

Union with Christ - the dynamic of the Christian life

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[0 : 00] Well, we are going to jump back into the stream of Romans. We started doing this, I think, in 2012, and then circumstances took over in various forms, but the intention was to go through Romans and we started and we're returning to that.

I say jump back into the stream because Romans is like a powerful stream or a river, and when we were looking at it before, I think we got a sense of the power of what it was saying. Probably forgotten it. I think I have, so it's quite an effort to jump back in and say this is what we were thinking about previously.

We're going to jump back in in chapter 6, but this morning I think I'm really trying to lay a bit of a foundation without getting right into the main flow of it.

So, here's the introductory thoughts. The question, how to live the Christian life. How to live the Christian life. That's a very big question, a very important question.

Let's narrow it down a little bit. How to deal with temptation and the attacks of the evil one.

[1 : 26] That makes it a little bit more what it's like in daily life, isn't it? Christian people have a sensitivity to sin and dealing with temptation is part and parcel of the Christian life.

And you don't have to go too far in the Christian life before you realise you have an enemy who's trying to trip you up with all sorts of nasty tricks. So, attacks of the evil one.

Or perhaps, put it this way, how to overcome sin. How to overcome sin. There's a question for the Christian.

How do I overcome sin in my life? Do I bother? Is it an issue? Or as Paul, I'm paraphrasing what Paul says right at the beginning of this section.

Shall we just carry on like we used to be before we became Christians because we can easily be forgiven? Chapter 6, verse 1. What should we say then to all that we've said so far?

[2 : 30] Shall we go on in sin? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? I think what he's saying is that he has been describing grace.

So that's, Christian life is to do with grace. It's to do with God's kindness. It's to do with God's forgiveness. And so, just to paraphrase it slightly, he's saying, what if we can easily be forgiven? Just been talking about the power of Jesus to forgive sins. Does that mean that we can just carry on sinning any old how really without bothering too much because we've got this infinite supply of forgiveness?

So let's just carry on. And his reply is, absolutely not. That is a complete misunderstanding and a complete wrong approach to the Christian life.

By no means, he says in verse 2. So that's my introduction. I'm not going to answer all those questions, but at least that's posing the questions.

[3 : 37] We're talking about, in chapter 6, about sin in terms of its presence, in terms of its influence, in terms of, you could even say, the rule of sin.

Rule in the sense of the fact that sin seems to have this ability to impose its will, if you like, on people. So that they obey sin.

It's the sort of language that he uses, the power of sin. That's the sort of issue we're thinking about. And as to the presence of sin, I think he's saying that the solution to that lies in the future.

We won't find a solution to the presence of sin. Sin will always be with us in this life, to one degree or another, in one form or another. But the question of the influence sin has, and the degree to which sin rules the life of a Christian, the power of sin in the life of a Christian, that's what he's going to be looking at.

That's what we're going to be thinking about. So I wanted to spell that out a little bit, just to ask whether you yourself would agree that that was an issue.

[5 : 03] Beginning of Romans, in chapter 1, verse 29, he makes, he includes a list of the sort of things I think he has in mind. He talks about, I'll read it to you, he says people are full of envy.

So that would be a sin, I think, that he's talking about. Murder. Strife. Deceit. Malice.

And then he talks about people who are gossips, and slanderers, and God-haters, and people who are insolent, arrogant, and boastful.

They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

I didn't put the whole list up on the screen, but probably worth pondering. If we're talking about sin, those are real things, aren't they?

[6 : 03] In a way, it's not much use me continuing to talk if we're in disagreement about this, because these are examples of sins, and I think for each of us, we might say somewhere on that list is something that I'm conscious, I have done, or said, or thought, and I know that that was wrong.

Perhaps I've been envious. Perhaps I've been greedy. Perhaps I've just not been right and straight in the way I've lived.

Perhaps I've deceived. It doesn't have to be a big deception, but little deceptions. Perhaps I've been malicious. On the outside, I've been a smiling face, but on the inside, I wish I could scratch somebody's eyes out, or something like that.

Malicious gossip. Perhaps I've been ungenerous in the way I've talked about somebody else.

Perhaps I've slandered somebody.

Perhaps I've said something which I perhaps know is not true about them. Perhaps, boys and girls, in your hearts, you've been disrespectful to your parents.

