

Resurrection Christians

What difference does the resurrection make to the lives of believers? Is it just another holiday to be observed? Is it simply a beautiful, ornamental piece of theology that as Christians we dutifully file past once a year, bow respectfully and carry on? Does the resurrection affect the way we live?

Once before, on Bible Perspective, we looked at Whatever Happened to the Resurrection - where we examined how our Gospel is only half a Gospel without the resurrection. Salvation is not possible without the resurrection. As Paul put it:

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” (1Co 15:17)

But the resurrection of Christ goes beyond salvation, and enters into our spiritual growth as Christians – our sanctification. If there was no resurrection, there could be no power over sin, no progress in our walk with Christ. The resurrection has profound consequences for the believer, whether or not he or she realises it. The sad thing is the precious truths of our identification with Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection are hardly known by the average Christian. Many Christians live in patterns of sin, seemingly unable to break free, continually going through a cycle of confessing, trying, sinning and confessing again. This goes on for years, and the discouragement and despair begins to set in – that they just must be weak Christians, Christians who simply cannot live the life the way others can. Their problem is not a lack of power; it is a lack of understanding of the truths of Romans 6, the Bible’s Master Key when it comes to defeating sin and living in a way that pleases God. Today, as we celebrate the Resurrection, we want to see how its truth can free you as a Christian to walk in newness of life.

Paul begins in Romans 6:1-3 with these words:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”

Paul’s first point is that

Sinning is the Perversion of Salvation

Paul has been speaking about the grace of God in chapter 5. There he showed how as sin abounded and multiplied, it magnified God’s grace in being able to forgive it all. The chapter ends on a high note – how big is the grace of God! But now, he hears the voice of the worldly, carnal Christian – “Well, if God’s grace is shown to be so big because of the amount of sin that has been committed – let’s sin some more to magnify the grace of God! Let’s prove just how massive God’s grace really is!” There’re a lot of Christians who believe that today. They suggest that God’s grace is like a huge bank balance. The more you sin, the more withdrawals of God’s grace you need to make, therefore, the sheer size of God’s bank vault of grace is admired. Such people believe they can sin on, brazenly disobeying the Word of God, and then return to I John 1:9 – *if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. They feel that sin and forgiveness is a game – God’s grace is magnified by continual sin.

Well, in a sense they are right – God’s grace is truly magnified for not destroying them on the spot. But what they do not see is that they are showing contempt for their

salvation Paul says: “How can we, who are now dead to sin, continue to live like that?” In other words Christ died for our sins to free us from sin, to forgive us our sins and we received Him by faith for that promise – freedom from sin. What kind of corruption would now turn around and say: “Thanks for freeing me, but I think I’ll go back to it! Continuing in wilful, unrepentant sin is like Lazarus, after having been resurrected by the Lord Jesus, popping his head round the wall of the tomb, and saying, “Thanks Lord, but I think I’ll stay here”. Continual sin is a return to the grave; it is walking around in our grave clothes.

So Paul goes further and shows that

Newness of life is the Point of Salvation

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4)

Now Paul shows us the reason we experienced this death was that we could experience His resurrection – which would mean newness of life. We have not only been united with His death, we have been united with His resurrection. The resurrection is a call to newness of life. It is a call to abandon the old, and live in the new. A resurrected life is a new life. There is a new way of thinking. We have new desires, new goals, new priorities, new plans, new attitudes, new motives, new emotions, and a whole new way of viewing the world. There is also a new way of living. There are new habits, new speech, new music, new use of time, new behaviour, a new lifestyle. We are new in our relationships, new in our family, new in the way we relate to neighbours, colleagues, classmates, other believers, church.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2Co 5:17)

God gave His Son to die and rise again so that we could be freed from the old and experience the new. This pattern of putting off the old and putting on the new is the continual pattern for spiritual growth in a Christian’s life.

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

(Eph 4:22-24)

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him...Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;”

(Col 3:8-12)

This pattern for being able to put off the old and put on the new might sound impossible to the Christian battling a habit or besetting sin. How can we say no to sin and yes to God when saying yes to sin and no to God seems almost natural? Paul now gives the answer:

Being Baptised into His Death and Resurrection is the Power behind Newness of Life

The power lies in the fact that we have been united with both His death and His life. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his resurrection*:”(Rom 6:5)

Both the power of His death and the power of His resurrection are what we have been united with, and identified with. Therefore, their reality is our reality. The old man, the old sinful nature has died with Christ. That means it cannot rule us anymore. It is as if you have a disease that is destroying you. The problem is the disease lives because you live. It gets its sustenance from you. As long as you live, the disease will live, and, continue to destroy you. The only way to eradicate the disease would be for you to die. When you die – the disease dies with you. If we could then bring you back to life, the disease has died, and you are freed from it. You are free to live a disease-free life. That is somewhat of what Paul is getting across. Now sin is not a disease, it is a choice. But the illustration does serve to help us see that our death in Christ is what has made it possible to walk away from sin. As a believer, you and sin are no longer organically linked. Sin used to feed off you and you off sin in an inseparable relationship. You could do nothing except obey the old man – follow your selfish desires. In the cross of Christ, that dies. The body of sin is destroyed. We are no longer slaves to sin.

