

“Union With Christ” (part 2)

Romans 6:1-14

If you have your Bible, let me invite you to take it and turn with me to Romans 6. We're in a study that I have given the title, “Spiritual Habits.” We are taking an in-depth look at the Christian life from start to finish. When God saves a person, He changes their life. He sets that person free from the bondage of sin. He puts His Spirit within that person as well as certain ‘holy’ hungers. The will of God for every Christian involves being conformed to the image of Christ. The Bible calls this process ‘sanctification.’

Even though they have been set free in Christ, a lot of believers have a hard time understanding who they are. Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers have been set free from the slavery of sin. Yet in our daily experience, we still wrestle with sin's presence in our lives. Old habits and old patterns still haunt us. Inwardly, we long for holiness of life.

Without understanding our new identity, holiness seems to be a burden rather than a joyful pursuit. What is true of our position has a hard time working its way out in our practice. That's why we often settle for spiritual mediocrity.

Paul realized that this is the experience of every believer, including himself. He shows us in Romans 6-7 that the Christian life involves a brutal struggle against sin. He deals with the issue that every believer faces at some point or another in their Christian life: If the Spirit of God has come to take up residence in me, why do I struggle so much with sin?

- Have you ever found yourself frustrated with what seems to be a lack of progress in the Christian life?

- Do you wonder why temptation still has a pull?
- Have you ever questioned why you don't naturally love God more, are more generous than you are, more bold in your witness, and cared more for others?

What we read in these chapters is very encouraging. The truth contained here is absolutely vital when it comes to understanding the Christian life. Within the sixth chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul presents us with his theology of how to grow. It begins with embracing at the core of your being the new identity that God has given you in Christ. That's why the subject of sanctification is so very important. The word 'sanctification' describes the process of internal transformation that is happening in your life right now as a Christian, whereby the Holy Spirit is conforming you to the image of Christ. It is progressive and ongoing. Therefore, it is important for every Christian and it begins with the knowledge of your new God-given identity—who you are.

This is why it is important that we understand the provision that we've been given in Christ as Paul explains here...

By the time he gets to this section in Romans, Paul has just been expounding the central fact of redemptive history—what has been forfeited in Adam has been regained in Christ. Where sin and death reigned, Jesus Christ has initiated a takeover. Sin came into the world through one man's disobedience, and death through sin. Death spread to all men because all sinned.

Paul says in chapter 5 that God's judgment on Adam's sin brought condemnation, but the free gift of Christ brought justification. Chapters 4-5 of Romans deal with the great subject of our justification by faith. The point has been well made that our justification is by God's grace through faith in Jesus.

Where sin increased, the grace of God abounded all the more. Now in chapter 6, he begins to explain the results of justification in terms of our present experience. The profound truth that is being taught in Romans 6 is the believer's union with Christ and all that it involves. To begin with, as a believer it is important that you:

1—UNDERSTAND the nature of your union with Christ

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

Notice the question that Paul presupposes there in verse 1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” In view of what he has said about the truth of justification apart from works, he anticipates this question. One of the dangers of preaching salvation by grace alone is that it can be interpreted as a license to sin. Paul's detractors had even accused him of this (Rom. 3:8).

Notice how he answers the question—“By no means!” It is a strong expression of emotion. His point is that it reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of both sin and grace. The one who sees the gospel of grace as a ticket to sin reflects that he doesn't understand it and has not yet come to truly believe it.

Paul establishes the point here that a true believer can't continue to willfully and habitually pursue sin, because a true believer is someone who has turned over control of their lives to Christ, and when Christ comes in, he breaks the power of sin over you. Thus, if you are still willfully pursuing sin and using grace as an excuse, you've never really let Christ take control, because when He comes in He changes you permanently. Those who try to justify their sin abuse the very grace that sets them free.

You and I cannot fully begin to appreciate grace until we have come to an understanding of the seriousness of sin.

“Sin” — *word is ‘hamartia’ and means to miss the mark*

Paul uses this word ten separate times in these 14 verses. It is a word that means to miss the target, to miss the mark. It defines ‘sin’ as failure to live up to God’s standard or meet His holy and perfect requirement.

