

“Our Union with Christ”
 Romans 6-8
 “Citizens of Another Country”
 Part I

*“If we’ve left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there?”
 (The Message)*

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
 Title: Our Union with Christ
 Text: Romans 6:1-14
 Theme: Living His victory over sin because of our union with Him. You are united with Christ in His victory over sin and death to sin. “We who were once ‘dead in sin’ are now ‘dead to sin.’” (John Phillips, Exploring Romans, 100).

Its eternal value:

The preaching of Christ crucified and the implications of this truth are of such paramount importance that nothing else matters. In the absence of this singular truth, all other information becomes disjointed. This is the hope we extend to the dying and to the living.

What does this look like?

Have you ever had chocolate chip cookies without chocolate chips? Whatever else you might have, you do not have chocolate chip cookies. Some people profess Christianity without Christ crucified. Whatever else they might have, what they do not have is biblical Christianity. To profess Christianity without Romans 6-8 is to have a chocolate chip cookie without the chocolate chips. Call it whatever you wish, but do not call it a chocolate chip cookie. This study seeks to put and keep the chocolate chips in the cookie.

Our present danger:

Instead of truth going from our intellect, to our volition, then to our emotion we typically lead with our emotion, then choosing, and then forming our minds by what we feel. This has made experience the informer or molder of truth. This passage is the opposite of that. This passage wants us to know, then to choose, then to feel. None of these three are optional expressions of biblical truth.

Introduction:

Earlier, Paul established the reign of grace over the reign of death (Rom. 5:20, 21). The tyranny of sin has been overthrown by the power of the cross. Citizens long enslaved under the brutality of an unbearable despot dance in streets flowing with freedom.

Yet like many long enslaved, freedom brings its own questions. Learning to live free when all one knows is oppression has its own difficulties. “If my sinning causes the grace of God to abound, should I go on sinning?” Paul patiently and tenderly unpacks this truth. Although such thinking is abhorrent, it is not sourced in the

defiant, but in the ignorant. The idea of death is fundamental to Paul's instruction. An aspect of death is separation and an element of non-response.

New Testament scholar Charles Hodge correctly notes how, "That act involves in it not only a separation from sin, but a deadness to it." (Charles Hodge, Romans, 192).

His initial premise comes out quickly and in a short burst, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it" (v. 2)? Such a statement begs the question, "How did I die to sin?" What follows is an explanation of what it means to be "dead to sin."

Ultimately the question asked is simple, "Does the cross really matter?" Does the cross give me the power to win against my struggle with sin? If the cross is so significant and Christ so wonderful, why do I continue to sin? All of this is answered for us in Paul's presentation of a course we could entitle, "The Cross 101." John Murray correctly notes how,

"Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ." (John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, 161,170).

The significance of this union must not be underestimated or overlooked.

"Since the Christian's very existence as a Christian as well as his growth in grace and his hope of glory are all grounded in his spiritual union with Christ, from whom he derives all his strength and power to live the Christian life, to deny one's union with Christ is not only to deny a cardinal aspect of the Christian life but also to open the way to soul blight and stunting of the Christian's growth in grace. On the other hand, sin will not reign as king in the life of the Christian who by virtue of his union in Christ's death to sin self-consciously knows and seriously regards himself as dead to sin and alive to god in Christ Jesus." (Robert L. Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 739).

Paul addresses our union with Christ after his treatment of universal condemnation and the provision of justification. From his presentation flows the truth of sanctification that is fully and completely sourced in our union with Christ.

A Snapshot of the Book of Romans

Section 1: A theology of Condemnation (1:18-3:20)

Section 2: A theology of Justification (3:21-5:21)

Section 3: A theology of Sanctification (Chaps: 6-8)

Section 4: A theology of Incorporation (Chaps: 9-11)

Section 5: A theology of Implication (Chaps: 12-15:13)

Matthew Henry (d. 1714, English Presbyterian pastor) sets forth the union of our justification with our sanctification. When God breaks the penalty against sin, He also breaks the power of sin. **If justification is the seed, then sanctification is the flower that grows from the seed.** Just as the sun generates heat, so also the cross

produces holiness. The two are inseparably linked. Listen carefully to his striking words of explanation concerning Romans 6.

“The apostle having at large asserted, opened, and proved, the great doctrine of justification by faith, for fear lest any should suck poison out of that sweet flower, and turn that grace of God into wantonness and licentiousness, he, with a like zeal, copiousness of expression, and cogency of argument, **presses the absolute necessity of sanctification and a holy life, as the inseparable fruit and companion of justification**; for, wherever Jesus Christ is made of God unto any soul righteousness, he is made of God unto that soul sanctification.”

