

# Union With Christ

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Today's scripture reading is from Paul's letter to the Romans, verses 12 to 21 in the liturgy.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law.

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is the pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if 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?

[ 1 : 17 ] Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin. The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteous reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification in all life for all people.

Just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. It's good to see you all this morning. Happy Independence Day weekend.

[ 2 : 36 ] I want us, as we begin, to just think about how much impact one person can make on a whole group of people.

I read a book last summer about Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, and Nikola Tesla, and it was this novel about the nature of genius, the cost of ambition, and the battle to electrify America. New York City in 1888 was full of gas lamps that still flickered in the streets at night, and the miracle of electric light was still in his infancy.

So these three inventors, they were in a race to turn the night into day. And what I learned in that novel, that story about Edison, was that he acquired 1,093 patents in his lifetime, innovated, obviously, the incandescent light bulb.

But more than that, he created the first record player. He also innovated an early version of the motion picture camera, each of which has had a massive impact on our lives.

[ 3 : 42 ] If in the last 24 hours you have turned on the lights, listened to music on Spotify or watched TV in the movies, you have Thomas Edison to thank. One person can have a huge effect on a whole group of people.

We all know about Albert Einstein. He developed quantum physics and the theory of relativity. Less known is Marie Curie, who was the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize, and she was the first

person to win it in two separate categories.

She won it in 1903 in physics for her research on radioactivity, and then she won the Nobel Prize again in 1911 in chemistry. And then, as if that were not enough, she went on to help develop the first X-ray machines.

And it'd be hard to imagine life in the 21st century apart from the impact of Einstein and Curry. Think about social reformers that we celebrate.

Abraham Lincoln, by his Emancipation Proclamation, was able to free 3.5 million slaves and set them on the path of liberty. Rosa Parks, by refusing to give up her seat on a bus, launched one of the most successful and effective nonviolent protests against discrimination in America.

[ 4 : 58 ] The staunch and active Christian woman became a figurehead of the civil rights movement and helped to achieve lasting change for the good of our whole society. So, one person can have a significant impact on the world around them.

And that can be both positive or negative. One person can affect great good, and another person can affect great evil. One person's life can help and lift up many people, and one person's life can destroy and ruin many people.

And that's the Apostle Paul's argument in Romans chapter 5. He's comparing and contrasting one man and what he did with another man and what he did.

And as I said last week, this is the most important chapter and the most important letter in the New Testament. And so, we should remind all the people who went on vacation today that they really missed out.

Verses 12 to 21 are really the heart and the center and the turning point of this whole letter. It sums up all that's gone before it. It encapsulates all that Paul's going to say to the end of Romans 8.

[ 6 : 09 ] It's a crucial section. And the scope and the sweep of what we just heard is probably the greatest, the widest, and maybe even the deepest of all the writings of the Apostle Paul and maybe even the whole of the New Testament.

And this text really invites us to stand back and to take a look at this grand view of the whole panorama of redemption that's summed up in these two people.

And what Paul wants to say is that we were made, we were made to reign in Adam. But now grace reigns in Christ and so we reign in life.

It's a lot, so I'm going to say it multiple times. We were made to reign in Adam. But now grace reigns in Christ and so we reign in life. Let me just unpack each of these thoughts.

First of all, we were made to reign in Adam. If you want to understand Christ and you want to understand your need for Christ, we must know something about our relationship with Adam and what it means to be in Adam because his story is the story of the human race.

[ 7 : 21 ] God has always, from the beginning, dealt with human beings through a head, through a representative, and through a covenant and an agreement with that representative. So what was the covenant agreement with our first head, the first representative of humanity?

On page one of the Bible, we learn that at the climax of God's good creation, God says in Genesis 1.26, he says, let us make human beings in our image so that they may rule, so that they may reign. And so God does that very thing. He makes Adam and Eve in his royal image as the king and the queen of creation. So that every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve you'll ever meet is to share in this nature and this task that Adam and Eve had, that the people sitting in the pew next to you this morning, they're actually royalty, right?

