

# **Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle**

## **Baptized Together With Christ**

**Romans 6:1b-11**

## **Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)**

## **Analysis by Bruce T. Martin**

6:1b Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

*Contextual note: In chapters 1-5, Paul finished his outline of the gospel as “the righteousness of God” (1:17) with the dramatic assertion that, in Christ Jesus, the new reign of grace (the free, undeserved gift of righteousness before God, received*

*through faith), trumps the old reign of sin via Adam, death and the law. The great struggle is thus among two lordships: Adam and Christ (5:12-21); therefore also among two conflicting Powers: Death/Sin/Law and Grace (5:17, 21; 6:14). In chapters 6-8, Paul directly answers the persistent charge against him (6:1b), and a persistent challenge to his gospel: that obedience to the law of God contributes nothing to saving faith (3:28); contrariwise, that human sinfulness, being magnified by the law, magnifies and confirms the righteousness of God, first through judgment (3:5) and then through faith (3:8). Paul argues ironically, that the "obedience of faith" (1:5; 6:17, etc.) in fact "confirms the law" (3:31) that his opponents would wield against him and his gospel.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Walking in Death**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – The Body of Sin**

We humans (1:18, 32), even we Christians (7:25), find our "self," our "body," "enslaved to sin" (6:6), both internally and externally (1:24). But it is first of all the outward show that attracts our attention. We are charmed, as it were, by appearances, even to thinking that what appears to us as good and pleasing is equally good and pleasing to God. This is especially true of religious showings, such as circumcision (3:28) or sheer numbers or great cathedrals. But God's law, Whose demands hold us ceaselessly accountable, shows us otherwise: that sin enslaves us utterly, to the bitter end. Death is the fruition of all things, of our pretty bodies, profound philosophies, and techno-superiority, even of time itself. All this, Paul asserts, is our "body of sin." Escape is futile, as we all discover soon enough. Nonetheless, death is necessary in order to escape our enslavement to sin (6:6-7). Thus, we cannot "go on living in sin if we are dead" (6:2).

## **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Unbelievable**

Believing that an escape from this body of sin is even possible is even more futile than the futility itself, because “futility” originates not in our bodies but internally, in our hearts and reasoning minds (1:21), behind which we cannot get. Our futility to defeat sin is literally not believable. It is not because we are merely mortal or just not good enough, but because God himself has rendered us so, quite deliberately, “in order that they [and we] would be without excuse” (1:20; 3:19-20), “just as it is written, ‘There is not one righteous person, not even one . . . There is not one who seeks after God’” (3:10-11), period.

## **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Death’s Dominion**

Every attempt to avoid or to defeat death, especially through being religiously good, is ultimately self-defeating. But the opposite, for which Paul was charged, is not true either. “Continuing in sin,” so as to force God’s hand, does not lead to more and more “grace” (6:1b). Contrariwise, all roads lead to wrath and death, whose dominion is total. Although we necessarily sin (being slaves to sin) and necessarily continue to walk in death’s shadow (being handed over to futility), it is God who places Death before us. In our futility, we cannot perceive that death is the end of sin’s enslavement; we must die before we can believe that! For now, we can only perceive that God is against us, as indeed he is. Even before we die we know that much, “for through the Law (of God) there is full knowledge of sin” (3:20). Thus has the Law fulfilled its function, wholly and without remainder.

## **PROGNOSIS: Walking in Life**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Death to Sin Together with Christ**

“But now the righteousness of God is manifest apart from the Law . . . through faith in Christ” (3:21-22). Having “died to sin, .

. . death no longer has dominion over him," the proof being his resurrection from the dead (6:9-10) as a manifestation of the Father's glory (6:4). The good news for us slaves-to-sin is that we, being "united together" with Christ (6:5) by faith, have "died to sin" and consequently will also be "united together" with Christ in resurrection life. Baptism expresses the reality of our death to sin, our life of faith being Christ's down payment on this reality and promise. Thus, Paul says, since we have been baptized (died to sin) into Christ's death, it is impossible that we should still be enslaved to sin. Having died together with Christ, we are "freed from sin . . . in order that we should walk in a new life" (6:4-5). Our death-to-sin-together-with-Christ is the "grace-gift" (6:1b) we have received, in prospect of our resurrection.

#### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *This Is Certainly True***

We have only Christ's word that we are, by baptism, dead to sin. And we have only Christ's promise that we shall be raised from the dead with him into life eternal. In the language of Paul's diatribe, we "know" (6:3, 6, 9) this, and we "believe" (6:8) this, because of the historical "certainty" (6:5) of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. The character of faith holds onto the word of promise, because of the Promiser. Although the word is sure, the promise is as yet unfulfilled in us – hence Paul's reticence to declare us already resurrected; yet, because Christ has already been raised, it is "certain" that we, too, shall be raised from the dead in the glory of the Father. Until then, because Christ is alive to God (6:10), our faith remains truly faith.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Grace's Dominion***

Grace now has dominion over us by faith in our crucified and risen Lord. The dominion of grace, upon which we now rely as we live and breathe, enables us for the first time to "walk in

newness of life" (6:4), wherein everything we think and do is accomplished in faith. Because we are dead to sin's enslavement and our body of sin is "destroyed" (6:6), death no longer threatens us with finality. We are "alive to God" (6:11) because we live by faith. Our resurrection body, as the grace-filled manifestation of God's glory, is a future reality (because reality is always embodied). Nonetheless, we may "consider" that our resurrection is assured, living in the certainty that our faith alone is well pleasing to God (6:11).