“The previous argument has made us intensely conscious that Justification, while a definite transaction in law, is not a mere transaction; it lives and glows with the truth of connection with a Person.” (H.C.G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 160). Moule continues, “While the way of Justification can be isolated for study, as it has been in this Epistle, the justified man cannot be isolated from Christ, who is his life.”

Section 3 (Chapters 6-8) of Paul’s treatment on the doctrine of justification addresses the issue of the cross and its impact on sin in the life of His people. What Paul says here is true of every believer. **Our union with Christ is conditioned only on His work on our behalf. There is nothing we do to be in union with Him.** We can never reverse the consequences of this union. Our experiences can fail to align with our union, but it is because our experiences are false, not the union.

In these chapters (6-8), Paul presents five large ideas. In the first four sections, he deals with each area through the use of rhetorical questions. Each section (6:1, 15; 7:7, 13) is marked off by “May it never be!” The question posed is simple, “Does the cross really work?” In our pragmatic culture, we want to know if it really makes any difference as to whether or not we are believers. Paul’s emphatic answer is “yes!” If all that was presented in 6:1-8:30 is true, what is to be our response? His answer to that question is presented in 8:31-39. The intent of this study (Romans 6-8) is to show the reader what our union with Christ looks like experientially.

The present danger:

I am forcing the issue of the experiential aspect of the cross in your daily life. You can live His victory over sin and life right now. The cross is eminently here. The cross is casting its shadow across the canvas of your life right now. If you are living a tired existence and find no joy in any aspect of it, then you are not seeing God in its details. The cross impacts the mundane and the routine. Paul wants you to experience your union with Christ with your intellect, your volition, and your emotion.

Our first study focuses on the first question and the response Paul gives in Romans 6:1-14.

I. The Introduction to our Union with Christ’s Death (vv. 1, 2a)

Question 1 “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? **May it never be!**” (6:1-14).

Question 1 is in response to the death of sin's reign and the reign of grace through righteousness (5:21). Hypothetically, if the reign of grace is more evident when sin is present, should we increase our sinning in order that grace might abound all the more (5:20)? In classic Pauline fashion he responds with "May it never be!" The first question addresses the issue.

In 5:21 the language employed is that of a king or kingdom. It speaks of reigning, of ruling. It is kingdom language. Once we were citizens of a kingdom where sin was sovereign. But now, we are citizens of a kingdom where grace is sovereign.

Listen to the language of Romans 6:1-3 from THE MESSAGE.

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If **we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there?** Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. **When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land!**

"Ten times in Romans Paul wrote 'may it never be' the strongest words available to him to **express his disgust** with certain ideas or teachings. The Greek phrase is **me genoito**. Literally it means 'may it never come into existence.' Leon Morris states, 'It is Paul's most **emphatic repudiation** of any idea to which it refers' and is often used by Paul to refute any possible **false implication** that might be drawn from his teaching.'" (Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 155, 19. <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue51.htm>)

Paul expresses a sense of holy passion when he utters the words "May it never be!" It is not simply a statement of outrage or indignation, but of passion and fervor. Such thinking, if left unchecked, makes mockery of the cross. It would be unthinkable for one under grace to continue in sin.

The word "continue" is a compound word. The primary word is "to abide" and the other word, the prefix, supercharges the abiding. The question is not "do you sin" for that is true of all believers. The question is "do you **abide** in sin" for this is not true of any believer. The word "increase" is "to super-abound, to exist in abundance." It is a different word to describe the same idea in 5:20, "to abound beyond measure." Both words are words of lavishness, of overflow.

"According to Paul, ignorance is a key factor in hindering a life of victory." (John Phillips, Exploring Romans, 100).

Paul's immediate response shows the underlying ignorance of his audience, "Do you not know?" He assumes that they should. If they do not know, their instruction in this truth is paramount.

"Or **do you not know** that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3).

It is my desire that we become well versed in this central truth. Paul then explains what this union with Christ means.

This leads us to our second point in the paragraph.

II. The Presentation of our Union with Christ's Death (vv. 3-11)

The fundamental reason as to why we should not sin in order that grace might abound is because of our present union with Christ. The language is repetitive and thus emphatic.

- We have been baptized (Aorist Passive Indicative) into Christ Jesus and are thus baptized (Aorist Passive Indicative) into His death (v. 3)

The Aorist tense speaks of a past point in time. There was a time when we were baptized into Christ Jesus and our old self was crucified with Him. This baptism into His death happened when we received Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin (John 1:12; 1 Cor. 12:13).

- Therefore we have been buried (Aorist Passive Indicative) with Him through baptism into death (v. 4)
- We have become (Perfect Active Indicative) united with Him in the likeness of His death (v. 5)

The Perfect tense speaks of a past event with continuing results in the present. We became united with Christ in our justification and we continue in that justification today.

