

Death to Sin

by Charles Finney

The sermon explains what it means to be 'dead to sin' and how it can be achieved through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 5:8, John 3:30, Romans 6:7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:3, James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Death to Sin"

Description

Charles Finney delivers a powerful sermon on 'Death to Sin,' emphasizing that true freedom from sin comes through a spiritual death that annihilates selfishness and fosters perfect love for God and others. He outlines various types of death mentioned in the Bible, clarifying that the death referred to in Romans 6:7 is a death to sin, which is achieved through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finney stresses that this transformation is not accomplished by mere resolutions but requires a complete surrender to God's will and the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit. He encourages believers to seek this state of being dead to sin actively, as it leads to a life wholly devoted to God's glory. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize the necessity of total abstinence from sin to maintain spiritual life.

Transcript

TEXT.-- Romans 6:7: For he that is dead is freed from sin.

In the discussion of this subject I shall notice,

I. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DEATH MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE.

II. WHAT KIND OF DEATH IS INTENDED HERE.

III. WHAT IT CONSISTS IN;

IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN IT;

V. HOW IT IS EFFECTED.

I. Different kinds of death.

1. Natural death. This is the death of the body.

2. Spiritual death. This is death in sin. It is total depravity or a state of entire alienation from God.
3. Eternal death. This consists in the endless curse of God.
4. Death to sin.

II. The kind of death mentioned in the text.

The death here spoken of is manifestly a death to sin. This is very evident from the context. At the close of the preceding chapter, Paul had been speaking of the super-abounding grace of Christ, and commences the sixth chapter by saying, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" Here Paul is speaking of those who were alive and yet dead to sin,[.] He spoke of their having received a baptism into the death of Christ. By their spiritual baptism they had been solemnly set apart or consecrated to the death of Christ. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; 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. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:" He speaks of them as not only dead, but, by their spiritual baptism buried into the death of Christ. And to carry the idea of their being still farther from the life of sin, He speaks of them as being planted into the likeness of his death, and crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed. And then adds in the words of the text, "Now he that is dead is freed from sin." In the margin it reads "is justified from sin." The term here rendered justification may be rendered "is made righteous."

It is plain from this connection, that Paul is speaking of those who had been so baptized by the Holy Spirit so as to be dead to sin, buried, planted, crucified, as it respects sin.

III. What it consists in.

Summarily, death to sin consists in the annihilation of selfishness, and the reign of perfect love to God and man in the heart and life.

IV. What is implied in it.

1. Death to sin is the opposite of death in sin. Death in sin implies living for self, or being dead to God's glory and interests and only alive to our own glory. Death to sin implies the reverse of this. It implies a death to our own interests and happiness as an end of pursuit, and a living wholly to the glory of God, and for the up-building of his kingdom.

2. Death in sin implies a will opposed to the will of God. I speak here of a fixed and permanent state of the will in opposition to a single particular volition. A will in this state is not at all influenced by the will of God. It has never submitted to his will, and consequently a knowledge of the will of God is no influential reason to determine its volitions. But death to sin implies a will wholly subservient to and under the control of the will of God. I speak now also of a state of will. One who is dead to sin has no other will than that God's will should in all things be done. Lay before him any question in which he is in doubt in respect to what the will of God is, and he will find himself unable to decide upon a course of action. All he can decide upon in such a case is to search and inquire what is the will of God. But until he is satisfied in some way in respect to

the will of God, he is utterly in doubt and finds himself unable to make up his mind and come to any decision in respect to the question before him. This is a state of mind directly opposite to a death in sin. In a state of death in sin, the will of God is not inquired after as the great and only influential motive to decide the will. A man in this state has, as we say, a will of his own. He decides upon his own responsibility, in his own strength, and entirely in view of selfish reasons. While one who is dead to sin, has so submitted himself to the will of God--so bowed his will to God's will, that he decides nothing in view of selfish reasons, and the will of God has come to be the controlling reason or motive of his conduct. Let him but know what is the will of God in the case, and his will is yielding as air. But shut him out from this knowledge, and he is in a state of the utmost perplexity and cannot decide upon any course of conduct. He can only say, I have no will about it. However uncommon it has been for christians to come into this state while in life and health, it has not been at all uncommon for them to be in this state while on a death bed. Every one conversant with death bed scenes has probably witnessed such cases of entire surrender of the whole being to the will of God, as that the individual was unable to choose whether to live or die and could only say, I have no will about it. Not knowing what the will of God was, there was no other choice than this, viz. that the will of God, whatever it was, should be done. Ask an individual whether sick or well, living or dying, who is in this state, whether he wills or chooses a certain thing; and if it be a question in respect to which he is in doubt, as to what the will of God is, you will find him to be entirely at a loss. He is conscious of choosing that the will of God should be done. But until he knows whether this or that is the will of God he has no choice about that particular event.