[7 : 24] And so on. I'm just pointing out with some examples that sin is not an abstract problem for somebody else. And when we think about it, it's a problem for me.

It's a problem for me. And just to fill in the background a little bit further, in the book of Romans, Paul's take on sin, is that that isn't even, the things we've just said, aren't even the bottom line. The bottom line is not just the way we relate to other people, but the way we relate to God. And so, before he'd given that list, he had said about humankind, although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile.

That's chapter 1, verse 21. He says, this is where the bottom line is. There is this instinct in the human heart which doesn't want to allow God to be God and to glorify God as God.

or thank him, or to be indebted to him. And that's at a very, very fundamental level. That's the problem of the human race. That's what sin is bottom line.

[8 : 52] So I mention this because you might be sitting thinking, well, he's going to talk about sin. I don't think there is such a thing. I don't think that is the problem of humanity. Human beings are basically good.

And, you know, I'm not prepared to sit and listen to something in which human beings are sort of put down in this way. And I'm trying to say that's not the way it is.

Certainly not the way it is in the Bible. And I think if you think about it, you will agree it's not the way it is in the world. There is this present condition of sin. And I'm also going to say that Paul has said there is an answer to this present condition of sin, which in particular is forgiveness in Christ who is set forth as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

And he's been saying this in chapter 3, verse 25 and around there. So I'm reading God presented Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

He's squashed that sentence up as tightly as it will go. But what he's saying is that yeah, sin is real. But God has made a real solution, a real practical solution to the problem of sin.

[10 : 16] He hasn't done it by giving people better instruction as to how they should live. He hasn't solved the problem by chiving people up to live better by sort of encouraging them to live better.

What he's done is he's come down as Jesus Christ and died on the cross to bear the penalty for our sin. And that's the solution.

That's the huge and magnificent solution that Paul offers. So before I go any further I'll ask you those two questions. One, are we in agreement that sin is genuinely the problem?

And number two, are we in agreement that Jesus Christ is spectacularly and wonderfully the solution to that? That he died on the cross for our sin and I put a little figure on there jumping for joy because that is not a bad reaction to the news that this is what Christ has done.

And I think for a Christian we're grateful every day we say thank you Lord for dying on the cross for me. There's never a day in which that becomes irrelevant. There's never a day in which we think well I've got past that stage of the Christian life.

[11 : 31] There might be days which we forget but that's something we always come back to or should always come back to. Okay? So I'm just setting the scene there. So let's now come into Romans chapter 6 and ask again this is his question.

So those things being the case sin being the problem Christ's cross being the answer so now I'm a Christian shall I just carry on like before because I can be so easily forgiven?

And you see he's getting on to the subject of the Christian life and he's saying absolutely not carrying on like before unchanged absolutely not.

If you think that you've really misunderstood what's going on spiritually. So let's let's take this a little bit further and the way he answers it the way he follows on is absolutely not don't you realize something he answers this question by drawing upon the ideas so there are ideas you put them into words but they're more than ideas the facts or perhaps we could show you the spiritual reality of union with Christ and you're thinking where does he get that from?

I didn't read the words union with Christ Chris read it union with Christ actually it does say things like that let's just go through and spot them doesn't actually use the exact phrase union with Christ but what it does say is in verse 4 we were buried with him or if you like a little bit more awkwardly but what the original is saying we were co-buried with Christ which is a strange thing to say isn't it when Christ died we were somehow bundled up with him and we too were what does it say in verse 4 buried with him and then he also says in verse 4 so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father we too may live a new life now he doesn't say he doesn't tie it up absolutely neatly but he's saying something like this isn't he

[14 : 07] Christ was raised from the dead and that we're bundled up with that in some sort of way and we live a new life look at verse 5 if we have been united with him like this in his death or if you use a funny word co-planted with him in his death so that's an idea of being bundled up with Christ in his death verse 6 we know that our old self was crucified with him we were co-crucified when Christ was crucified we were somehow bundled up and linked in with what happened to him verse 8 if we died with Christ we we died with

