

The Benefits of Christ's Death

Lord's Day 16

By Rev. John Marcus

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Bible Text: Romans 6:6-8
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First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton

15911 107A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, T5P-0Z3
Canada

Website: www.edmontonprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/edmontonprc

Romans 6. Him

We read the entire chapter. Romans 6, beginning at verse 1.

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 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. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 6 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. 7 For he that is dead is freed from sin. 8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: 9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. 10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. 11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 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. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. 15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16 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? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because

of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. 20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

Before we turn to the Catechism, let's read from Scripture, Romans 6, verses 6 through 8.

6 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. 7 For he that is dead is freed from sin. 8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

It's upon these verses and many other verses from Scripture that the Catechism bases the teaching of Lord's Day 16. Lord's Day 16 Questions and Answers 40 through 44. We'll read those.

Q. 40. Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

A. Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God.

Q. 41. Why was He also "buried"?

Thereby to prove that He was really dead.

Q. 42. Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

Our death is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.

Q. 43. What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

That by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Q. 44. Why is there added, "he descended into hell"?

That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ in our treatment of the Apostles Creed, we come to the darkest words in the entire creed, "dead and buried, He descended into hell." When he died, his soul was separated from his body. When he was buried, his body was taken out of the land of the living, out of the presence of the living, and placed in that dark tomb. But especially the darkness is presented in those words, "He descended into hell." Jesus experienced the torments of hell, being forsaken by God. And all by themselves, those words are comfortless words full of darkness and despair. All by themselves, I say. They don't give us comfort until we add the words that are implied, "for us." Jesus died and was buried and descended into hell for you and for me, then there is comfort in those words; then there is not despair. As soon as we add those words, "for us," then we have reason for rejoicing because Christ through that suffering earned great benefits for us. We want to look at those benefits today. They are especially three benefits that Christ earned for us on the cross through his death and the first of those benefits the Catechism speaks of in Question and Answer 40: the satisfaction for our sins. The second benefit is: the crucifixion of the old man. And the third benefit: the passage into eternal life. Because Christ descended into hell, because he suffered those torments, our death now is a passage into eternal life. Let's look at those benefits of Christ's death, then, the satisfaction for sins; crucifixion of the old man; and passage into eternal life.

When we think and when we confess Christ's death and descent into hell, beloved, we must know that this was the only way in which satisfaction could be made for our sins in order to deliver us from those sins. Satisfaction, literally the idea of satisfaction, means the doing of enough, if you took the word all by itself. The doing of enough and so satisfaction for our sins is doing enough to make the payment for the wages of our sin, and the wages of our sin, the inspired apostle has expressed in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." God will pay those wages. God must pay those wages. Why must he pay the wages of sin? Because God is God. Because he is a God of truth and justice and he cannot change himself. Justice demands that the wages of sin be paid. Justice demands that God not ignore rebellion against his most High Majesty. He is a righteous and a just God, completely set upon doing that which is just.

And he is, connected with that justice, God is a God of love. Now, some think if God is a God of love, why can't he just set justice aside? And the thing is when people think about God as a God of love, they think of him only as regards his love towards the human race. They think that God loves all men, head for head. They say, "Why can he not in love forget justice?" But they forget that a God of love also loves himself. God loves himself perfectly and, therefore, he must punish and destroy all that sets itself against him, that sins against his infinite Majesty.

God's justice demands that the wages be paid. God's truth demands that he pass the eternal sentence that he threatened upon Adam and Eve if God said to Adam and Eve, "The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God is a God of truth. He keeps his word. He must pay the wages that he declared would be paid.

There are only two ways that wages, those wages of sin, might be paid. One way is for us to spend eternity in hell. Jesus Christ will say on the judgment day, "Depart from me ye that work iniquity," to pay the wages. That's the idea. Everlasting punishment they will experience, being cast out of the presence of God on the judgment day, neverending weeping and gnashing of teeth, devouring unquenchable flames, the place where the worm never dies but continually eats. The smoke of our torment rising up forever and no rest, no peace day and night. The wages of sin is eternal death. What a fearful expectation for those who are yet in their sins.

