

# Written Copy: Romans 6:1-5 “Cleansing Our Love of Idols”

## Baptism of Jesus

Sunday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Text: Romans 6:1-5

<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

### Exegetical Statement

Paul has just described how as my awareness of sin in my life grows, I should also see grace abound even more to cover that sin. Given that, should I then persist in a life centered on sinning so that grace may then increase too? Absolutely not he responds! In my baptism I have died to living a life dedicated to sin. That is because my baptism has intimately united me to Jesus' death on the cross. His death was the death of my sin, and the power of my sinful heart was also put to death with it. While my sinful heart and the sinful desires still exist inside me, they no longer rule over me. Sin has lost its power to condemn me to eternal separation from my God. My sins were buried with Jesus and my desire to live a life centered on pleasing my sinful self was buried with them. I am no longer a slave to sin. Just as Christ rose from death to a new life, never to die again, so I too have risen with Him. I now live a new life, centered on loving obedience to my Savior. Because His death has removed all that would offend God, I now am declared to be in right standing with God. I have been acquitted of all sinful charges. I am good enough for God's Spirit to live in me and with me. Even though I continue to sin, grace abounds, and that sin is forgiven, washed away to the cross. And I am once again restored, declared righteous and cleared of all charges by the Father through faith in His Son which delivers to me all that His Son earned for me on the cross. So as I live out my life, I need to constantly reaffirm this fact through daily confession and repentance: that I have died to the power of sin and live by the power and forgiveness of the living God now, with the sure and certain hope of eternal life to come. This promise is declared to me every time I hear and hold fast to the words of the Absolution

### Focus Statement:

Jesus came to destroy the power that our idols have over us by uniting us in baptism to His death. His death not only takes away the consequences for our idolatry but renders powerless our sinful hearts that desire to make idols out of anything other than God. We can confess our sins because they have all been taken away to the grave and buried there with Jesus. United with Him we rise again to live a new life, not centered on pleasing our sinful idols, but empowered by the One True God to live for Him and with Him and in Him.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We create idols out of political parties and leaders. We are willing to defend them against all error, because if they are ever shown to be wrong then they lose the power and honor we have invested them with. If not political parties and figures, then we make idols out of ourselves, refusing to admit that we can be wrong

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Remember the power our baptism has to cancel our love affair with our idols. Confess those things we defend that are not of God, repent-turn away from them and back to God, knowing that their power over us has been defeated. Hold fast to the truth of the Absolution that is the ongoing forgiveness and renewal delivered to us through our baptismal cleansing every time we confess and hold fast to the Gospel.

### Subject Sentence: In Baptism power of sinful heart is broken

## **Introduction: Our Idols and How We Serve and Defend Them**

Do you want to know how to spark a lively debate on social media? Post anything at all about the riot that occurred at the Capitol building on January 6<sup>th</sup> where a mob stormed the Capitol and forced the combined session of Congress to retreat from doing its duty. The day following the riots, after reading posts and comments written by others on Facebook, I decided to address what was upon my heart. No matter what you believe to be the truth about the election, or how Congress should act in either ratifying the Electoral Vote or not, responding by rioting, looting, and trespassing is always wrong. It was wrong when done in support of Black Lives Matter rallies over the summer and it was wrong here on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Now there is the matter of free speech that is in play. I believe that leaders of the country should be very careful at this volatile time not to incite further unrest. There are questions that need to be raised about the speeches made by Republican leaders at the rally that preceded the mob heading down and storming the Capitol building. At the same time, I read in the media about Democratic Leaders who, in discussing the way the mob overcame the security detail at the capitol, suggested and insinuated that because the protesters were white, the same level of force was not used on them as was on protestors at the Black Lives Matter Rallies that turned into riots. I don't find these comments to be helpful at this time.

But I bring these matters up for another reason. I want you to stop right now and examine your heart. Did either of these statements cause ire and anger to rise in your heart? Did either of these make you want to stand up and defend "your side" against "the other side"? I ask this because it brings to mind a quote I recently read in the book **"Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World is at its Worst"** by Ed Stetzer. In it he quotes the following from Tim Keller: ***"When we center our lives on the idol, we become dependent on it. If our counterfeit god is threatened in any way, our response is complete panic...This may be a reason why so many people now respond to U.S. political trends in such an extreme way. When either party wins an election, a certain percentage of the losing side talks openly about leaving the country...They have put the kind of hope in their political leaders and policies that once was reserved for God and the work of the Gospel."*** As Christians we know we are to love others, even those we consider to be our enemies. We certainly should be tolerant of those who hold opposing political viewpoints from us. And we should be ready to examine our own candidates and political party when it steps over the lines, whether it's the Democrats or the Republicans. But do you find yourself unable to do so? Do you find yourself finger pointing to the other side and responding "Well, look what they did!" instead of considering what your party or candidate may also have done? Is it possible that you've made a leader or a party your idol? Have you elevated them to the position of someone or something that can do no wrong, that needs to be defended by you against all attacks?

No one likes to admit they are wrong. Certainly not politicians. In fact, to admit you are wrong in the public square these days is to make certain you will not be reelected. But how ready are you to admit you are wrong? Are ready to confess that what you said or did was the wrong thing to your spouse, to a family member, to a friend? Perhaps it's not just political figures and parties that we make idols of. When we can't allow ourselves to admit that we were wrong, is it possible that we have made an idol of ourselves? When we allow pride and self-righteousness to prevent true confession of sins have we then elevated ourselves above the level of the Holy Spirit whose job is to move us to confession? Isn't the "I" in the word "sin" the "I" of the "idol"?

## **God Works to Break Our Enslavement to Idols**

The LORD knows we have a tendency to elevate things and people to the level of idol or false god in our hearts and lives. And so He makes it a point to come into our lives to smash these idols and show them for what they are, useless powerless things unable to save us.