Christ so that what happened to him we were somehow linked up with it and in verse 8 he says we will also live with him so he rose again and we're caught up somehow in that and in verse 3 he says it using the idea of baptism but he says we were baptized into Christ Jesus so baptism which is an outward sign of beginning the Christian life he says well that is a symbol of entering union with Christ we were baptized into Christ baptism shows and somehow we're bundled up with the Lord with Christ himself so if you do read the passage without yet taking it all to pieces seeing how it all works we can say that there is a lot there about union with Christ and that's what I want us to look at this morning just that idea so that we've got that idea in our minds we can go a bit further another time that's all

I'm going to do just look at that idea in a couple of ways two supporting texts which perhaps will help us to get the idea so let's turn to John chapter 15 so please turn back if you have a Bible to John chapter 15 somebody might tell us a page number for the people who have a Bible from the back of the church 1083 so if you've got a Bible from the back of the church 1083 John chapter 15 15 chapter 15 chapter 15!

So what I'm doing is looking at another chapter which I think has the same sort of ideas but put in a slightly different way so that we can try and get hold of the idea John chapter 15 page 1083 3 I'll read it I am the true vine this is Jesus speaking my father is the gardener he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful you are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you remain in me and I will remain in you no branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me I am the vine you are the branches if a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing if anyone does not remain in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned if you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish seems to be a reference to prayer and it will be given you this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be so here's the picture that Jesus is giving us of a vine don't quite know what a vine looks like so I'm just going to beg your indulgence with that so a stem and then leaves

and bits where there are fruit let's put it like that and he says this is how to think of the spiritual life I'm the vine you are the branches that are joined to the main we can understand that idea can't we and he says things like in verse three remain in me and he says in verse four if a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit so if you remain you bear much fruit and then he talks about the necessity of remaining he says in verse four no branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me so you must remain or else there's no fruit okay so he's not saying there's two sorts of Christians there are Christians who bear a little bit of fruit but they don't remain in Christ and there are other Christians who get the idea of remaining and they bear a lot of fruit he says no you've got grades of Christians you're either in Christ remaining in him and bearing fruit or else the alternative is that you are completely not part of that picture at all not bearing fruit cut off from the vine just those two possibilities and he also not only talks about remaining in the vine but in verse 4 he puts it the way around and says I remain in you so I think the ideas of union with Christ are here aren't they a close link with Jesus Christ and in verse 7 he links this with his words if you remain in me and my words remain in you so he links it with words so he links it with prayer so here's a little summary of it I'm just trying to paint the basic picture there this isn't Paul being difficult this is John's gospel this is the Lord Jesus giving us a picture that I think we can at least get the hang of union with Christ is to do with bearing fruit we remain in the Lord Jesus Christ Christ remains in us that is the sets up the conditions for bearing fruit fruitful Christian lives underneath the union with Christ I've put this sort of it doesn't just happen Jesus makes it a command doesn't he remain in me so I think there's something active about it it doesn't just happen by itself there is at least a dimension to it in which we are active he says remain in me this picture sets us up for pruning and cultivation my father will prune he doesn't go into details on that we could ponder the way that God in his providence does things to our lives which might feel as though he's snipping bits off that we quite liked that's what pruning is isn't it well it just tells us that we're to expect that as part of fruitfulness union with Christ there is a necessity for us to remain in him there is the promise of much fruit if a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit there is no alternative this abiding includes certainly includes Jesus words few reign in me and my words remain in you talking to neighbor the other day and we pondered the fact that Christianity is a religion of words or all it is you can't get away from the fact that words are important in Christian faith Jesus here says it is to do with my words that isn't the whole thing but that's certainly important my words must remain in you and it would appear to include prayer as well because Jesus says if my words remain in you you ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you so Jesus draws a picture so I offer that as one passage idea picture of union with Christ I think we can get the hang of it there are two questions that it points us to number one am I a believer because I can't bear fruit without being joined to Jesus Christ it's a different picture to the picture which says everybody's got a spark of goodness in them and it's just a question of cultivating it it's not that picture at all it's saying that without being joined to Jesus Christ in some important sense my life remains fruit less so am I joined to Jesus Christ am I a believer and then perhaps a question for believers how am I doing in remaining in Christ abiding in Christ staying where I've been put there is something active about it and it seems to me that there's at least part of that to do with our devotional lives to do with whether we are people who keep reminding ourselves of the [25 : 21] Lord and his promises and his word and keep coming back to him hopefully on a daily basis living in conscious dependence on him I think there's least part of that there okay so that was John 15 and now we're going to look at a second passage which is in Romans the bit the other bit that Chris read so please turn back to Romans chapter 5 and in Romans chapter 5 Paul talks about Adam and Jesus Christ and this too is to do with union with Jesus Christ you might remember long time ago talked about bubble wrap and the way that if you want to do something with the bubbles in bubble wrap you have to pop them one by one Mark I think unhelpfully said that he managed to pop them all together but we just forgot about that basically you pop them one by one and then I compared it with the tree in the garden next door which all of a sudden having gone like this a day later had died and the reason being my next door neighbour had severed the chute or the root at that point there and the whole thing died he didn't have to go to each leaf and knock it on the head with a hammer in the bubble wrap manner he just