They, that the people sitting next to you were made to rule and to reign, right? We should really address one another as your majesty or your royal highness.

You can try that at coffee time. I give you permission afterwards to try that out. But God goes on and he says in two verses later in Genesis 1.28, he says to his royal image, the king and queen of creation, he says, be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it, reign over it.

[ 8 : 48 ] That's what you were made to do. Theologians call this the creation mandate or the cultural mandate. What in the world does it mean? Well, it tells us something about societal life, right?

That this first couple was to bear the fruit of kids and they were to increase the number of the image of God in the world and they were to cultivate an entire society of people that would reflect the glory of God back to God.

And this text tells us something also about not only societal life but of cultural life. God placed the first man and the first woman in this, what we should think of as like a national park called the Garden of Eden.

And he gave them this task to till it and to keep it. So that just as God had been forming and filling his creation, now Adam and Eve are to fill and to form his creation even more.

To develop and to unfold in society and in culture all of the hidden potential that God has woven in and baked into his creation for the glory of God.

[ 9 : 58 ] Does that make sense? Adam and Eve were made to rule and to reign. And they were to do that according to the laws of nature and also according to the norms that God had built into society and into culture.

The wisdom of God, the plan and the order of God had been woven into all the given structures and standards of all these various spheres and institutions of marriage and the family.

Of education and culture and schooling. Of the arts and the sciences. Of business and commerce and industry. Economics and technology and media.

Politics and government and administration. God says to Adam and Eve, I want you to work with me. Work with me as my royal stewards. As my under-sovereigns.

To execute my plan for my masterpiece. And bring all of these spheres, all of these institutions to conform to what I intend.

[ 10 : 58 ] My creational blueprint and my design. And so this ruling and this reigning from the very beginning was never about tyrannical exploitation of the earth.

It was always about this careful stewardship to spread the goodness of God and to glorify the name of God within this ordered creation in which God had placed Adam and Eve.

And this is why Psalm 8, when you read the psalm, Psalm 8 says, Wow, praise God. God, you made men and women to rule and to reign over the works of your hands.

Whoa. And you see, Adam and Eve were made to reign over God's creation. But instead of reigning over it, they ruined it. Instead of reigning over it, they ruined it.

They were made for this personal relationship with God. They were made upright with this original righteousness to live in obedience to God. And I don't have time to talk about all the details of Genesis chapter 3.

[ 12 : 02 ] But we read there that they had a choice. Adam and Eve could obey God or they could defy God. They could yield to God's loving rule and therefore enjoy life.

Or they could try to chart their own path and find their own way apart from God's word and therefore experience death. And so here they are fearfully and fully and wonderfully made to live out their freedom under God's reign and his rule.

But this dark power comes in. This dark enemy comes. And he subtly begins to doubt, to cause them to doubt God's word. He begins to question and cause them to question the goodness of God. And tempts them to assert their own autonomy, to become a law unto themselves rather than relying on God's word for direction. And we know the fatal choice.

Right? They chose to be self-defined rather than God-defined. They chose to be self-centered rather than God-centered. Thinking that in that they were going to find the path to true life, to true freedom.

[ 13 : 10 ] So that what the apostle says of all people can certainly be said of Adam and Eve. That although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie. And they worshipped and served, created things rather than the creator.

And so what was the result? What was the consequence of this action? Well, sin and death came flooding into the world. Right? That's where our text picks up today in verse 12.

It says that therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way, death came to all people because all sin. And this is the catastrophe that Adam and Eve were made to reign, but they fell into ruin.

They were made to subdue and to fill all of creation with the goodness and glory of God. And yet, what really happened was the world was filled with misery and trouble and wretchedness.

[ 14 : 15 ] Adam and Eve, rather than subduing, they became subdued by unhappiness and sorrow. And so our text tells us in verse 14, it says that death reigned from the time of Adam onwards.

And in verse 17, it says, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man. And then in verse 21, it says that sin reigned in death.