That is why all of humanity is under the condemnation of sin. Paul has said as much in **Romans 3:23**, *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* There is none righteous, not even one. And this sets up the situation for everything that is wrong in the entire world. Sin affects every human relationship. Every human problem that exists between people comes from sin. Sin has stirred up chaos at every level, whether it is in a marriage, whether it is among coworkers, or whether it is among nations. Sin is the current ‘monarch’ of fallen humanity, and that monarch must be deposed if there is to be any hope for someone.

In His holiness, God exposes sin for what it really is. That’s the role of His law. Grace liberates the believer from the reign of sin and death. Listen to Paul’s logic in verse 2:

“How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

The very idea that any believer would make excuses for sin and seek to use the grace of God as a justification for sin is unthinkable. The reason Paul gives is that believers have died to sin. How can someone who has died to sin still live in sin at the same time? It would be a contradiction.

Before we were saved, we were enslaved to sin and we habitually served sin as our master. Our old self found sin irresistible. But death has freed us from its bondage.

How can it be said that we died to sin when we obviously are very much alive? Paul's answer is found in verses 3-4:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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.”

The Bible says that all of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ have been ‘baptized’ into Him. Now, this is not a reference to water baptism, which is but a picture of the spiritual reality that Paul is talking about. What Paul is saying here is that believers have been immersed into the life of Christ. Our identity is united with His so much so that what is true of Him is true of us. He died and we died with Him. He rose from the dead to a new kind of life, and so have we!

Look at verse 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.”

Notice the word ‘united’ there. It is a horticultural term, like where you’d take branches off of one tree and graft them into another tree. When you accept Christ, the Spirit takes the dead branch of your life and grafts it into Christ’s living vine and His life starts to flow into you.

You will notice that Paul says our union with Christ involves both a negative and positive. The verses that follow are an explanation of this.

United with Him in a death like His (v. 6-7)

“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. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

Paul says in verse 6 that 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 it.

“Old Self” — *person you were before your conversion*

The ‘old me,’ who I was in Adam, was crucified with Christ and was buried in death. That’s how I have died to sin.

“Body of Sin” — *should be understood as the part of our fallen humanity that is yet to be redeemed*

Who I was in Adam was crucified with Christ in order that indwelling sin, which is still very much with me, may be rendered inoperative. What this means practically is this—just as Jesus did not serve sin, neither must we as those who are now identified with Him.

United with Him in a resurrection like His (v. 8-10)

“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.”

In a negative sense, the ‘old me’ is crucified with Christ so that the power of sin is broken in my life. And in a positive sense, the ‘new me’ has been raised to live

with Christ. If it is true that we (old self) have died with Christ, then we can be sure that we also will live with Him. The idea is the it is something of which you and I can be certain. We are in possession of His life now, and we are waiting on future bodily resurrection. It is true of us because of Christ.

He will never die again, and death no longer has dominion over Him. Notice the emphasis of verse 10, “For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.”

Revelation 1:18—“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hell.”

Since the ‘old me’ is crucified with Christ, the ‘new me’ is now alive and free! We now walk in newness of life. This same truth under the microscope here in this text is also expressed in other places in the New Testament:

Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Ephesians 2:4-6—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Colossians 3:1-4—“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

Look at the repetition of the word 'know' in these verses. It shows us the importance of what we believers understand and believe. The apostle Paul was absolutely convinced that Christian living depends on Christian learning, and that duty follows doctrine. These are truths that we ought to know very well. Our confidence depends upon it.

He says, "It is important that you know what has been done for you in Christ, because what you then do as a Christian is an extension of this truth."

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *"He is showing us clearly what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we are clear about that, we shall never be clear about our own position, and consequently shall never get victory in our lives. This is a most important principle; this is how the NT deals with us and our problems and our difficulties. It never starts with them directly. What the NT tells you to do always, in the first instance, is to forget yourself altogether—to forget all your problems, your temptations, your difficulties, everything else; to forget yourself and look at the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider first what happened to Him, consider first His relationship to sin. Then when you have got that clear, the next step is to say, 'I am joined to Him, and what is true of Him is true of me.'"*

I am under new management as a slave of righteousness!

