

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUDIFIED – NO LONGER DEAD BUT ALIVE

- I. Dead in sin according to the written code**
- II. Alive because the written code is canceled**

Dearly beloved of the Lord Christ,

“What is death? How do we define it? Is it a flat line on the hospital monitor? Is it an EKG or an EEG that registers no heart or brain activity? Is it a lifeless body in a casket? The unbelieving world sees no meaning beyond the narrow existence between the cradle and the grave. Physical death is the end of everything for which a person has lived.

What we observe every Lenten Season is God’s answer to our hopeless situation. God’s demand for perfection is not even a possibility even before we are born. David proclaimed that he was sinful from the time he was conceived in the womb. We all were. Add to this the fact that we have no solution. We all fall short of the glory of God. We all have sinned.

Remembering our original position goes a long way for us to appreciate the new life we now have in Christ. The text begins, ***When we were dead in our sins***. What Paul is saying here is that God identifies our sins as the evidence of our spiritual death. Each time we lay claim to our right to do what God forbids, we imitate Adam in his rebellion and stand with him under God’s wrath.

Adam lived to be over 900 years old but Adam did, indeed, die on the very day he ate the forbidden fruit. However, it was a much more horrible death than mere physical death. As soon as Adam desired to be like God, he died to God. Adam’s new-found perversion called the tree to be avoided, good, and God’s good command, bad. That inward death led to the actual sin of reaching out and taking the forbidden fruit. Adam’s death was also seen when he was terrified to be in the presence of God. That is why he hid in the garden. Furthermore, the man and woman covered their nakedness because they were ashamed and they knew how their sin-darkened hearts were capable of abusing God’s good gifts. All of these were signs of inner death. To be sure, physical death and everlasting death in hell would follow.

The question needs to be asked, “How could we possibly have know what sin is since the image of God is distorted by the fall?” We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin. The Apostle answers this question with this reference to ***the written code, with its regulations***, The best summary of this written code is the Ten commandments. The commandments help us assess where we stand with God in regard to His holy will for our lives. The commandments tell us how God sees us.

For example, what does God see when He views us through the First Commandment? Does He see in our hearts and minds or in our actions any hint of idolatry? Do you have a

relationship with another person that stands in the way of your relationship with God? Relationships are a wonderful blessing from God unless they get in the way of us fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things.

How about your use of God name, His holy Word? Are there parts of God's Word that when you hear them spoken, you say to yourself. I really don't believe that. Does the Word of God give you direction for your life and then you say to yourself; that doesn't fit into my plans. I am not going to do that. This can happen even while we are regular in worship and enjoy singing God's praise and pray to Him regularly. Remember that the temple of Jesus' day was a busy place, crowded with worshippers. But the problem was that while their lips were saying the right words, their hearts were far from God.

We need to see all the commandments as dealing with our relationship with God. In the first three commandments our relationship with Him is directly involved. In the remaining seven commandments our relationship with Him is reflected in our relationship with our neighbor, that is, with all those people around us. This starts with our family, friends and then moves on to our associates at work and then on to an ever widening circle of acquaintances.

The problem of sin, however, does not merely lie in what we have done wrong or not done right. It goes deeper than that. St. Paul describes it as ***the uncircumcision of your sinful nature***. Circumcision was the ceremonial operation in which a piece of flesh was cut from the male anatomy. It was done eight days after the child was born. It demonstrated the cutting away of sin long before the rebellion was evident in the child's actions. Why would God command such a primitive thing to be done to bring people into His covenant family?

In fundamentalist Islam, if you're caught stealing, they cut off your hand. But what if both your hands were cut off? Would that stop the greed that led to the stealing in the first place? If both eyes were plucked out; would that stop the sin of lust? You could lock a person in prison and throw away the key, but would that person not continue to seethe in hatred more than when he first committed murder? None of these amputations can stop inherited sin.

Circumcision was God way of dealing with sin that begins at conception. Just as David confessed, ***Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me***. This is what we also confess, ***Merciful Father in heaven, I am sinful from birth ...*** Just as circumcision cuts away flesh at the source of life, so God deals with our sin at its root. In the midst of the living dead God breaks through and performs the miracle of resurrection.

Listen. ***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ***. It is futile to plead with the corpse of a loved one to rise up from the coffin. However, God who breathed the breath of life into lifeless clay in the beginning and it became a living being, has breathed into the 'walking dead' with the same result. Only now the breath that gives us life is the Gospel of Christ crucified.

The ***written code, with its regulations*** stands against us in the court of the holy, all-knowing and just God. Our consciences testify to what the verdict of the Almighty should rightfully be: "Guilty as charged on all counts! Since you have declared your independence from your Maker, leave Him and go into outer darkness – forever!"

But the Judge ***canceled the written code, with its regulations***. How can that be? Listen. ***He took it away, nailing it to the cross***. This is what Lent is all about! That written code was taken out of the courtroom to some remote and desolate place where the judge could see it no longer - reminiscent of the scapegoat on the great day of atonement.

The text says, ***and having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross***. Picture a victory parade after a Roman military campaign. The streets of the victors would be thronged with cheering spectators. Garlands of flowers would be placed around the necks of the general and other officials. Loud cheers and the smell of incense would fill the air. The enemy soldiers would be

stripped, bound and marched down Main Street prodded by the victors' spears. They were a public laughingstock. Finally, at the end of the march, the enemy soldiers were put to death.

Christ crucified stripped our enemies of their armor when He brought us from death to life. This is illustrated at the time of His death. There was a great earthquake and the graves of many of the saints were opened. Those saints came out of their graves – ALIVE. This was a prelude to the fact that those who held us captive were no longer captors. Three days later we would see this more clearly, when Jesus' body would rise without seeing decay. On the Last Day, we will see the ultimate result of ***captivity being taken captive***, when all who have crossed over from death to life will arise to the new paradise, the home of God's elect, the home the righteous.

This new life in Christ is not an inert thing. Life never is. Christ made us alive so that we could be living sacrifices to Him. To the apostles this new life meant spending themselves in God's service – even to the point of shedding their blood. In the same way we want to live out our calling as the people of God in meaningful activity for His kingdom. We want the world around us to see the love of Christ in our works of mercy. When we open our mouth, we want those who hear to recognize the voice of Jesus in our proclamation. Sacrifices? Yes! Sacrifice of our time, talent and treasures. Even if the economy tanks we will strive to give increasing portions of our God-given resources to spread the Good News far and wide. This is our privileged service because Christ Crucified has brought us from death to life. **Amen.**