

"Our old man"

"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." — Romans 6. 6.

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The death of Christ is the grand master-fact which controls all proper Christian life and experience, and it is striking how this comes out in Romans, chapters 6, 7 and 8. In chapter 6, for instance, verse 6 gives us the solid foundation upon which all its teaching rests; a verse which carries our thoughts to the cross of Christ and what God accomplished there.

The apostle is showing how unthinkable it is that the believer should continue in sin, and he appeals to what was common knowledge in connection with baptism, viz., that it is 'into' or 'unto' Christ's death, and hence baptism has the character of burial with Him, carrying with it the necessary consequence that our subsequent life is to be of a new order. "We also should walk in newness of life" (verse 4).

In verse 6 our thoughts are turned, not to baptism, but to that immeasurably greater event to which baptism points. Verses 3 and 4 give us baptism and what we are to know in connection with that. Verse 6 gives us the cross and what we are to know in connection with it. Behind baptism lies the cross — if we may so speak. Without it baptism is nothing.

"Our old man" then has been crucified with Him, so that, the "body of sin" being annulled, we should no longer serve sin. 'Annulled' is a more correct rendering than 'destroyed', as in the A.V. The difficulty which that verse presents is largely found in the two phrases we have put in inverted commas. What do they mean?

"Our old man" is an expression which sets before us an abstract idea, inasmuch as we cannot refer to any particular man as setting forth the idea in concrete shape. We cannot exactly point to Adam, though all the features which characterize the "old man" are just those which lay inherent in Adam as a fallen creature, and which have unrolled themselves in the sad history of his race.

Let us rather spend a moment in mentally visualizing the Adamic being and nature, as set forth not only in Adam but in the whole history of his descendants; it instantly presents itself to us as "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4: 22), and we have some idea of what "the old man" is in its moral characteristics.

But our verse deals not with "*the* old man" but "*our* old man". An important distinction. "The old man" is a condemned thing, "put off" — i.e., disowned as to its power and characteristics — by the Christian; but it is "*our* old man" that is said to be crucified with Him.

To make the point clear, refer for a moment to Romans 3: 22, where the distinction is so clearly made between the righteousness of God being "unto all" in the first place, and "upon all them that believe" in the second. The first is the broad and general bearing of that righteousness based upon Christ's propitiation (verse 25), the second the actual effect of the application of that righteousness, strictly limited to where the faith exists that makes Christ's work its own in a substitutionary sense. Of this, Romans 4: 20 is an example. As a substitute He died for 'our' offences, that is, the offences of believers, and not everybody's offences.

Now what is true in Romans 4: 25 in regard to offences is true also in Romans 6: 6 in regard to the nature from which offences proceed. It is not "*the old man*" which is crucified with Christ any more than it is everybody's offences for which He was delivered. Had He suffered for everybody's offences and had "*the old man*" been crucified with Him, then pretty clearly *no one* could righteously be punished for their offences, nor condemned because of what they are in themselves. In other words, we then must logically hold to universal salvation.

Just the same feature is displayed in 2 Cor. 5: 21, though here again there is a frequent tendency to omit in quoting it the two small words which qualify the statement, "for us". The statement is: "He hath made Him to be sin *for us*"; again we say — *not* 'for everybody'.

"Our old man" then is our Adamic being and nature as set forth in its moral characteristics — all that we were as children of Adam — and that has been crucified with Christ. Its judgment has been borne by Him, so truly so that in the great judicial act of the cross *we*, as identified with all that we were, have died also. Hence in verse 8 the apostle takes up just that expression and uses it as a basis for a further deduction. "*Now if we be dead with Christ*", etc. The world has not died with Christ, but *we* have.

From all this flows the annulling of "the body of sin" — another abstract idea. Colossians 2: 11 furnishes us with a similar expression. In this verse the words "of the sins" are wrongly inserted, as is generally admitted; the passage should read, "putting off *the body of the flesh*".

In both these passages the word 'body' seems to have a similar sense as conveying *the whole thing*, as contrasted with anything partial or sectional. For instance, Amos likened the deliverance of some of Israel to a shepherd taking out of the mouth of a lion "two legs or a piece of an ear" (Amos 3: 12), only fragments were saved. God has not dealt with sin in any such partial or fragmentary way. His purpose was not merely to annul certain ugly features of sin but the whole body of it, and that He did by bringing to crucifixion — a death of shame — our old man — all that we were as children of Adam.

That great judicial act and sentence of the cross decides everything. It means liberty for the believer, that henceforth he does not serve sin. *Knowing* what the cross has affected, he *reckons* in accordance therewith (Verse 11), and henceforth *yields* himself and his members as instruments of righteousness unto God (verse 13). The new life of the believer is a life of obedience, for this is what yielding means.