

A new freedom

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 14, which can be found on page 1135 of the Church Bibles.

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?

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.

For if we have been united with him in a death like this, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

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.

[1 : 26] For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we 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.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their 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.

[2 : 49] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace. Well, Ed, thanks so much indeed for reading so clearly for us.

Please do keep Romans chapter 6 open on page 1135. If you've closed your Bibles as we continue our series in Romans. Now, my aim this morning is for us to see that the Christian is someone who belongs to Christ, and therefore has every reason to use all of their being, every gift they possess, every ability they have, to serve God.

Now, this section continues what it means to live as someone who has been justified. Look back to Romans chapter 5 verse 1. Romans chapter 5 verse 1.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, and that is a summary, really, of Romans up to this point, that the person who has put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ, and in his death for us, they are a justified person.

In other words, they no longer face God's condemnation at the judgment, but rather have been acquitted. They are no longer in the wrong with God, but are in the right with God.

[4 : 22] And last week, we began to see what it means to live as a justified person. It is to understand that we are no longer under the reign of sin and death, but have been transferred to the reign of Christ.

And we saw, didn't we, something of the confidence that we can have if our trust is in Jesus and his death for us. Confidence in the face of death, confidence in the face of our own ongoing sin.

But of course, that begs the question, and you may well have been asking it last week, and it's there in Romans chapter 6 verse 1. What then shall we say? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

In other words, you see, if a Christian is someone who is justified, if a Christian can say, I know now that I'm right with God, I know now that I'm a forgiven person, I know now that the verdict on the future judgment day will be that I'm acquitted, that I will not face the judgments.

Or surely then, I can live how I like, because I know that I'll be forgiven. Indeed, that may be a question that some of the Jewish Christians in Rome were thinking.

[5 : 44] So they know that sin is sin, and they understand all too well that any kind of, any belief system worth its salt must change the way people live.

And there may well be some of us this morning, and we're thinking to ourselves, well, surely justification by faith, surely that is simply a license to live how you want.

But I guess there may be others, and perhaps even at this point, we're just slightly beginning to switch off, and we're thinking to ourselves, well, Romans chapter 6 verse 1, frankly, that is not the question I'm asking. That is not the question I'm going to be asking myself tomorrow morning when I wake up to start another busy week.

But let me just ask, what is your attitude to sin? What is your attitude to sin? To the sin in your life? Don't we so often think to ourselves, well, I know I sin, but actually he doesn't really matter because Christ has died.

[6 : 49] He doesn't really matter because I'm forgiven. Isn't that so often how we think? We know we sin, but actually we don't do anything about it.

At best we are half-hearted about sin, at worst we ignore it. Does it matter how we live? Yes, it does.

Turn back to Romans chapter 1 verse 5. Romans chapter 1 verse 5 talks about Jesus.

Jesus through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

True faith, true Christian faith, a proper understanding of justification by faith leads to a changed life. It leads to obedience.

[7 : 53] What we're going to see today is that it is not an obedience based on rules and regulations. Christianity is not about carrot and stick. Rather, it is a change of life which comes from understanding that if we have put our trust in Jesus, we now belong to him.

Now just take up the outline on the back of the service sheet. Don't worry about the diagram for the time being. If you're anything like me, diagrams terrify you most of the time. But just notice, will you, from the headings that what God wants us to grasp this morning is simply one thing, one principle, and then two implications.

So first of all, let's have a look at that one principle, and it is union with Christ. Have a look at verse 5 of Romans 6. For if we have been united with him, that's Jesus, in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Here is the principle. It is that those who have been justified by faith, those who trust in Christ and his death for us, we have been united with Christ, and we now belong to him.

That is explained in verse 3. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? In other words, what happened to Christ is reckoned to what happened to us.

[9 : 24] Now, I think in our culture, we probably slightly lost the sense of this, simply because so often, when someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ, when they are converted, so to speak, so often baptism does not immediately then follow on afterwards.

But of course, in the first century, baptism so often did follow immediately on from conversion. As such, baptism is a wonderful visual aid of what happens when you do put your faith in Jesus.

So if you're baptised, not simply with a sprinkling of water, but a kind of decent amount of water, while you are put down under the water, a visual aid of being united with Christ in his death, and then on the assumption that you're not left under the water for too long, you are then raised up with Christ to new life, being united to him in his life.

That's why, by the way, if you've come to Christ recently and you haven't yet been baptised, actually it would be a very good thing, a very important thing to do to be baptised. But can you see how baptism is a wonderful visual aid, if you like, of being united with Christ as we die to our old way of life and raised to new life?

And notice what Paul is saying here as he speaks about being united with Christ. It is true for every Christian believer, not just some. And it happens at the moment when we put our faith in Christ.

[10 : 52] It happens at the moment of conversion. This isn't some kind of gradual process that Paul is describing. Now I've tried to express that on the diagram, on the outline.

Those of us who were here last week will recognise, won't we, these two circles. So in other words, there's the reign of Adam or the reign of sin which leads to death and everyone by nature shares that.

That's how everyone starts life. And then there's the reign of Christ. That's how we left it, wasn't it, last week? But the question perhaps we may have been thinking last week was well, how do you move from one to the other?

