

### **Buried with Christ!**

***“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”***

Do you have a credit card? Credit cards are convenient. Swipe the card and pay for it later. But it takes some discipline to use a credit card. You get in trouble when you don’t pay it off later. The statistics say card debt has risen 20% over the last decade with an estimate that Americans have 1.1 trillion dollars in credit card debt. The average is anywhere from \$6700 to \$9300 of credit card debt per household.

Now imagine two young gentlemen, each with a balance on their credit cards, let’s say the average of \$9,000. If they paid only the minimum per month, it will take them anywhere from 20 to 30 years to pay them off, and they will be paying a lot just in interest. Now imagine each gentleman has a very nice relative who wants to help them out. This nice relative pays off their debt totally. They don’t owe a penny. There are two ways they can take advantage of this.

The first young man is so touched by the generosity of this relative, and so happy he is debt free, he vows he will never get into that position again. He sets up a budget and he pays with cash. He leaves his credit card on the dresser or actually cuts it up and never uses it again.

The second young man is touched by the generosity of his relative, and is so happy he doesn’t owe that debt anymore. What does he do? He goes shopping. He upgrades his television from a 50 inch to an 85 inch TV along with complete surround sound. He puts it on his credit card. He needs new furniture and charges it, too. He even takes his generous relative out to dinner and pays for it with his credit card. Before he knows it, he has maxed out the limit on his credit card.

Which one truly appreciated the fact that their debt was gone? Well, both, at first, but which one really appreciated it? The first young man. You can tell by how did not want to go into debt again.

#### *I. What does it mean to be connected to Jesus’ death?*

The Apostle Paul describes a very nasty attitude out there. ***“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”*** Paul had just described how much God loves you. It doesn’t matter how much you sin, there will always be more grace. You can’t commit more sins than Jesus’ paid for on the cross. You can’t. That’s comforting.

But the devil is spreading lies about this comforting news. He tries to convince us that we can keep on sinning. In fact, he challenges us to sin more so that God can be more generous and shower us with more grace. It would be like that young man who had his credit card debt paid and says, “Hey, I can go and buy as much as I want. Who cares if my card gets maxed out again? Maybe my relative will bail me out again.” We Lutherans have been accused of this. We know from the Bible that it is all about a gracious God who forgives us all of our sins. And we point out that this is apart from works. It is a gift. But people accuse us of tempting people to take advantage of free forgiveness and use it as an excuse to keep on sinning.

This temptation is strong. We find ourselves falling for it. “Well, I don’t have to take sin seriously anymore. I am forgiven. It doesn’t matter if I see it in my life or not.” So, is it true? Does forgiveness mean we can commit more sins?

“Never.” Paul says. ***“By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”*** When you were baptized into Christ, you died with him. You were crucified with him, not with nails, but with the water of your Baptism. What does this mean?

It is true, Jesus died on the cross to pay for the debt of our sin, to pay it off completely. I think of a father driving with his young daughter. It was nice enough day that they had the windows rolled down. Suddenly the daughter screamed. A bee had flown into the car, which is bad enough, but she is allergic to bee stings. It could kill her. Her father reaches over and captures the bee in his hand and keeps it in there until it stings him. Then he opens his hand. The bee is now harmless because the father absorbed the stinger. Christ absorbed the punishment for our sin in himself on the cross.

So, Jesus freed you from the debt of your sin. But he didn’t merely pay the debt of your sins. He has freed you from sin. Look at the two young men and their credit card debts. One saw this freedom as freedom from debt. The other saw it as freedom to go back into debt. I ask you: which is free from debt? Only the first young man.

Look at what this means for you. ***“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”***

About one third of the people living in Rome at this time were slaves. Most of these slaves never tasted freedom in their lifetime. But they did when they died. It didn’t matter how much the master yelled and threatened and beat his dead slave, he

didn't have to obey him anymore. They were free. The same thing happened to you. Because you died with Christ, sin is no longer your master. It can command you, yell at you, threaten you, even bribe you and you don't have to obey it anymore.

God paid the debt of your sins by letting Jesus absorb the sting of death on the cross. But it is more than that. We are free from our sin. In fact, we have a new life.

## II. What does it mean to be connected to Jesus' resurrection?

***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."***

I pray that you and I look forward to the resurrection from the dead. It will happen. But this section from Romans tells us we don't have to wait. We are raised now. Our Baptism connects us to the death of Christ. But our Baptism also connects us to his resurrection. Because he lives now, we live a new life in Christ.

Remember the two young men who had their debt paid for? They both experienced a resurrection, a new debt free life. One continued in that debt free life by avoiding debt. The other didn't. He went back where he started. Remember what Paul said early on: ***"We died to sin."*** Notice he doesn't say, "sins," plural. We died to "sin," singular. He is not talking about individual sins we commit, but he is talking about the state of being sin. You can look at someone and say, "He is tall," and another, "she has freckles." When you look at a human, you can say he or she "is sin." That's who we are. That's why individual sins come out of us.

But that is not who we are anymore. ***"We too may live a new life."*** One young man got a taste of what it means to be debt free, so he wanted to stay debt free. That is a new life for him. Because of Christ, we taste of what it means to be sin free so we want to stay sin free.

***"For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."*** When Christ came to earth as a human, he was subject to death. I suppose someone could murder him—in fact they tried many times, but he didn't allow it. Then he died on the cross for our sins and then rose from the dead. He no longer is and never will be subject to death again. So it is with us. Our baptism connects us to Jesus' resurrection. There is no going back. We already died. Now it is time to live.

What will this look in your life? The truth is, we still must deal with sin. It is all around us. It is still in our heart. Yes, it is true, we died to sin with Christ. So how can it still be lurking in us? I like how Luther explained it. He says we should drown our sinful nature in our Baptism water. But when we do, we will notice he knows how to swim. In heaven you will never have to ask yourself, "Is this sinful or not?" because our sinful nature will be gone. But it is still here today. The key is daily repentance, that daily looking at your life to see where sin exists and asking God to forgive you. Daily dying and rising. Daily drowning the sinful nature in your Baptism water and daily rising to a new life in Christ.

Where is your Baptism certificate? When you get a chance, look at it. That certificate is not a license, like a driver's license, to go ahead and commit sin. Instead, it is a death certificate telling you the day you died with Christ and died to sin. It is also a birth certificate as it tells you when you were born again and made alive in Christ. Christ has canceled your debt. Do you enjoy a debt free life? Then, ***"...count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** Amen.