We were made to reign in righteousness and life, and yet sin and death began a reign of terror over every single one of us. Adam and Eve opened this door of sin and death, and it therefore invaded us like a foreign invader came into God's good creation.

And Paul here personifies sin and death as this active, reigning, ruling, governing power that exercises total domination.

A tyranny, an oppressive totalitarianism that makes us not rulers and people who reign, but rather makes us slaves.

[ 15 : 25 ] That no matter how free and liberated we think we are, we're not. We're rather in bondage and in captivity. We're not free even to choose sin.

We will sin and we must sin. And we cannot even help ourselves from sinning because sin reigns, and we are the slaves of sin. It's controlling us. It's governing us.

And Paul talks about the reign of death, which proves that we're all regarded by God as judicially and legally sinners. The poet John Dryden said that every man who lives is born to die.

Right? Right? From the very moment we begin to live, we begin to die. The very first breath is only one in a long series of breaths that's going to lead to our last breath.

And death will be our end because this world is a place of cemeteries. It's just strewn with corpses. It's a place where death reigns. And in Adam, we're not only dead physically, but we're also dead spiritually.

[ 16 : 32 ] Right? Because real life means knowing God. Real life means having a relationship with God. And so what we regard as life, apart from God, that's not life. It's just mere existence.

It's not living. It's just merely existing in a living death. And Paul, he's saying, oh, how far we have fallen from what we were made to be.

We were made to rule and to reign. And yet the reality is we're ruled by sin and we're reigned over by death. And that is our position. That's the status of everyone you'll ever meet who's a descendant of the race of Adam.

And so if you're exploring Christianity today, I want to encourage you to consider whether or not this reign of death, which is universal and without exception, is that a part of the natural order of life on planet Earth?

Or is this an unnatural, unwanted intrusion into the way that God wanted human life to be lived at a very, very high level? With human beings reigning as kings and queens just under the reign of God?

[ 17 : 47 ] Paul says that in Adam, we were made to reign in Adam. You following me so far? This is like one of the hardest texts in the New Testament. So I'm working hard up here for you this morning.

We're made to reign in Adam, but now grace reigns in Christ. But now grace reigns in Christ. Paul says in verse 14 that Adam is a pattern of the one to come.

He's a figure or a type of the one to come. Adam, he says, is only one half of the story of humanity. But there's also this other story of this one to come.

The story of God's promised Messiah in Christ. It's a story of grace that's unfolding all the way from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. The story of grace, which is the story of the Christian church, the story of all Christian people.

And Adam, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, he says, Christ is the last Adam. He's the second man. Right?

[ 18 : 49 ] So Adam is the first man and Christ is the second man. Adam is the first Adam and Christ is the last Adam. God has only appointed two heads of the human race. There will never be another.

And every one of us is either in Adam or we're in Christ. We're either experiencing the results and the fruits and the effects of the one man. Or we're experiencing the results and the fruits and the effects of the work of the other man.

And what Paul is saying is that Christ came to be the head of a new humanity. He came to be the head and the beginning of a new race of men and women.

So that in Romans 8, Paul says that Christ is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters. The firstborn of many who will be born after him and in his line.

Christ came, Paul says, to launch a new age. A new kingdom. A new order. A new realm in which something different will reign. And what is that?

[ 19 : 50 ] He says in verse 21, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. As we are all related to Adam by nature, so we can be related to Christ by grace, he says.

In Christ, we are under the reign of grace. The reign of sin and death that came to all by the action of one man, Adam, has now been overtaken by this new age, this new realm of the reign of grace through the action of the one man, Christ, he says.

And so the apostle's main concern here is to unfold for us this amazing reign of grace. And in doing so, he's giving us a paradigm and a framework for human history.

He says, the history of the world and really the history of redemption is a struggle between the reign of sin and the reign of grace.

And it leads ultimately to the triumph and the victory of grace. And grace, you'll remember from the past few weeks, grace is God's favor to the undeserving. Grace is God's approval and God's acceptance of those who deserve judgment and condemnation.