One of the prime examples in the Old Testament is the contest between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The rules were as follows: The prophets of Baal would pray to their god, and Elijah would pray to the LORD God. The God who answered by fire would prove himself to be the one and only God. The prophets of Baal took up the challenge because they were sure their god was the god that would answer. And so they carried on, crying out to their god for most of the day, cutting themselves and doing other things to try to get Baal's attention. By the time evening came there was no answer from Baal. Then Elijah built an altar to the LORD, placed wood on it and the bull for sacrifice. Then he had the people douse the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice with water until everything was drenched, and water filled the trench around the altar. When Elijah prayed to the LORD God, it was the LORD who answered with fire. His answer not only burned the wood and the sacrifice but consumed even the stones the altar was built of. The LORD proved to all that day that He was the only God, and that all other idols did not exist and had no real power to help.

But what about today? How does God work to break us from our love of idols and our trust in them, even when we make an idol of ourselves? He comes to us in His Word to declare that He is the only He has the power to help, save, comfort, and defend us. He is the One who created all things in the beginning. His Spirit hovering over the waters. He is the only one who, as David confesses in **Psalm 29: 7-11** ***7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!*** His voice is the One with power that makes things happen. His voice brings His will to bear upon all people. His voice is the

One that strengthens and brings peace to a world in confusion and unrest. His voice and His Spirit are what changes you and me.

It was His voice, His Word, His Son who came down and dwelt among us. God the Son became the man called Jesus of Nazareth. The One who at His baptism the Father testified **(Mark 1:11) And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."** He is the One who came to defeat the power of all the idols in our lives by defeating the creature that is behind all idol worship: Satan. He defeated all the attempts of Satan to tempt Him to sin, to make Him put Himself and His personal desires in the place of the Father's will and plan for Him. And He provided an even more dramatic and decisive win against the devil and all other idols when we He willingly gave His life on the cross to win for us salvation. He suffered for all our sinful idolatry. He took upon Himself the punishment we have earned for allowing ourselves and others to have the place that belongs to God alone in our lives. He took all those sins to grave with Him to remove them from us forever. And He rose again so that we might know His victory was complete and final.

It's the victory that He has given to you in your baptism. When He submitted to the baptism in the Jordan that was only needed by sinners, He connected Himself and His baptism to your own. In your baptism you have been intimately connected with Jesus, and therefore with His victory over sin, death and the devil that He won in His death and resurrection. That sinful part of you that desires to make yourself and others equal to the Creator God was joined to Jesus in His death. It's power to rule over you was broken. You no longer are called to serve whatever thing you've made into your idol. The charges of sinful idolatry have been expunged from your record. Jesus took them from you and placed them on His account, and they all went with Him to the grave-all of them from your past, present, and future.

And with Christ you have risen again to a new life. A life where you no longer serve the idols of this world or of your own heart, because you have been changed in your heart and mind. The Holy Spirit has come upon you in your baptism and has invaded your heart and mind. He has given you a new purpose to your life: to love and serve the One true God. We do so based on the promise of His word, **in Romans 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** We have been born again to a new life that is lived with Him through the abiding presence of His Spirit. Linked to Jesus baptism at the Jordan, when you were baptized, the Spirit descended upon you in the water just like a dove. And you received the forgiveness and grace that Jesus won for you. And just as the Father declared about His Son at His baptism in the Jordan, He declares at your baptism: **(Mark 1:11) "You are my beloved son-you are my beloved daughter; with you I am well pleased."** He is well pleased with you not because of what you have done. But because of all that Christ has earned for you and given to you. Because of your faith in Jesus He is well pleased with you.

He wants you to know as He did the Romans that **Romans 6:6-8** “**6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**” You have been declared set free from sin, set free from enslavement to the sinful idols that ruled your life. You have been declared God’s precious child with whom He sends His Spirit to live within you, and work on you, to grow in faith and love toward Him. **Romans 6:11** “**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**”

What should this new life you are to live “alive to God in Christ Jesus look like?” It is one where we can be honest with God, with ourselves, and with one another about the sinful idols we have had in the past and which still try to assert themselves. We confess before God and one another that we have been wrong in the places where we’ve placed our trust. We confess that we are not the perfect people we pretend to be who are never wrong. We send those sins to the cross and know that Christ has taken them to the grave and they are gone forever. Then by the power of the faith given in your baptism, you cling to the words of truth in the Absolution. Cling to the words that are spoken by the Pastor who’s just as much in need of a Savior as you. Who has been called and ordained to stand in place of Christ Himself. Who declares the mighty words of God that have the power not only to declare the truth but make His truth your truth. The words of Absolution that declare you have been forgiven of all your sins and stand no longer condemned, but declared right with God, and through Him right with your fellow man. The words that free so that you can confess your wrongs to the LORD, and be encouraged to confess your wrongs to one another.

### **Conclusion: We Live Enslaved to Our Savior**

It’s part of who we are as sinful humans to lift up things and people of this world and make them an idol. It’s part of who we are as sinful human beings to allow sinful pride to block us from seeing and admitting when we are wrong. And it is the LORD God Himself who sent His Spirit to us in Baptism to apply all the Jesus won for us on the cross to break the hold that our idols have over us. It is the Spirit who came upon you in your baptism who reminds you this day who you are, that you are His beloved son or daughter. And as such He wants you to live out your life of faith remembering these words from **Romans 6:11** **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** Remember Your baptism and whose you became when you were baptized. Remember His love and forgiveness that was shared with you, and the power it has to change your life. Remember these gifts, and then seek ways to share them with a world that needs to hear them, and desperately needs the peace that they bring to all who believe. Amen.