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”
(Rom 6:6)

He that is dead is freed from sin – that much is obvious. But in the same way that merely killing a patient to kill a disease would not really solve the problem, so only being united to the death of Christ would not solve ours either. We need to be united to His resurrection as well. And this is what Paul says:

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:”(Rom 6:8)

The power to no longer obey the flesh lies in our having been united with the death of Christ. But we spoke about newness of life. It is one thing to say no to the old. Where does the power come to say yes to the new? It is in being united to His resurrection. If we died with Him, we also live with Him. And the following verse gives us a thrilling insight as to what it means to be united with the life of Christ

“Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”(Rom 6:9-10)

Jesus has died to sin, and it did not and does not hold Him. He never has to die again. He died once to sin, but now, continually, eternally lives to God. The resurrection of Christ means the one time act of breaking sin’s grip has been done, so that the never-ending acts of loving God may continue. Our identification with Christ’s death means we can say no to sin. But our identification with Christ’s life in His resurrection means we can always say yes to God. On the earth, the Lord Jesus said:

“...for I do always those things that please him.” (Joh 8:29)

“Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (Joh 4:34)

This kind of God-centred life which is lived to God and for God is made possible by being organically and spiritually linked to the resurrection of Christ. It is as if He has taken us out of a dark cave, and faced us Godward. We can always live in a Godward direction now.

So we now can describe this newness of life. It is a Christlike life, one so God-centred that God's value and God's glory and pleasure permeates every word, thought, decision and action. This is newness of life. This is resurrection life. Life which abandons living for the weak, unsatisfying life of obeying the whining of the old man, the whining of the flesh, and the groaning of Self. It now lives passionately for the source of all Life – God Himself. Living for the pleasure of pleasing Him becomes the Christian's manifesto. This is newness of life.

So Paul has shown that living in continual sin is a perversion of Salvation. He has shown that newness of life was the point of Salvation. He has shown us that the Spirit joining or baptising us into Christ's death makes it possible to live above the demands of self. He has shown that being united with Christ's resurrection makes it possible to live as Christ did – always seeking to please God, to gain actual satisfaction and sustenance from doing the will of God.

But that raises the question – how? What does it mean in practical terms, to walk in newness of life? What practical things do we do to live like resurrected saints, not like people still in their grave clothes? That's what Paul answers next, when he shows us...

The Practice of Newness of Life

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Rom 6:12-13)

Here is the practical outworking of what he has been saying. Since you have died to sin in Christ – do not let it reign in your mortal bodies, that it should make you obey its passions. In other words, since you are dead to sin as a master, do not treat it like it is your reigning master again. Well, how do I do that? By presenting myself to be used by sin - yielding my members, that is, all of my parts – body, soul and spirit in the service of sin.

All day, every moment of the day, I am presented with the choice. Two masters call for my service. The Master of Self calls me to use my body, my thoughts, my actions, my opportunities, and my time to further its aims apart from God. Self on the throne calls upon me to serve its aims – to gain its own fame, fortune, power or pleasure. It shouts out – I am the most valuable one of all. Give your thoughts and actions and all of you to carrying out my wishes.

The Other Master is Christ. He calls me to use my body, my mind, my will to know and do the will of God. He calls me to serve the glory of God, to know and experience the power and pleasure and riches and honour of Christ. God declares – I am the most valuable one of all. Give yourself to carrying out my wishes. The one is yielding myself as an instrument of unrighteousness. The other is yielding myself as an instrument of God for righteousness. Now, notice that Paul is using passive words – present or yield. He does not say – don't do sin, do righteousness. Instead, he seems to be saying – don't let yourself be used by sin, let yourself be used by God for righteousness. Why does he say this? Well, the answer is that is how the Bible portrays humans. The Bible often uses illustrations that show humans to be the ultimate product of the forces working on them. God refers to Israel as a lump of clay, which He seeks to mould into a vessel, pleasing to Himself. Elsewhere, we are called vessels – either to honour or dishonour. The implication seems to be that we are not these powerful, independent agents, shaping our destiny. We are vessels that end up being used in the service of sin or God, depending on what we give ourselves to.

Consider the implications of us being compared to a vessel, or a jar. If you fill a vessel with poison, it necessarily becomes a vessel of death. It has been yielded to the purpose of killing. If you fill a vessel with milk, it becomes a vessel of life. It has been presented, or yielded to the purpose of giving and sustaining life. Well, that illustration helps us see what it really means to yield ourselves to sin or to God. If we present our eyes with all kinds of filthy images, scenes of violence and immorality, anti-God and atheistic, humanistic scenes, if we read that which is in opposition to God and harmonises with Satan's philosophy, we are filling the vessel with unrighteousness. If we fill or give our ears to ungodly music, to gossip and blasphemy, to vain philosophy, to evil forms of communication, to trivial and foolish things – we are filling the vessel with unrighteousness. If we present our bodies to activities that are sensual and immoral; if we give them over to laziness; if we fill them with unhealthy things; if we use them for activities that do not glorify God – we are filling our vessel with unrighteousness. Above all, if we yield our minds to thinking thoughts that are impure, dishonourable, untrue, unjust, revolting and thoughts not commended by God – we are filling the vessel with unrighteousness.