had to do one thing to the main chute and the whole thing died the point being that God deals with the human race from this point of view not like bubble wrap but like the tree that's the way that it is and here are two examples of it show you what

I mean number one is Adam so think of the whole human race as stemming from Adam and in Romans chapter five Paul says that's how sin worked one crucial head of the human race sinned and that affected everybody else so you look at verse I'm just trying to do this quickly so verse 12 sin entered the world through one man and death through sin etc verse 16 he says the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation verse 17 by the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man so there's the idea of the one key figure and then

I'm going to lead that on through an arrow to the effect which is affecting many people it affects it brings death and sin to many one affecting many so if we go back for example verse 12 sin entered the world through one man and death through sin in this way death came to all verse 12 death came to all verse 14 death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses so death reigned and I'm going to pick out the word condemnation verse 16 judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation and without trying to do the whole of Romans all over again condemnation is a key word it talks about the legal status that a person has the judge looks on somebody and says they're righteous or he looks on somebody and says they're condemned and therefore they are treated as righteous given their support in all sorts of ways or they're treated as condemned and that's very much to do with the way people are treated and

Adam's sin brought the whole human race into the state of condemnation and not only the state of condemnation but he says in verse 19 for just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners I think he's saying more than they were condemned I think he was saying they were changed their character they became sinners so they're not wrongly accused people who've been given a guilty sentence when really they're very nice people and innocent and completely above board no the sin of Adam didn't change that through one man many actually took on the character of sinners and were born as sinners and he goes on to say sin reigns verse 21 sin reigned in death and we have therefore a union with

[31 : 18] Adam a state of affairs where the people bundled up in Adam are in a state of condemnation and sin and death and that's an important thing for us to understand about the way Paul speaks he sees a whole realm to do with Adam where sin reigns and death reigns and where there is condemnation and nothing else and that's the sphere that's the realm that every human being is born into by ordinary birth ordinary nature we're all in Adam to begin with but he doesn't just say that he says there is another realm and another union and he talks about Jesus Christ and what he's actually doing in Romans 5 is comparing the terrible situation in

Adam with the wonderful blessings in Jesus Christ and the features are quite similar so there was one man who is the trunk of the you know that stem of the tree of sin and there is one man who is the stem of another tree of salvation verse 15 for the gift is not like the trespass for the many died by the trespass of the one man how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflow to the many so he's saying one man solved this problem it isn't a bubble wrap thing where everybody's got to solve it individually one at a time!

It can be done at one fell swoop one man solves this problem verse 18 consequently as the result of one trespass was the condemnation for all men so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men so there's one act which we take to be Jesus amazing powerful sacrificial offering of himself as he dies on the cross one act of righteousness brings a flood of generosity and grace and gift that is undeserved and it brings the opposite of condemnation verse 16 it brings justification look at it verse 16 the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification so it is a legal status to do with treatment by the judge the judge says

I'm going to treat you as righteous people so all you know if you think of it in this if you think of it in our ordinary lives all the resources of the state are there for the citizen who's not broken the law but within the normal realm of things you get the support of the national health service you get the support of the police when you call for them you get all sorts of things supporting you because you are in that good position that legal status of being right and Paul says Christ brought that so that all the resources of heaven are behind you if you're a Christian all the support of heaven is behind you because you're in that state of justification verse 17 he talks about look at it trespass of the one man death reigned how much more will those who receive

God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ and he talks about abundant grace and righteousness and reigning in life and in verse 19 he says the disobedience of the one man many were made righteous through the disobedience many were made sinners through the obedience of the one man many will be made righteous and I think here he's talking about not just their legal status but their character of life they're actually changed they're not the people that they used to be they're different and this is his second sphere if you like the sphere of condemnation sin and death and now we're talking about a wonderful place of justification and righteousness and life so