Some people try to cover over the harsh reality by imagining that Jesus will have mercy on everyone in the end, but that's not the Jesus that Jesus, himself, declares. Of all the prophets, Jesus spoke of hell as much or even more than they did. Matthew 11:23 is one example. Jesus had performed and the children in Catechism just had this history, Jesus performed many miracles in Capernaum. Jesus says to Capernaum later, he says, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee." Sodom will be judged for its wickedness but those who saw the miracles, those who heard the truth of Jesus Christ and rejected it, Jesus says, "Woe unto you."

Jesus spoke about hell. He taught clearly about hell, what a dreadful day that will be for those who face the day without Jesus Christ as their Mediator. Modern churches balk at the talk of hell but they will have to answer for their rejection of Jesus' clear teaching. One way to pay the wages is to experience the torments of hell ourselves, but if we want to escape the eternal torments of hell, the only other way for the wages to be paid and for God's justice to be satisfied is for Jesus Christ to descend into the depths of the torments of hell for us as our substitute, and for that to happen, Jesus had to humble himself all the way to death. Physical death but also spiritual, the torments of hell itself. Jesus must humble himself.

If there had been another way, do you think that God would have sent his only begotten Son? Do you think he would have gone through all the trouble and put his Son through that torment if there had been another way? Why would God make him suffer the horrible wages of sin if there had been another way? When Jesus prayed in the garden, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," would not God have answered him if it had been possible? There was no other way.

The wages of sin must be paid. How is God's justice satisfied with regards to our sin? Only if Jesus humbled himself unto death, the death of the cross. It had to be a special death. What kind of death must Jesus suffer on the cross? Well, in the first place it must

be a willing death. No one forced Jesus to go to the death of the cross. No one captured him against his will. Look through all the history of Jesus' life, he did not run from the cross, he delivered himself to the cross. He marched into Jerusalem. He did not try to defend himself in his trial, but as a lamb before its shearers is dumb, so Christ opened not his mouth because he was willing to go to the cross. Jesus himself said, John 10:18, "No man," speaking of his life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." As an offering, I bring that offering willingly. That's the idea. "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Jesus was in control. He willingly offered himself. Even on the cross, he was in control of his life so that the very last thing that he spoke, he willingly gave up the ghost, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." If Jesus had done otherwise, if he had run from God's will, if he had refused to go to the cross, then he would have been disobedient and then there would be no sacrifice because he would have his own sin to pay for.

But secondly, Jesus' death must involve the suffering of God's curse. He must die a cursed death and that's why Jesus had to die on the cross, because the death of the cross God had declared to be a cursed death. "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." That was a symbol of God's curse when the one hanging on the tree was separated from the earth and from heaven, rejected of God. Jesus while he hung on the cross was fully aware of the symbolism of the cross. He knew that God had declared him cursed and he experienced that curse and the darkness of the cross when God forsook him.

Jesus must suffer a willing death, Jesus must suffer a cursed death, Jesus must suffer an innocent death. Jesus must be absolutely innocent. He must be perfectly righteous because if he had committed any sins himself his whole life long, he would have deserved the punishment that he got for himself, and then he would have to pay for his own sins, he could not pay for the sins of another. He must be perfectly innocent. God made him to be sin for us but only because he knew no sin of himself. In that way, he could satisfy God's justice for our sins.

A willing death, a cursed death, an innocent death, and a violent death. Jesus' death must be violent. Jesus could not simply die of old age or of some sickness lying in a bed. If a guilty criminal is allowed to die a natural death, nobody would consider that that death was the payment for his crimes that he had committed and so, too, when Jesus died, it must be evident that his death was a payment for all of the sins of all of his people. It must be a pouring out of blood because in the blood is the life. Punishment requires a violent death.

Lastly, Jesus' death must be a precious death. His sacrifice must be of great value. His sacrifice must not just be enough to pay for one sinner to be released from the payment of sin, but his sacrifice must be so valuable that it would pay for all of the sins of all of his people. It must pay the whole ransom price and that means Jesus' death must involve the precious blood of God himself, that is, God the Son. Nothing is more precious in all of the earth than the precious blood that was poured out on the cross. Nothing is more precious.