3. Death in sin implies a self-indulgent state of mind. To consult ones own ease, happiness, reputation, and interests is natural to him who is dead in sin. If he is on board a steam boat you will find him ready to contend for the best berth, and hastening to obtain the best seat at the first table. If riding in a stagecoach you will observe him seeking for the best seat. To consult his own comfort, his own indulgence and happiness is the law of his mind. And in ten thousand ways will this state of mind develop itself.

But a death to sin implies a self-denying state of mind, a disposition to give others the preference, a choosing to accommodate others, and bless, and benefit others, at the expense of self-interest or self-indulgence.

4. A death in sin implies the real and practical regarding of ourselves as our own. But death to sin is the real and practical regarding of our whole being as God's.

5. A death in sin implies the love of our own reputation. Death to sin implies the making of ourselves no reputation as Christ did.

6. A death in sin implies the practical regarding of our possessions as our own. Death to sin implies the real and practical regarding of our possessions as God's.

7. Death in sin implies the dominion of the flesh and a will in subjection to the flesh. A death to sin implies a subjection of the body to the soul. It implies the keeping the body under and bringing it into subjection, and that all its appetites and propensities are brought into subjection to the will of God.

8. A death in sin implies a state of mind that is influenced by sensible objects, by the honors, riches, opinions, and things of this world as much as if its possessor expected to live here forever. Death to sin implies the giving up the world substantially as a dying man gives it up. Its riches, honors, amusements, pursuits, ambition, strifes, and envyings, what are all these to him? If he knows himself to be a dying man, he regards them not. He desires them not. He seeks them not. He does not, cannot, under these

circumstances, will to have them. He chooses nothing of this world's goods, but those things that are really necessary for the few hours or moments which remain to him of this life. A little more breath--perhaps a few spoons full of water--a little of the kind attention of his friends are all that is left for him to desire of earthly good. Now death to sin implies this giving up all desire and expectation of the wealth, honors, and selfish pursuits of this world. The man who is dead to sin is as absolutely satisfied with a competency of earthly good as a man is who is on a bed of death. He would no sooner lay his schemes of earthly aggrandizement, or for enlarging and perpetuating his selfish gratification, than a man would upon a bed of death. In a word, he has given up the world as an object of pursuit, as really and emphatically as if he knew himself to be doomed to live but one hour. He has entered upon a new and eternal life. All his plans, desires, and aims are heavenly, and not earthly, sensual or devilish.

[V.] IV. How this death is effected, or how persons may enter into and exercise this state of mind.

1. Not by the strength of your own resolutions. You will never die to sin by merely resolving to die to sin. It is one of the most common delusions among men to suppose that they can stand against temptation by the strength of their own resolutions. Peter thought himself able to follow Christ even unto death. But his resolution, like all mere human resolutions, failed him just when he most needed its support. A brother said to me the other day, "I have learned this of my resolutions, they are firm enough when there is nothing to overthrow them, and just when I do not need their support. But they always fail me when I do, just when I have a trial that demands their sustaining power, I find they are like air and good for nothing.["]

2. This state of mind is never to be entered into by any unaided efforts of our own. Sin has too long had dominion over us. Our powers are too much enslaved by its protracted indulgence. Sin has too long been our master, to be at once put down by any unaided efforts of ours. But,

3. This state of mind is effected by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit does not imply the bestowment of miraculous gifts, as some seem to have supposed. The Apostles possessed miraculous gifts before they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The power of miracles may or may not be incidental to spiritual baptism. But it, by no means, constitutes any part of it. Nor does spiritual baptism imply great excitement.

But it does imply such a degree of divine influence as will purify the heart. The New Testament writers manifestly use the term baptism as synonymous with purifying. Water baptism is typical of spiritual baptism. Spiritual baptism, is the purifying of the heart by the Holy Spirit. Miraculous gifts, great excitement of mind, great rejoicings, or great sorrowings over sin, may be incidental to spiritual baptism, but they are not essential to it. You that have read the memoir of J. B. Taylor will recollect that on the 23d of April 1822, while he was engaged in prayer, he felt his whole soul sweetly yielding itself up to God. Such a sweet thorough yielding himself and all his interests for time and eternity, into the hands of God he had never before experienced. Now I suppose that this was the effect of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He ever after remained in a state of mind entirely different from anything he had before experienced.

In receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit we are by no means passive but eminently active.