[ 21 : 10 ] Grace says there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the whole Bible is a story of the struggle between these two powers of sin and grace.

And the moment Adam fell, the story of this struggle begins, right? This dark enemy, he came in, this dark power came into God's world, came into God's paradise. And he tempted Adam and he pulled Adam down from a very high place and sin began to reign.

But immediately, immediately, God gives a promise and grace enters into the conflict. God says in Genesis 3.15 that the seed of the woman is going to come and he's going to bruise the head of the serpent.

It's the first announcement of grace, the first announcement of God's good news. And then the remainder of the Bible records this conflict between these two mighty forces, the force of sin and the force of grace.

And if you've tried to read the Bible, it's hard. It's a big, long story full of twists and turns. But it comes to this climax in what Paul calls one act of righteousness, one act of obedience.

[ 22 : 26 ] And what was that one act? Well, the whole life of Christ in the Gospels is just one steady, active obedience. One steady act of righteousness before God the Father.

We see Christ listening to God's word. We see him fulfilling the law and the prophets. We see him loving God with all his heart and loving his neighbor as himself. We see at the beginning of his life and ministry, he's tempted in the wilderness.

And he meets that temptation with the word of God. He does exactly the opposite of what Adam did in doubting and disregarding the word of God. We see at the end of Jesus' ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane, he's aligning himself with the will of God.

Saying the exact opposite of what Adam said. Adam said, God, not your will but my will be done. And Christ at every point, at every point along the way, he's being obedient where Adam was disobedient.

He's being righteous where Adam was unrighteous. He's succeeding at every point where Adam failed. And we get to that one climactic moment in the life of Christ. Where we see him submitting passively to God the Father.

[ 23 : 40 ] Who's putting on to his son, Jesus Christ, all the sins of all the people. So that Christ himself would bear the awful judgment and absorb the pain and the suffering of all of our punishment.

And endure God's just wrath against our sins on his cross. That is the one act of righteousness. The one act of obedience. That's how grace came climactically to reign.

And so what is the result of this one act on our behalf and in our place? Well, Paul says in verse 18. The reign of grace came in, Paul says.

And changes our status. Transfers our position. We, our status in Adam was one of condemnation. But grace came in and removed us and set us down over here in this position of justification. That grace came in and it dislodged us from this place we were in.

[ 25 : 02 ] He extracted us from death and placed us over here into life. The reign of grace came in and it uprooted us. And it took us out of this class of unrighteous people.

And therefore it planted us over here in this new class, this new category. So that we might be planted among the rank of the righteous. The reign of grace takes me out of Adam and puts me in Christ.

And so unites me with him that I've been crucified with him. I've died with him. I've risen with him. I've been exalted to be seated on the throne of heaven with him.

The reign of God's grace means that my being and my identity is no longer in Adam as it once was. But it's now in Christ. United with him so that now his story is my story.

And all that he is and all that he has belongs to me. The reign of grace and God's grace is such an irresistible power.

[ 26 : 07 ] It's such an irresistible force that it can come and it can bring us out of this terrible power, this tyranny and this thralldom of sin and death.

And we see it even in the man who's writing this very letter. The reign of God's grace can take someone like Saul of Tarsus, an adversary of Christ, a persecutor of Christ's church.

And it can turn him into the greatest apostle, the greatest preacher of Christian truth and Christian faith that's ever been known. That's the power of the grace of God.

That's the power of the reign of God's grace. So that if God has put you into Jesus Christ, you're finished with the old position in Adam.

You're no longer a sinner. You're no longer living in condemnation. God's taken you out of that category and put you into a new category.

[ 27 : 04 ] Not sin. Righteousness. Not death. Life. Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do you experience this? Grace reigning like a king in your life, conquering all of your biggest and worst enemies, controlling everything for your ultimate good.

That's what it means for grace to be reigning. So we were made to reign in Adam, but now grace reigns in Christ. And so Paul draws the inference from this.

He says, so therefore we reign in life. If grace is now reigning in Christ, we reign in life. And I just want to finish with a thought on this.