- Our old self was crucified (Aorist Passive Indicative) with Him (v. 6)
- Now if we have died (Aorist Active Indicative) with Christ (v. 8)
- Consider yourselves (Present Middle Imperative) to be (Present Active Indicative) dead to sin (v. 11)

The Present tense speaks of "right now time." Right now you and I need to consider these two ideas as true.

The picture used to describe this union is that of water baptism.

ILLUSTRATION:

Many churches practice baptism by immersion. This immersion places the individual into the water. They are completely surrounded by the water. Our baptism by the Holy Spirit into the life of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27) created a union with Christ. This union is incorporation, not a mixture or blending, but a folding into. Our lives are folded into His life. What we are in our own identity no longer exists. Our existence is lost in His. Who He is dominates and controls who we are and how we live. The picture used to describe this union is baptism. Our English word "baptism" is a transliteration of the Greek word "Baptizo" and this word simply means "to immerse."

The term baptize is not a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Catholic term; it is a Greek term. Baptizo in the Greek meant to "dunk," "dip," "plunge," "submerge," or "immerse." Originally, it had no religious connotation. Rather, the word baptize was used to describe a ship that had been sunk in a battle or a piece of cloth that was dipped in dye. Other times it was used to refer to someone who had drowned or a cup that was dipped into a pitcher to drink from. Its use was general in nature. www.calvarychapel.com/redbarn/terms.htm

When we received the finished work of Christ in our behalf (John 1:12), we were immersed into the life of Christ. **This “baptism” transferred the merit of His work to our account.** In this “baptism,” our standing before and with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit changed. Specifically, the Father receives us as children (Gal. 5:26), the Son’s work is attributed to us (2 Cor. 5:21), and the Holy Spirit bears His fruit through us (Gal. 5:19-21). His character is produced in and through earthly vessels (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

Some call this positional truth, others the victorious Christian life, others the exchanged life, while still others the Christ life. Regardless as to what you call it, this truth says you are united with Christ in His victory over sin and death to sin.

Many might ask the question, “How do we know this is Holy Spirit baptism and not water baptism?” This is a good question. THE MESSAGE suggests it is water baptism. I, however, see water baptism as only picturing Holy Spirit baptism. In my understanding of the Scripture I believe there is only one baptism and I base this on Ephesians 4:5. I believe Holy Spirit baptism is this “one baptism.” Water baptism is a picture of this baptism. This is why Matthew 28:19 calls us to be baptized and this is why the book of Acts shows us a church that baptized by immersion those who believed. Thus, **Romans 6 gives us the substance, whereas Matthew 28 speaks of the shadow.**

Because of this “baptism” into the life of Christ, the value of His work is attributed to me. Hence Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” What did His death secure according to our present passage?

What did His death accomplish?

- His death won new life (vv. 4, 5, 13).
- His death destroyed the body of sin (vv. 6, 7). His death brings freedom from sin’s enslavement.
- His death destroyed sin’s rule (vv. 8-12). His death liberates enslaved citizens.
- His death moves citizens of grace to offer up their services to its government (v. 13).
- His death establishes a new government characterized by grace (v. 14).

There is a tendency to see this as only “truth” that has no direct or immediate value to real life experience. Such thinking is a travesty against the power of the cross.

Paul's entire point is the life changing impact that the cross has on the circumstances of the individual.

Somehow we fail to see the immediate impact of this idea in our struggle against sin. If you believe this has no bearing on your fight against sin, then you will fight flesh with flesh. But if you believe the victory is already yours, you will fight flesh with the cross.

This leads us to our third point in the paragraph.

III. The Implications of our Union with Christ's Death (vv. 12-14)

Verses 12-14 are the application to the preceding verses (6:1-11).

Because Christ is dead to sin and you have died in Christ to sin, do not let sin reign in your mortal body (6:12).

“Let not sin **therefore** reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12).

Believers are dead to sin. What does it mean to be dead to sin? First, what does sin produce?

- Sin produces death
- Sin produces bondage
- Sin produces guilt
- Sin produces wrath
- Sin produces shame
- Sin produces separation
- Sin produces alienation
- Sin produces debt
- Sin produces inability

What is our problem?

This is where we live. This describes our experiences and the devil delights in keeping us in a defeated position.

Charles Hodge correctly notes how, “The grand design of Christianity is the destruction of sin.” (Charles Hodge, Romans, 202).

I have been delivered from sin's wage.

- I am alive
- I am free
- I am confident
- I am at peace
- I am emboldened
- I am in fellowship
- I am welcomed
- I am fully supplied
- I am resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ

This is where Paul wants us to live, because this is where we are and what we are.

ILLUSTRATION:

Have you ever tried to convince someone of something that they could not see? It is like looking at a picture within a picture and not being able to see it. The picture is there, but its appearance escapes you.

