian.

SHARING CHRIST'S RESURRECTED LIFE. — Romans 6:4

Now Paul gives us another reason why a true Christian cannot continue in sin. Because of his union with Christ, the Christian not only shares in Christ's death to sin, but he also shares in Christ's resurrected life.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.” Through union with Christ, the Christian shares in his burial, which is simply a sign that death to sin has taken place.

“That [in order that] like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” The subject is now Christ's resurrection in which he gained life over death — eternal life. Christ not only broke the chains of sin in his death, he also rose victorious over death.

“Even so we should walk in newness of life.” Because of his identification with Christ or union with Christ, the Christian shares Christ's resurrected life. This eternal life is now the possession of the Christian. The result is a new kind or quality of life, one that progressively breaks the power of sin in the Christian.

Believers receive a supernatural life through union with Christ for the purpose of walking in obedience to God. Since every true Christian shares Christ's life, this gives him the power defeat sin progressively. Therefore, the Christian cannot continue in sin.

The life that the believer has because of his union with Christ must manifest itself, or there is no life at all. This is what makes the difference between professing and possessing Christians, true Christians and good churchmen, religion and regeneration, Christianity and “churchianity.” The truly born-again Christian shares the life of Christ, and this life always manifests itself in him. Truly saved people desire to do the will of God even though at times they may find it difficult.

CO-RESURRECTION ILLUSTRATED — Romans 6:5

“For if [since] we have been planted together [grown together, grafted together] in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” Paul explains how a Christian shares Christ’s life through an illustration of a graft. A Christian shares the life of Christ in the same way that a graft shares the life of the plant into which it has been grafted.

When I was pastoring a church in California, we lived in the San Juaquine Valley, the heart of the fruit farming area. They called it the “fruit basket” of the world. There it was not uncommon to see the farmers change a whole peach orchard into a plum orchard without removing the peach trees. They would graft a plum branch into the root of the peach tree and within two years the peach tree would be producing plums, for the life of the peach tree became the life of the plum branch through the cunning of modern-day farming.

I understand that in Santa Cruz, California, there are two trees at an angle to each other. They were two trees that grew close to each other and after hundreds of years their branches crossed and the bark touched and they grew together. Contact between them has been made a hundred feet in the air, and from that point they are one tree--a single top growing from two trunks.

Another illustration of our union with Christ is Siamese twins, two distinct persons connected at one point. The same life flows through both individuals.

CHRIST’S LIFE IN THE BELIEVER WILL BE MANIFESTED

Through union with Christ, God has given the Christian the divine nature (divine life), so that the Christian he has both the desire and the power to do God’s will:

“Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).

Because God has imparted divine life to him, the Christian now has a bent, slant or propensity towards righteousness. Through progressive sanctification the Christian will be able to experience this divine life and obey God. The Christian will progressively make more choices towards God as he grows to maturity.

If there is life in the Christian there will be growth. The implanted divine life must grow. A believer can hinder growth by a failure to get the proper fertilization and sunshine of the Word of God, but he cannot stop God's life in him. It is possible for a person to be an abnormal Christian, or even a Christian freak because of failure to grow normally. But if there is no growth at all, there is no life!

CONCLUSION

For the Christian: Because the believer is in union with Christ, the Lord Jesus becomes the center of his affection and attention:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

“I am Crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

For the Non-Christian: If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour from sin, the Bible tells you that you are a slave to your sin nature, that you are living for yourself and not for Christ, that you are without the forgiveness of sin, and that you are devoid of any spiritual life because eternal resurrected life is found only in the person of Jesus Christ. If you will turn to Christ, and trust him as your personal Lord and Saviour, you will at that moment be put into spiritual union with Christ and begin to share his eternal resurrection life. He will begin to give you the power to defeat sin progressively in your life, and will assure you a place in eternity with him. Without Christ you have no hope for time or eternity! With Christ you have forgiveness of sins and the guarantee of eternal life. Will you receive him as personal Saviour and crown him as the Lord of your life?