He says in verse 17, this has become, I think, my favorite verse, one of my favorite verses in this letter. He says, For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

[ 28 : 27 ] This is an astonishing antithesis and really a thrilling contrast if it's actually true. We were dominated by death.

But Paul says now we're identified with the risen and the living Christ. Because of one man's trespass, death reigned. But now, what's the opposite of death reigning?

It's life reigning. But the apostle Paul doesn't say life is reigning. He says that's true, but there's so much more for us than that.

He loves this phrase much more. We've got to think about the much more. However, the contrast of death reigning is not merely life reigning, Paul says.

It's the fact that you now, brothers and sisters, are reigning in life by the one Jesus Christ. He's not only saying that as a result of Christ's work and because death no longer reigns over us, we receive the gift of eternal life.

[ 29 : 29 ] And therefore, life is going to reign over us and we've come under this new order of life. All of that is gloriously true. But he says there's so much more even than that. He goes way beyond that.

He says we don't get the exact opposite of death reigning. We ourselves reign in life. Listen to it again.

How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ? What Christ has done for us is not only to restore us to what we were in Adam.

He's done so much more. He's not just put us back where we were. He takes us way far beyond that because in Adam we were united to a man. We were united to a created human being.

But when we're united to Christ, Christ, he's not created. He's the only begotten son of God. He's the God-man. And so when we're united to Christ, we're not merely given back the human righteousness of Adam.

[ 30 : 39 ] We're given so much more. We're given the righteousness of the God-man. We're given the moral and spiritual record of the greatest life that's ever been lived on planet Earth. And Paul says, look, this Christ, he's not dead and gone as a past figure of history.

Rather, he's risen and alive and ascended into heaven so that you are united to a living and a powerful Christ. And that's why you, if you're a Christian, you're reigning. You're reigning. You're reigning in life. So many of us know more than we'd like to know how powerful death is.

The death reigns. The death came as a conqueror. Death came and triumphed over us as a tyrant. Death has dominated our lives. But here is one who has eternal life.

Here's one who has the life of God. Here's one who walks into a crowd and says, My name is the way, the truth, and the life of the capital L. When he's resurrected from the dead, what does Jesus say?

[ 31 : 47 ] He says, All power and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And when Peter preached the first Christian sermon at Pentecost, he says, God raised Christ from the dead because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

And so, brothers and sisters, we've been united to one who's so much more than a mere human being. And we've been united to someone who's so much stronger than death.

And this is why Christians no longer fear death. Right? We're reigning in life over a conquered enemy. We're reigning in life and we have victory over death before we even meet it.

That's what it means to be a Christian. And what's even greater than that is that our present reigning in life is just the first fruits.

It's just the foretaste of this much more glorious rule and reign and reality that's coming for us when Christ returns. We're going to know what it means to reign fully.

[ 32 : 56 ] Jesus says himself in Matthew 25, he says, Then the king, Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my father, Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Because of this reign of grace, you are not only reigning in life, but you are going to receive an inheritance that's far beyond any inheritance you can receive in this world. You're going to receive the kingdom of the father.

You're going to be ruler. You're going to be ruler. You're going to be ruler. You're going to be ruler. You're going to be ruling and reigning. The last book of the Bible, Revelation 1, says, He who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father.

And it goes on to call Jesus Christ the king of kings. Well, who are the kings of which Christ is the king? You are.

The people of God are the kings. He's made us to be a kingdom to serve his God and Father. And that means that we are going to reign with the king of kings.

[ 34 : 08 ] We're going to share the throne of the Son of God who shares the throne of thrones of his heavenly Father. And so even now, because of this reign of grace, we're reigning in life through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Adam's world, this sad old world, is a world full of the power of evil and sin and death. But this new world of Christ is a world that's full of the power of grace and righteousness and life.

And this means that much more has been done by Christ to put things right than Adam ever did to put things wrong. And Christ is much more powerful to redeem than Adam was to ruin.

Sin reigned in death, yes, that's true. But how much more does grace reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord?

Do you believe that? Let's believe it. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.