

United with Christ

Romans 6:1-5

Introduction

Paul says in **verse 4** that *we were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death*. This is why many Christians practice baptism by immersion. It symbolizes being laid in a “watery grave” and raised to a new life. In **verse 5**, he says that we were *united with [Christ] in a death like His*, and we will be *united with Him in a resurrection like His*. This raises three questions: 1) How are we united with Christ? 2) How is our death like His? 3) How is our resurrection like His?

United – Planted

‘United’ means more than having fellowship or being together. A union is a strong bond. As the Bible says about marriage, *The two shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24)*. The word translated *united with Him* means “grown together” or “planted with.” This agricultural term points us back to Jesus’ words in **John 15** (Read **John 15:1-5**). We are united with Christ in Baptism; however, Baptism is only the beginning. It is the ‘planting.’ The ‘growing together’ is ‘abiding.’ When things grow together, they ‘become one.’ In **Romans 11**, Paul talks about Gentiles being grafted into the family of faith. When a branch is grafted onto a tree, it becomes part of that tree and dependent on that tree. Above all, being united with Christ means we are dependent on Him.

Three Types of Death

We are united with Christ in a *death like His*. To understand the ‘death like His’ we must look at the three types of death.

Figurative Death in Baptism

We were *buried with Him by baptism into death (v. 4)*. As we said earlier, this is why many Christians practice the mode of immersion. It symbolizes being buried with Christ and raised to a new life in Him. As a side note, it was the mode Martin Luther preferred and there are some Lutheran churches going back to immersion. Pouring symbolizes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and sprinkling symbolizes the cleansing waters of Baptism. At Baptism, Christ cleanses us from our sin, unites us to Himself in death and life, and gives us the Holy Spirit. This death is ‘figurative,’ not in the sense of being symbolic, but, as we said, it is only the beginning. As the Catechism teaches: *[Baptism] indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

Mortification of the Flesh

This brings us to the second type of death, the daily death of the Old Adam. This is what used to be called the ‘mortification of the flesh.’ Paul says in **1 Corinthians 9**, *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27)*. Some take this literally and beat or whip their bodies to bring their flesh under submission. But as we read in the Catechism, ‘mortification’ is daily contrition and repentance. That is, acknowledging your sin, being

heartily sorry for it, and turning from it. The disciplining of the body shows the extent to which sin has control of us and the severity of what must be done to conquer it.

Physical Death

The last type of death is physical death. This is the death most people think of and fear. And if this life on earth was all there is, then it would be a fearful thing. But hear the words of Chrysostom concerning the martyrdom of John the Baptist: *Do not say, "Why was John allowed to die?" for what occurred was not a death but a crown, not an end but the beginning of a greater life. Learn to think like a Christian. You will not only remain unharmed by these events, but will reap the greatest benefits.*

Resurrection Like His

The benefits are that we are united with Him in a resurrection like His. Like Christ, we will be raised from the dead, never to die again.

Like and Unlike

Our death and resurrection are like Christ's and unlike His. Our death is like His because we died to sin as He died to sin. However, while His was a death that **gave** forgiveness of sins and life, in our death, we **receive** forgiveness of sins and life. While, in our resurrection, we will share in His glorified humanity, we will not share in His divinity. In Communion, we share in His death, receiving forgiveness of sins and life in Him, while we proclaim His death until He comes when we will share in His resurrection. This is how we are **UNITED WITH CHRIST** in death and life.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