This influence is secured by faith. Faith in Christ throws the mind open to the influence of his truth and gives the Spirit the opportunity of so presenting truth as sweetly to bring the entire person under its whole power. Christ administers spiritual blessings, and this is received by taking hold of his promise to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and throwing the mind open to his influences. The baptism of the Apostles, by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, will illustrate what I mean. Christ had promised them that they should

be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. They fastened upon this promise, and waited in a constant attitude of prayer and expectation, throwing the door of the mind open to his influence. Now Christ has given to all believers a great many promises of the freeness of the Holy Spirit. He has said that the "Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children." The "water of life" which is so abundantly promised in both the New and Old Testaments is the Holy Spirit. This everyone knows who has attentively considered the real meaning of those promises.

And now if you would enter into this death to sin, you must be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If you would be baptized with the Holy Spirit you must fasten upon the promises of Christ and take hold of them in faith, laying your whole soul open to receive his influences. Rest with the utmost confidence in his promise to give you of the "fountain of water of life freely." And when you have taken hold of his promise, be sure not to let go or let your confidence to be shaken until you feel a consciousness that "you are baptized into his death."

REMARKS.

1. In the connection of this text, Paul speaks of himself and others as dead to and freed from sin.
2. If death to sin does not imply entire sanctification, death in sin does not imply total depravity, for they are manifestly opposite states of mind.
3. As death in sin is consistent with persons doing many things which the world regards as righteous so death to sin may be consistent with many things which the world would regard as sinful.
4. Paul's history confirms the profession which he here makes of being dead to sin.
5. The circumstances of the primitive Church rendered a death to sin almost inevitable, at least in many instances. The profession of attachment to Christ must inevitably cost many of them all that the world holds or calls dear. They had to enter upon the christian life by a renunciation of the world, by giving up worldly expectations and pursuits, as much as men do on a bed of death. This state of public sentiment was eminently calculated to facilitate their entrance into a state of spiritual death, and was no doubt a prime reason for their rapid advancement in the divine life.
6. We see why it is that state and other violent persecutions have already greatly contributed to the spirituality of the Church.
7. We see also why it is that state and worldly favor has crippled the energies, and overthrown the purity of the Church.
8. We see how the idea comes to be so prevalent that Christians are not wholly sanctified until death. As a matter of fact, this no doubt generally is true, that Christians are not wholly and permanently sanctified until about the close of life, until they come into that state in which they expect very soon to die. I once knew a good man who was told by his physicians, that in consequence of the enlargement of the large blood vessel near the heart, he was exposed to instant death, and that at all events he must expect to die very soon. This intelligence after the first shock was over, was instrumental in baptizing him into the death of Christ. He very soon entered into a most blessed and heavenly state of mind, let go of the world, and seemed to stand looking and waiting with most heavenly serenity for the coming of the Son of Man. In this state of mind he was informed after a while, that he might probably live for a long time, notwithstanding his

disease. This so staggered him as to well nigh bring him again into bondage. Not seeming to understand the philosophy of the state of mind in which he was, and how to remain in it by simple faith, he staggered and groaned under this intelligence till Christ, true to his promise, interposed and set his feet upon eternal rock. After this he lived and died to the wonder of all those around him, few if any of whom perhaps, so much as dreamed that his state of mind was what is intended by a death to sin.

[9.] 8. Payson and multitudes of good men have found it easy to enter into this state of mind when all expectation was relinquished of remaining longer in this world. But it seems impossible or difficult for most persons to conceive, that this state of mind may be really entered into, with a prospect of any amount of life still before us.

[10.] 9. But there is no need of waiting until the close of life before we die to sin. We have only to thoroughly let go of all selfish schemes and projects whatever, and give ourselves as absolutely up to the service of God, as much as we expect to when we come to die, and we enter at once into this infinitely desirable state of mind.

[11.] 10. If persons have entered into this state of mind, new trials may call for fresh baptisms of the Spirit. While we are in this world of temptation, we are never beyond the reach of sin and never out of danger. If selfishness could be called into exercise in holy Adam, how much more so in those who have lived so long under the dominion of selfishness? If a man has been intemperate or licentious although these appetites and propensities may be subdued, yet it behooves him to keep out of temptation's way; and renewed temptation calls for fresh and more powerful baptisms of the Holy Spirit. Be not satisfied then with one anointing. But look day by day for deeper draughts of the water of life.

[12.] 11. If we allow any form of sin to live, it will have dominion. It must be wholly exterminated or it will be our ruler. The principle of total abstinence in regard to sin is wholly indispensable to the reign of spiritual life.

Let us then, beloved, not rest satisfied until we are conscious that we are dead and buried, by spiritual baptism into Christ's death, until we are planted in the likeness of his death, and so crucified with Him that the body of death is fully destroyed.

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