Beloved, you and I must believe that. We must believe that Christ was able to satisfy God's justice against our sins in every way so that no more punishment remains. The debt is paid. That means the sins that you and I committed yesterday or last week or today or next year, all of those sins have already been paid for. You say, "But, pastor, you don't know what I did. You don't know the horrible things that I have done, the sins that I struggle with." Jesus says those sins are paid for, paid for already. Sinful pride and selfishness. Sinful doubts. Sinful self-pity. Sinful words and deeds. Sins against our spouses. Sins against our children. Sins against our parents, our brothers and sisters, our neighbors. All of our sins, great and small, have been paid in full on the cross.

Now we experience the payment has been made, now we experience the application of that payment to our consciences when God, by his grace, causes us to turn away from our sins and to bring them and lay them at the foot of the cross and to ask him for forgiveness. That forgiveness is not for everyone. It's not for those who refuse to turn away from their sin. It's not for those who don't come to cross confessing their sins and seeking the blood of the cross to cover those sins. Forgiveness is not for them but it's for those who, by God's grace, turn from our sins and look to that precious sacrifice that Christ has offered for us.

The death of the cross not only made satisfaction for our sins, it also earned for us the crucifixion of our old man. That's what the Catechism teaches in Question and Answer 43, "What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross? That by virtue thereof, our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving." That's striking language, beloved. Our old man is crucified, dead and buried with him. That's a reflection, that's not just the writers of the Catechism that came up with that striking language, that's the reflection of the language of Scripture itself. Romans 6:6 says, "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."

Our old man. What is the old man? The old man is that principle of sin remaining in us. The old man is our hereditary sinful disposition. The old man with all its various lusts, possesses and influences us in all of our faculties and powers. It's called the old man because that's something that all mankind has by nature. It lives and spreads itself in every one of us. It powerfully affects our inclinations. It's called the old man because it's as old as we are. As soon as we are conceived, we receive the old man. We inherit that old man from Adam himself passed down through the generations. We call it the old man in distinction from the new man that we receive by the grace of the Holy Spirit that God gives to us when he gives us new life. Then the inspired apostle calls it "our" old man because it is ours. It is our nature and we will always have that nature as long as we live until we are brought into heaven itself.

So what does it mean that the old man is crucified with Christ? Our old man is put to death with Christ. There is a sense in which just as Christ was put to death, so our old

man is put to death. As certainly as he was put to death, so certainly he puts our old man to death. How is the old man put to death? Well, not, of course, on a physical cross and not in a few hours' time, but the inspired apostle is making a likeness, making a comparison. Our old man is put to death when Jesus Christ by his Spirit works in our hearts to sanctify us, and like the slow death of the cross, not an instant death but like the slow death on the cross, the old man is put to death by a slow and painful process that lasts our entire lifetime and will be completed when we are taken to heaven.

Our old man is crucified, dead and buried with Christ and the result of Christ's mighty work of sanctification is that, as the Catechism says, the corrupt inclinations of our flesh no longer reign in us. No longer reign in us. Does that mean that we no longer sin? If that were the case, we would all have to conclude that we don't have that new life. We would all have to conclude that we are not saved because the fact of the matter is, every child of God yet struggles with sin every day and in every part of our lives.

The fact of the matter is, once we are saved, that's when the struggle begins against the old man so when we say that the corrupt inclinations of our flesh no longer reign in us, we are saying that sin does not have the same power as it does in the unbeliever. It doesn't have the same authority in us as it does in the unbeliever because all the unbeliever can do is sin. Sin rules over him as a king and he can do nothing else but pure sin and there is no struggle against that sin. If an unbeliever struggles against an outward manifestation of sin, let's say they struggle against drunkenness, it's because they want to go to another sin and fulfill other lusts.

The unbeliever does not struggle with sin as sin but that's not the way with God's people, beloved. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you." That is, sin will not dominate you as it dominates unbelievers. Now sin is only a terrorist, not to minimize terrorism. Sin is a terrorist that wreaks havoc in our lives but it's not a tyrannical king that we have to obey and so when we see a struggle against the old man, that is a sure sign that we have the new man. When we repent of sin and when we flee from sin, when we hate our sin because it is sin against God, that's a sure sign that Christ is working in us by his Holy Spirit to sanctify us, to make us hate sin more and more and flee from it and follow after righteousness.