This truth saturates the teaching of the New Testament, and you find it on every page. Coming back to the issue raised in verse 1 of those who would turn grace into license to sin, Paul says that they don't know the gospel. His logic is this:

- We receive forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ
- As believers, we are now united to Christ
- Christ died unto sin

- Since we are united to Him, we also died unto sin
- If we died unto sin, we cannot continue living in it
- Therefore, we cannot continue in sin that grace abound

The argument that we should continue in sin because we are under grace is totally false. In reality, the opposite is true. It is impossible to continue living unchanged when you become a Christian. Those who argue that grace allows for sin reveal they are not under grace.

Union with Christ means your lifestyle is affected, just as it was by your union with Adam. If your life has not changed and if there is no impulse for further change toward Christ, then it is probably safe to assume you are not a Christian.

Understanding my union with Christ as a believer means that I know I've been baptized into Christ's death. It means I know that my old self was crucified with Him. It means I know that Christ is raised from the dead and I've been united with Him in a resurrection like His. In order for you to live the Christian life, Paul says this is fundamental truth that you need to know. Then, he says you must:

2—ACCEPT your union with Christ as true

“So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Everything Paul says through verse 10 is truth that we as believers must know. In verse 11, Paul shows us how the truth of our union with Christ is to be practically embraced. The truth that we know and believe must be practically considered. In other words, we must take the truth that we know, consider or 'reckon' it to be such, and then act upon it. We must count on it and live it out.

“Consider” — *an accounting term; means to reckon*

This word is one of the most important words in the book of Romans, and Paul uses it some 19 times. It is a term that means to impute to one’s account, to regard as something.

Romans 4:3—“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

As far as justification is concerned, when you came to trust in Christ as your Savior, God ‘credits’ righteousness to you. Now, as far as Christian living is concerned, it is our turn to do the reckoning. Just as faith was the means by which we received justification, continued faith is the means by which we access the power for sanctification. When we place our faith in Christ as the substitute for our sin, God ‘reckons’ our faith as righteousness. He credits the righteousness of Christ to our account. As we ‘reckon’ ourselves dead to sin, God infuses into us the power of new life. In other words, just as faith leads to justification, so faith also leads to the power of sanctification. Here’s where our growth begins—I am to reflect upon my position in Christ as a believer. Then, I must reckon these two things to be true of me:

- I am dead to sin
- I am alive to God in Christ Jesus

This is your identity as a child of God. You are free!

Sin so attaches itself to our identity that it leads us to try and find our identity in anything and everything but God, the only One in whom we can truly have identity. That is how the enemy seeks to keep people in spiritual bondage. Let me tell you, **freedom** is found in these words right here in verse 11. Because of

my union with Christ, I am dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is now my new identity, and it is true of me no matter what my experience may be. It is something that I must accept by faith. I must 'reckon' it to be true. The Holy Spirit then uses that faith to transform you.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *“I may feel that I am a sinner, that sin is in me. That is certainly true. But on the bare Word of God I believe this, that I died with Christ. I am no longer in Adam. There is therefore now no condemnation to me, because I am in Christ. Whatever my feelings may be, whatever the devil may suggest to me, however much the facts may seem to be flying in the face of the statement, faith sees the promise, holds on to it and believes it. And as a result glorious experiences follow. You first believe the Word, then you will have proofs that it is true... This is the very essence of the faith position. I am not taking an experience by faith, I am taking and believing by faith what God tells me He has done. He tells me that He has put me into Christ, and that because I am in Christ I have died with Him, I have risen with Him, I am walking in newness of life with Him.”*

We always want to feel first before we'll believe. God says, “No, sometimes you have to believe first, and only then will you feel.” In the Christian life, power comes through belief. Believing in the righteous identity God has declared true of you releases the power to live up to that identity in you.

This is why Satan began each of his temptations of Jesus with this charge, “If You are the Son of God...” That truth had been declared and affirmed at His baptism.

This is the first thing that the devil attacked because he knew that if he could weaken Jesus' identity in the Father, he would weaken Jesus at His very core.

Before he levels any of the temptations toward materialism or pride or the desires of the flesh, he starts with trying to chip away at Jesus' identity. "Are You really the Son of God?"

