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Buried with Him by Baptism (Dec 1956)

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Realizing that many Christians, at the time of their baptism, gave little serious thought to the deep meaning of that ordinance, it is purposed, not to refer to the Lord's command regarding baptism, nor to consult passages which deal with the practice of the early Church, but to consider carefully the words of the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Romans chapter 6, and to draw attention to their teaching.

Verse 12 of chapter 5 deals with the principle of sin rather than with the practice of sins; these latter embrace the fruits of that original root, sin. In this passage the subject is traced back to one man, Adam, by whom sin entered the world bringing in its wake death for all human beings. In marked contrast to this dark picture, another Man is presented, even the man Christ Jesus, by Whose grace the gift of life is made available to all who desire it. Chapter 6 opens with the question, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" The Apostle intimates that there might have been some who reasoned that since grace abounded where sin increased that they might just go on sinning the more. Consequently he raises the question, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" The clause, "We that are dead to sin," is worthy of our serious and prolonged examination, for only in the measure that it penetrates into our minds and hearts, taking hold upon them, shall we be enabled to understand the true meaning of baptism, and lead a

life that corresponds with that public confession of our Christian faith.

We shall do well in studying prayerfully this chapter to note every reference made by the Apostle to “sin” and to “death.” The first of these is found seventeen times, and the second, in one or another of its forms, the same number of times. At the outset we become conscious of being associated with a large number of dead persons, and then we become conscious of their burial, their resurrection, and the new joyous life that they have through Christ. They now live in a manner so different from formerly when they were alive to sin. By the grace of God they have been saved, they live in Christ Jesus their Lord; and, consequently, are dead to sin. Once we were all dead in trespasses and in sins, separated by our iniquities from God and the life which is in Him, but now the opposite is true, for we have passed from death unto life, and have become dead, separated from that which formerly characterized us, from that which held us in bondage.

Recognizing ourselves to be dead, we request burial, for in the spiritual sphere as well as in the natural this is necessary. Of this burial Paul speaks in verse 3, “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death.” How clear this makes the mode of baptism; it shows that only by immersion can we give expression to the truth of our death and burial together with Christ. If through the gospel one has learned that Jesus died for him, and if through believing that glorious message he yields himself to the Saviour, he will desire to identify himself with Christ on the cross in recognition of the fact that the death of Jesus has separated him from his

sins and from the surrounding world; therefore, he will obey the command of the Lord in baptism.

We shall now raise several important questions, and seek an answer to them in this chapter. The first question is, When did the believer die? The answer is stated, “Knowing this, that our old man is (better translated was) crucified with Him” (V. 6). That day long ago when Jesus was nailed between two thieves, you and I, dear Christian, were put to death. While some may not yet understand this fact clearly, much less feel that it is so, it must be accepted by faith. God says it, therefore it must be true. So corrupt is our old man (our carnal nature) that he cannot possibly be improved; moreover, God did not attempt to improve him, but nailed him to the cross of shame. The Lord now instructs all His children that they have died together with their Saviour.

Why were we put to death? This is another important question, and the equally important answer is given. We have already seen that our old man cannot improve for “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Consequently we have been put to death, “that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Every unconverted person is a servant of sin, some in greater measure than others, but concerning all, it is true that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” The Lord Jesus expresses it in the Gospel of John, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (8:34). Not only the openly ungodly serve sin, but many a born-again Christian, through the lack of yieldedness to his Lord, is, to a degree, ruled by that old taskmaster. One of the great reasons for the death of God’s Son was to deliver us from the power of sin. We can only enter into

the blessedness of this liberty from sin as we believe the word of God.

The exercised believer will doubtless raise another question, for he is conscious of the struggle of the two natures within him, the spiritual and the carnal. He will ask, “How may I overcome sin and make good in my daily life this truth of my death with Christ?

The answer is clearly and plainly stated, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (V. 11). Every child of God should become acquainted with himself, and be brought to realize that in the old nature there never has been and never can be anything good or even permissible. This is often learned only through painful experiences, but when once one is convinced of his own complete corruptness, he will welcome the good news of his death with Christ, and be happy, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin in the daily struggle against evil. In like manner he will rejoice in the reckoning of himself as alive unto God.

As this article draws to a close let us glance at verse 13, “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.” At Calvary, our old man was crucified with Christ Jesus; in our baptism we proclaim our identification with His death, burial, and resurrection; professing to have completely renounced the old self-life and also that we are the exclusive property of God. We must therefore not submit our bodies to be lightly used for self and sin, but rather

we must yield them unto Him, recognizing ourselves to be a people “alive from the dead.”

Should these reflections be perused by any unbaptized Christian, it is hoped that they may present to him a real challenge, and that he may obey the wish of our Lord, “In Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:11-12).