

Divine Immunity

By Linda Rex

June 25, 2023, Proper 7 / After Pentecost—I was reading through one of my old journals today and noticing that there are several things I still am struggling with in my life and character that I wrestled with more than ten years ago. Over the years I have learned that some things that have been criticized by others as weaknesses have turned out simply to be personal quirks and ways of being that God created me with which are different than the average person. Other things are areas where the Lord is still working with me to grow me up into Christ.

In our life in Christ, we are faced with the reality that we are often far from being the image-bearers of God we were meant to be, but at the same time are warmly embraced by the Lord who loves us and forgives us, and is fully committed to bringing us into the fullness of all he has in mind for us. This journey we call the Christian faith is exactly that—a long trip in relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit in which we grow in our relationship with God and one another, and we mature spiritually, growing up in Christ and deepening in our faith.

If I were to walk into a bookstore, especially a Christian bookstore, I would find a lot of books which would tell me all the ways in which I need to grow as a follower of Christ, and a lot of methodology in how to go about doing this. While I have been helped to some extent by such books over the years, I have found the greatest maturing and healing has come in relationship—in healthy relationship with other godly men and women who invested me and my life. It was their mentoring work and their prayerful investment which often led to changes which otherwise would not have happened.

But even so, the one relationship which really mattered most is the one which I have been given with Father, Son, and Spirit. The Lord of all has taken a personal interest in me (as I'm sure he has in you), and I sometimes wonder why. The Lord has invested in me and my life in a way which can only be explained by his mercy, compassion, forbearance and longsuffering. What I have discovered over the years is that I can work hard at being a good person, but my best efforts do not bring about lasting change. Lasting change only comes when I go to Jesus in the humility of my inability, need, and failure and receive from him by the Spirit the transformation which I long for as I live and walk day by day in relationship with him.

That I even long for change at all is a gift from God. This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 6, 1b-11, the passage for this Sunday. There were some who believed that God's grace gave them the "freedom" to do whatever they wanted in their lives, the "freedom" to sin or to live in ways contrary to their original design. This was a misunderstanding of God's grace and mercy. For when we truly realize and embrace what Jesus has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection, we find we have no desire to do anything other than to love God and love one another as we were created to. Anything else ultimately makes us miserable. Even though sin is still something we do (for we are still human), it no longer has the same power over us and does not control us as it did before we came to faith in Christ. Rather, as Christ lives in us by the Spirit, we find we are compelled by God's other-centered love to love God and one another.

It is unfortunate that much of our focus in Christian circles has been on moral behavior and trying to make ourselves right with God when it should have been on simply enjoying our relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit and being who we are as his beloved, adopted children who participate with him in caring for his creation. Jesus Christ, as God in human flesh, is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. It is Christ's own relationship with the Father in the Spirit that we share in—so it's not up to us to get ourselves in right relationship

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with God—Jesus did it, is doing it, will do it. It is his life with Abba in the Spirit that is ours, in which we find faith, hope, love, and joy.

The evil one likes to keep our focus on everything we are doing wrong, on all that is going wrong in this world. The evil one keeps us frantically trying to remake ourselves into good people or to make ourselves right with God. The evil one tells us constantly that God is not good, is not love, and doesn't give a hang about us. The world around us convinces us that these lies are the truth of our existence. This is why we must remember that when Jesus died—we all died. All of creation went through death with the creator as he was crucified and died and was placed in the tomb. The good news is that evil, sin, and death are dead. The sin in you and me died with Christ and so no longer is in a place of power in us. No, we are in a new place now—in the risen Lord.

This means that sin, self, Satan, as the apostle Paul shows us, no longer dictate to us how we are to live. Indeed, now we are free to be who God meant for us to be all along—his beloved children who love and serve him and one another. What echoes in my mind are Jesus' words to the woman caught in the act of adultery: "Neither do I condemn you—go and sin no more." You and I are forgiven, accepted, beloved, placed in right relationship with God in Jesus' death and resurrection. We have been given a new life—so, we live it. Did you mess up again? I know I have and I will, but in Christ I am made new. And so are you. And I will turn to Jesus once again. And so will you. And once again, we will go and sin no more—because that is what the life of Christ in us and us in Christ is all about. And we will continue on this journey in close fellowship with Father, Son, and Spirit until we are called home to be with them forever in glory—all because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Thank you, Lord!

Heavenly Father, thank you for making us your very own. Thank you for loving us and drawing us to yourself in Jesus by your Spirit. Lord, grant us the grace to never forget our old selves are dead, that sin no longer has power over us, and that we have been given new life, life in union and communion with you. Enable us to ever live in the truth of who we are as your cherished children, through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Now what is our response to be? Shall we sin to our heart's content and see how far we can exploit the grace of God? What a ghastly thought! We, who have died to sin—how could we live in sin a moment longer? Have you forgotten that all of us who were baptised into Jesus Christ were, by that very action, sharing in his death? We were dead and buried with him in baptism, so that just as he was raised from the dead by that splendid Revelation of the Father's power so we too might rise to life on a new plane altogether. If we have, as it were, shared his death, let us rise and live our new lives with him! Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken—for a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin. And if we were dead men with him we can believe that we shall also be men newly alive with him. We can be sure that the risen Christ never dies again—death's power to touch him is finished. He died, because of sin, once: he lives for God for ever. In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:1-11 PHILLIPS

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