[36 : 32] I don't want to go very much further than that I'm just trying to get us up to a point where we can look at chapter six let's summarize some of the things that we've seen the believers union with Jesus Christ so here I think is a clear scriptural truth now you might not have thought about it very much I have to say I hadn't really thought about it very much until I had to think about it but it is a clear scriptural truth it's not some weird thing that somebody is trying to persuade us of that isn't really there number two this clear truth is actually very important for the believer's fruitful life you think of the way it's put in John 15 if you abide in me you produce fruit if you don't you don't produce fruit so there's something quite essential about this subject about this idea essential for the believer's fruitful life if you want to put it in

Paul's terms it is essential for the believer's holy transformation if people are going to live holy lives they need to grasp this thought and then what does it link up with well this is what I was thinking anyway it links up with God's hidden and mysterious work because I think there is something hidden and I think there is something mysterious about this it doesn't I mean as I look at you it doesn't look you don't look as though you are joined to Jesus Christ you don't I can't tell by looking which of you have died with Christ and which of you have risen!

it doesn't change the color of your hair or the color of your eyes or anything like that there is something hidden about it and there is something rather mysterious if I were to ask you when did this union take place would you say it happened on you know the 31st of March 19 something or other when I became a Christian or when I was baptized or would you say it happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again from the dead because that's when he did it so I don't know the answer to that question and I don't I'm not sure that the Bible spells out the answer but that's why I say it's mysterious there is a mystery here I think it's to do with our personal walk with Jesus Christ I think it does put on the agenda the idea of meditating on

Jesus words and praying so I just want to say if you got yourself into a position where you're trying to live the Christian life without doing that you're heading towards dodgy territory this assumes and it leads us into the thought of reading the Bible or meditating on the Bible or something of that nature on a pretty regular basis and praying so I'll just repeat myself if you if you're currently attempting to live the Christian life without bothering to do those things you are making a mistake so I'd ask you to rethink that it works in the area of faith because our union with Christ faith is an important component of this we can't do it without faith we come to Christ through faith we leave Adam and we enter Christ when we believe in some sense so faith is important baptism is important too Paul mentions that in chapter 6 and he pretty much says if you're starting the Christian life and you were baptized and in a way you can look at your baptism as being the start of the Christian life and when you were baptized you were baptized into Christ Jesus so we've got two baptisms coming up so it's very appropriate really and it's helpful for the people being baptized to realize they're doing something right and important and to be able to look at it in a helpful way and this is saying Maureen that when you're baptized you're to think of it as marking the beginning of the Christian life and of marking the fact that you belong to Jesus Christ in a way that you didn't before you were a Christian and in verse 11

[41 : 45] Paul is going to say count yourselves dead to sin the word there count is a thinking word and this is also to do with the way we think about ourselves count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ this is in the area of what we think now you may be very aware that what goes on in your head spiritually is actually quite important and you may also be aware of all sorts of voices telling you things about yourself spiritually and some of the voices you listen to hopefully they're the right ones some of them you try and disagree with and Paul is saying actually that's right there's an important thinking activity here if we don't do this thinking activity we won't be able to be fruitful in the

Christian life think reckon! sort it out mentally that you are dead to sin but alive to God in Christ and there's something here about obedience he's going to go on and say offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness so something about obedience and there's also something about the past and the present and the future so in the past we could say there's something mysterious about our union with Christ before we were even on the scene that when actually in Ephesians Paul said you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world so there's some sort of link with Christ before we even existed which is an amazing thought isn't it something about the present something about how we live the

Christian life today and something about the future because this union with Christ takes us on into the future when we will be with him forever when we will not only be risen with him in a spiritual sense but in a physical sense so there's all those sorts of things that we we're touching on so summary believer think about it think about your union with Christ don't listen to the voices that say you're just the same as you ever used to be because you're not abide in Christ remain there or if you listen to this and you thought I'm not with this at all don't understand what he's talking about at all it's not my experience then perhaps you are in Adam and that's the sphere that you're in and the hearty recommendation is for you to do something to get out of that place into Jesus Christ let's sing together 6 7 one