The one who consistently feeds his eyes, ears, mind, body and will with things that are in rebellion to God will find that in practice, he becomes a servant of sin, He consistently yields his members to unrighteousness, and as a result, he finds that he in practice is quite unrighteous. In verse 16 Paul says:

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”
(Rom 6:16)

We are always servant, always following or obeying someone or something. Many a Christian would find a dramatic change in life if they changed what they watched, read, listened to and thought about. Paul's logic is – since you have died to these things; don't fill yourself up with them again. Since you have died to the disease of sin, don't go swallowing samples of it in the laboratory. Don't drink death in again, since you have died to it.

On the other hand, if we yield ourselves to be instruments of righteousness, it means we fill our vessel with things pleasing to God. It means we present, before our eyes, only things that please the Lord. We give our eyes to copious reading of the Word of God. We give our eyes to reading the best of Christian books. We give our eyes to beholding only what is edifying and in keeping with God's laws. In so doing, we are filling our vessel with righteousness. We give our ears to the hearing of God's Word preached, to the hearing of godly music, to the hearing of godly conversation – that which is upright and edifying. This is filling our vessel with righteousness.

It means we present our bodies to be living sacrifices to God – we give them to service to Him in the local church, we take them to places that Christ is comfortable with, we give them to activities consonant with godliness. We fill them with food and drink and substances that are healthy and in keeping with the Temple of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we are filling the vessel with righteousness. Above all, we give our mind to the meditation of God's truth, to thinking thoughts that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely and commendable. This fills the vessel with righteousness. Such a person is presenting their members to be instruments of righteousness. They will find that in practice, they are becoming vessels of honour, vessels of righteousness.

See, it is a humbling thing to think of myself as a vessel, as clay that is impressed and warped by the influences acting upon it. I'd prefer to imagine myself as self-sufficient being, charting my own course. But the Bible says I am a vessel – and I am always presenting myself to be used by one master or another, by virtue of what I fill myself with, by what I allow myself to be influenced by. You are always obeying some law, whether it is the law of sin and self, or the law of Christ. Paul says, since you are alive with Christ, fill yourself with things in keeping with newness of life. Do not go and drink in the old. Make your diet entirely one of drinking in the new. This is putting off the old, being renewed in your mind, and putting on the new. I do not have to die to myself. The death is already accomplished. I need to act out what is true; I need to live like a man resurrected from the dead – filling my vessel with things pertaining to newness of life. If I fill my vessel with things pertaining to the old, I am as Peter puts it – like a dog returning to its vomit.

The one stuck in a persistent habit needs to live in the resurrection. I don't believe Romans 6 is teaching us that we must die and die and die to ourselves. I believe it is teaching since we have died and risen with Christ, we must become what we are. We must act like dead men who have been raised. We must not give our members – the various parts of ourselves – eyes, ears, minds, bodies over to the old dead way of life in rebellion to God. Rather we must give our eyes, ears, minds, bodies over to God to see and hear and think things pleasing to Him. It's as we do this that the power of the resurrection is fleshed out in us. We triumph over sin in this mortal body.

The key to breaking patterns of sin; to breaking repetitive sinful habits is not to rebuke them or pretend to cast out some supposed demon. It is to embrace and obey the truths of Romans 6.

Living a life of continual, unrepentant, repetitive sin is an abnormality for a Christian. God did mean for those He has regenerated to be stuck in the tomb, or be walking around in our grave clothes. We are to know that victory, resurrection over those sins is His will. Newness of life is the normative pattern; it is the point of salvation. He

wants us to walk as Christ did – in newness of life for His glory. To live unto God is the goal. Through being joined into His death and resurrection, we have now been freed from our formerly inability to please God. Sin is now a present enemy, not a guiding and ruling principle. When we say no to sin, it is the power of Calvary that echoes in our voices. And the power to live in the newness of life is because we have been joined to Christ in His resurrection.

How do we live this out? As people raised from the dead, we do not fill our vessels with the old life. We do not go sniffing around in the rubbish dump of death again. We give our eyes, ears, minds and bodies over to God to be filled with the knowledge of Him, with things pleasing to Him. As we do this, as we yield ourselves to Him, we will find two things happening:

- 1) Our minds will be renewed – shaped to be like His
- 2) The Holy Spirit will control and empower us with our Scripture soaked minds.

When our minds no longer view the sin the way we did, when the Holy Spirit is empowering our obedience in its place, there is no sin on earth that we are forced to do. Paul says – sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, the law is not your ruling authority – grace is. God’s enabling grace in the Holy Spirit is now your new master, and therefore sin cannot rule you.

The resurrection of Christ is the power to walk as Christ did – unto God in newness of life. Let the truth of the resurrection be more than a pleasant, ornamental piece of theology in your life. Let it be the life-giving truth that causes you to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God, by practically refusing to yield yourself to sin, and yielding yourself to God.