Notice the consequences of your union with Christ.

- Because you are dead to sin, do not let it reign (Present Active Imperative) in your mortal body by obeying (Present Active Infinitive) its lusts (v. 12).
- Because you are dead to sin, do not go on presenting (Present Active Imperative) the members of your body to sin (v. 13a). He connects these two statements with a strong contrasting conjunction.
- Because you are dead to sin, do present (Aorist Active Imperative) the members of your body to God (v. 13b).
- Because you are dead to sin, it shall not be master (Future Active Indicative) over you (v. 14a).
- Because you are dead to sin, you are (Present Active Indicative) not under law, but under grace (v. 14b). Again, he uses a strong contrasting conjunction to connect these two ideas.

ILLUSTRATION:

I have never had anyone tell me to act like a human. Being human is in my nature. I have had people tell me to stop acting like a pig and the reason is because I am not a pig. Paul says, "Stop sinning." His reason is because you are dead to sin in your nature. When you sin and place yourself under its mastery you are only acting like a slave to sin, you are not actually a slave in your nature.

Our tragedy is that we focus on our experience fully expecting our experience to bring us our freedom from sin's mastery without realizing that it is our union with Christ that completely and forever changes our experience. We are working from the wrong premise.

"Are you dead to sin?" Yes, not because you "feel dead to sin," but because you "are dead to sin." "All is bound up not with the tides or waves of our emotions, but with the living rock of our union with our Lord." (H.C.G. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans, 167).

"The body does not feel dead to sin, but that is quite beside the point; God says it is." (John Phillips, Exploring Romans, 102).

ILLUSTRATION:

(1) Think about your union with Adam. You were dead in Adam. You probably did not feel dead, but you were and your actions unconsciously or otherwise spoke of your nature. The same is true being dead in Christ. Moule captures this idea well in the following statement.

“The Last Adam, like the First, transmits not only legal but vital effects to His member.” (H.C.G. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans, 163).

(2) Think also of your justification. In your justification you are declared righteous. You do not feel justified, but your feeling of non-justification cannot undo the fact of justification. So also with your sanctification or union with Christ; you are as much sanctified as you are justified, whether you feel it or not.

“So far as God is concerned, we are already on the resurrection side of the grave and it but remains for us to realize this truth and appropriate it, and victory is assured.” (John Phillips, Exploring Romans, 101).

Paul’s point is that grace reigns because the cross still stands. You and I, as His people and in union with Him having His work attributed to our account are completely free from sin’s kingdom. We are no longer citizens of sin’s reign. We are free from sin’s domination. I am free to live in the resurrected life of Christ. It is the glory of the Father that now radiates from my earthen vessel. The burden of sin has been removed.

I am no longer . . .

- A transgressor of God’s boundaries
- A debtor in the slave market of sin
- An object of God’s displeasure
- Held at a distance and banned from entering His presence
- An illegal alien in the kingdom of righteousness
- Dead to God
- Alive to sin

I no longer serve to gain merit, but serve because I got merit. Herein is the power of the cross. God’s good pleasure is poured out on me because I have been immersed into the life of Christ and the value of His cross work has been attributed to me.

Charles Hodge summarizes this doctrine with the following words,

“To be in Christ is the source of the Christian’s life; to be like Christ is the sum of his excellence; to be with Christ is the fullness of his joy, (vv. 2-11).” (Charles Hodge, Romans, 202).

This is . . .

- Jaw dropping
- Eye popping
- Limb raising
- Hand clapping
- Feet dancing
- Leg hopping
- Mind blowing truth!

Paul's "formula" for appropriating what is already true is three-fold:

[**KNOW**] Many of us have not experienced the power of the cross in our circumstances simply because we have never heard of such liberating truth. Now you know it.

"The degree that the Christian takes seriously the reality of his Spirit - wrought union with Christ, to that degree he will find his definitive sanctification coming to actual expression in his experiential or progressive sanctification. The holiness of the Christian's daily walk directly depends upon his union with the Savior." (Robert L. Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 739).

[**CONSIDER**] The second "step" is to lean into it. Rest on it like you would sit in a chair or lay down on your bed. Considering this as true is to live as a citizen of grace and not as a citizen of self or sin.

[**PRESENT**] Finally, live the immersed life.

- First, know the facts (v. 6).
- Second, consider it true. This means lean into it (v. 11).
- Third, live the immersed life. This means act like it is true (vv. 11-13).

All of the heartache that is yours because of sin's reign has been removed. Paul is inviting us to live in the power of the cross. May you enter fully into the power of cross.

Verse 14 ("You are not under law, but under grace") sets us up for the next question found in verse 15 ("Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace"). We will continue our study through this passage in our next study.