Sin shall not have dominion over you. That might be discouraging for some of us to hear because we think to ourselves, "Well, it sure seems like it has dominion in my life." And maybe that's because we see the terrorism, we think that sin rules, and yet there's a struggle. So the apostle adds the words in Romans 6:14, he adds the words, "for ye are not under the law but under grace." We need that encouragement because sin is yet a very large part of our lives. We need to be reminded that the harsh and depressing rule of the law which served to heighten our guilt, that rule is over. We are no longer under the law, under the condemning law that says you deserve God's curse. We are no longer under that law but we are under grace. We stand in God's grace, that love which he gives us in Christ Jesus. We will never be separated from that love. Grace takes away the guilt and grace preserves us in the way. Even though we stumble in sin, grace declares forgiveness in Jesus Christ. By God's grace, our corrupt inclinations no longer reign in us as king.

But then Christ's sanctification also works in us to make us willing servants of Jesus Christ and so the Catechism expresses that, "but that we offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving." Not a sacrifice of atonement to pay for our sins, that's not why we do good works, but a sacrifice that we offer to God to express our thankfulness, that is, our reasonable service, that is logical in light of all the mercies that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus.

"I beseech you," Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Not that we arrive at perfection in this life. Anyone who thinks we even come close to perfection has a very shallow view of sin. Some people maybe look at a few outward gross sins, they pat themselves on the back and think to themselves, "I have almost arrived," if they don't think they have arrived already. But have they really hated all sin with all of their heart? Can they say, "I have loved God perfectly with all my heart and soul and mind and strength"?

We will not arrive at perfection but we do aim at perfection by God's grace and then we look forward to the fullness of that when we pass from this life into glory. So in connection with that, the third benefit is a passage into eternal life. A wonderful truth of the Gospel is not only that God satisfies for our sins through Christ's death, not only does he crucify our old man, but he also gives to us a passage into eternal life. Our death is not a payment anymore for sin, but instead is the last step of our sanctification. When God takes us into glory, then sanctification will be perfected. That is the unbreakable chain of salvation, that chain, that golden chain that begins with our predestination. Romans 8:30, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." That's the way God always works. That chain will not be broken so that we will be glorified when God takes us into heaven and clothes us in splendor.

Glorification is the perfection of sanctification. God in this life begins to make us holy, but when we are glorified, we will be perfectly holy in heaven above. The Catechism points to that in Question and Answer 42 when it says, "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die? Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into life eternal." In other words, death is the time when we will finally experience the fullness of eternal life with sin and without misery.

Our death is an abolishing of sin and going to be with Christ. That we look forward to, going to be with Christ. Not that we look forward to the process of death, we face that yet with fear because it is unknown; we don't know the pain that will confront us when we face that hour. But the other side of death, we look forward to that because then we shall be glorified.

Jesus' death and his subsequent glorification guarantees that our bodies also will be glorified with him. Christ's death purchases all of our salvation and if that's true, then our death is not a payment anymore for sins. Yes, it can be a very painful thing. It often is

difficult for the person dying, but it's never a payment for sin and so when we see that in its proper light, when we view death in that way, then there is comfort in the midst of our struggles surrounding death. It's not a punishment but only a passage into eternal life.

That ought to give us comfort, beloved. The dark death and burial and descent into hell of Jesus Christ ought to give us comfort because it means Christ already paid for our complete salvation. He already suffered the torments of hell that we deserved. We will be glorified with him in heaven.

That's our confession when we say Jesus Christ was dead, was buried and descended into hell, our confession that it is for us and then our salvation is certain and then we can rejoice. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that thou hast given to us the faith to believe that Jesus Christ died and was buried and descended into hell even for our sakes. May we know that. May we know that sacrifice was for us, even as we see or struggle against sin, even as we see ourselves looking to the blood of the cross, may we know that it was poured out for all of our sins. So give us comfort, we pray, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.