Let me tell you, that is exactly the same pattern that the enemy uses in our lives as believers. He'll try whatever is necessary to distract you from the new identity that you've received in Christ. He will bring up the past and remind you of things you've said and done. He'll whisper, "Do you really think you are a child of God? Surely not!"

Power in the Christian life begins by believing what God has declared to be true of you. Even if it doesn't 'feel' like it is true, you must 'reckon' it to be so! Accept your union with Christ as true. You are dead to sin and alive to God. The power of the resurrection is inside of you. Then:

3—YIELD to the One with whom you are united

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

When you were lost, sin held you captive and was a cruel master that ruled your life. However, sin cannot rule over you anymore because when you received Christ as your Savior, He took the place of power at the center of your heart. Thus, sin can no longer hold you captive. You are now under His dominion!

We will come back to this point next week, but notice how Paul uses imperative language here. In view of who we are in Christ, he says here is how we must

live. It is now a matter of yielding to Christ as Lord. Again, notice that it involves a negative as well as a positive.

Negatively, he says, “Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Don’t present the members of your body to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.” It involves a battle, but since sin isn’t your master anymore, you don’t have to use your body to serve it. Even though sin doesn’t rule over you, it can still harass you.

The negative action must be followed up by the positive. It is not enough that I not present my body to sin as an instrument for unrighteousness. At the same time, as one who has been brought from death to life, I must present my members to God as instruments for righteousness.

“Instruments” — *word in Greek refers to weapons of war*

The idea here is that we no longer present our bodies as weapons to be used by sin to accomplish evil ends, but to become foot soldiers in the interest of righteousness. It means that I must strive to possess:

- a mind saturated with gospel truth
- a heart devoted to worship
- hands that are given over to serve others
- feet that are committed to following the Spirit’s lead
- a tongue that is ready to share Christ

In the spring of 1945, the Allied forces took control of Germany after the Battle of Berlin. On May 8, the Allies accepted the German surrender a week after Hitler had taken his own life. That day became known as ‘VE Day’ for victory in

Europe. Even though the war was officially over, small pockets of German troops refused to give up, and in some cases, even fought on for days and weeks before finally calling it quits. Even though the Nazi regime was no longer in power, there were pockets of resistance. (More recently, we've seen the same thing happen in Afghanistan when the Taliban was deposed.)

This same reality is true in our lives as Christians. Even though the war over sin has been fought and won by Jesus Christ, even though Christ has broken the power of sin and deposed sin as the monarch of my life—sin is still present in my members. Satan has been defeated and the tyranny of sin has been overthrown. But indwelling sin resorts to guerrilla warfare.

This results in conflict:

Galatians 5:16-17—“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

If I stop fighting it for even a moment, indwelling sin will try to re-assert itself. That's why we must cultivate spiritual habits for the sake of godliness. It will be a life-long process, but one day our faith will become our sight! And knowing that we have all the resources of heaven at our disposal makes all the difference.

In the world of digital technology, very few of us still write checks. I write one check a week, and that is the one I bring with me to church to put in the offering plate. But on every check, there are some key lines and boxes. First, there is the 'Pay to the Order of' line. Under that, there is the 'written amount' and the 'numerical box' off to the right side. At the bottom, there is a memo line on the left side and the 'signature line' to the right.

In the gospel, you and I have been given a check. On the 'pay to the order of' line, it reads "Whosoever Believes." That is you if you are a Christian. The amount is all of the riches of God in Jesus Christ, and the signature of Jesus stamped in His own blood makes it official. Faith receives the check! Forgiveness, grace, and eternal life in Christ is deposited into your account. Through obedient living, faith then begins to write its own checks.

Transformation isn't something that comes easy, but it will happen. Your sanctification is just as sure as your justification. It is happening. If you are saved, if you have accepted God's free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, you have within you spiritual power and spiritual riches beyond your imagination. Sin no longer has dominion over you. The power of God in the presence of the Holy Spirit lives within you. As a Christian, rely on Him for all that you need.

If you are not saved, then you need to know the urgency of your situation. The power of sin can be broken in your life and you can receive a brand new identity. Trust in Jesus Christ and be found in Him!