How do you move from being under Adam, under death, with death being your master, as Mark was saying earlier, to being under Christ? And the answer is, it is through union with Christ. It is by being united to Christ and joined to him. Now look, we had a brilliant illustration of that at the royal wedding last week.

[12:00] You see, how could Kate Middleton, a commoner, possibly become part of the royal family? Well, she couldn't, could she? She couldn't just kind of wander into Buckingham Palace, a knock on the door, and say to the Queen, I'd rather like to become the Duchess of Cambridge.

Thank you very much. But amazingly, this ordinary person has indeed now become a Duchess. she has died to her old way of life as a commoner.

She has been raised to a new life as a Duchess. How? Well, by being joined in marriage to Prince William.

She has been united to him and therefore transferred from an old way of life to a new way of life. Now let me ask, is that your understanding of what happens when someone puts their faith in Jesus?

If you have put your faith in Jesus, is that your understanding of what happened when you did put your faith in Jesus? At that moment, we are united to Christ and it is through our union with Christ that we are transferred from that reign of sin and death to the reign of Christ and life.

[13:26] Now we said last week, didn't we, it's all too easy to have an inadequate view of the Gospel, an inadequate view of what Jesus has done. One danger we spoke of was the kind of tick-the-box view of the Gospel, which simply says, yes, I believe it.

Of course I believe that Jesus died for me, but actually it's no more than that. If that is your view of the Gospel, that is not going to change your life, is it?

The other danger we talked about last week was a tick-it-in-your-pocket view of the Gospel. Now I think this is very common. I guess there will be some of us here this morning, and yes, we will have a tick-the-box view of the Gospel, but I guess there are many more of us, and actually we have a kind of tick-it-in-your-pocket view of the Gospel.

Which goes like this, I believe that Jesus died for me, I believe that I'm forgiven, I believe that I'll go to heaven. And it's a wonderful thing to be certain about that. But actually, it goes no further.

Again, it doesn't lead to a change of life. It simply views justification as an entrance ticket to the new creation to heaven, which I put in my back pocket until the day I need it.

[14:39] And although it will be useful on that future day, actually it makes no impact at all on the life I live now. Well, I wonder if that is your view of the Gospel.

In which case, I understand this key principle that God's Holy Spirit wants us to grasp this morning, union with Christ. I guess perhaps for some of us, and actually if we're honest, we've never really thought about it.

Union with Christ. Well, that's the principle. We're going to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at two key implications of that. And the first is, verses 3 to 11, change the way you think. Change the way you think. Have a look at verse 11, which is the summary really, verses 3 to 10. Because first and foremost, God wants us to change our thinking.

Verse 11. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. We've been united to Christ, so we're to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

[15:52] Let's just spend a few moments here. We're just looking at each of those things in turn. First of all, in Christ your old life has ended, which is what it means to have died with Christ. Our old way of life has ended. You see, look at verse 2.

We who died to sin. Look at verse 4. We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into his death. Look at verse 5.

If we've been united with him in a death like his. Look at verse 6. We know that our old self was crucified with him. You see, it's as if Paul is saying to us, don't forget the funeral.

Don't forget that when you put your trust in Christ, that was your funeral. At that point, the person you were died. Now, Paul is speaking of sin here, not primarily as rebellion against God, although obviously it is rebellion against God, but more as a power that enslaves us and which rules us. Look back to chapter 5, verse 21, where he talks about sin reigning in death. It's just what Jesus Christ said in Romans chapter 8, verse 34.

[17:07] Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. So you may know that the 18th century French philosopher Rousseau wrote that mankind is born free and is everywhere in chains.

Well, not so, says the Bible. Everyone is born in chains. Not free, but enslaved. Enslaved to sin. But now if we are united to Christ, we are dead to sin.

What has happened to Christ is reckoned to us. That old way of life is dead and buried. And that is explained in verse 7.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. That phrase, set free, literally means is justified from sin. The Christian is justified.

No longer facing condemnation. Freed from the penalty of sin on the judgment day. Which means that the power of sin over us has been broken.

[18:17] Imagine for a moment a top class football player. He's been playing for a particular club for a number of years. And he's been answerable to that club and answerable to that manager. But then a very great price is paid and he is released.

He is released from his old contract with his old club. No longer answerable to his old manager. But instead he is transferred to play for a new club with a new contract and a new manager.

Well, the inevitable happens and the day comes along when his new team is playing against the old team. And a few days beforehand his old manager phones him up and says, what do you think? How about playing again for the old team? Well, what does he say to himself? No, my old contract has ended. I'm no longer responsible to that old manager.

I've begun a new way of life. The old manager is powerless. In a similar way, says Paul, in Christ your old life has ended. Dead and buried.

[19:24] Let me ask if you're a Christian here this morning. Do you believe that? Do you believe that about yourself? But secondly, in Christ your new life has started.

And this is what it means for the Christian to be alive with Christ. Our new life has started. Notice it's happened to Christ in his resurrection and therefore it is now reckoned to us as well.

We have been raised. So have a look at verse 4. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Or verse 8. We believe that we will also live with him. And verse 11. So also you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Now notice for a moment that although we are already fully united with Christ in death, we are not yet fully united with Christ in resurrection. We are still waiting for our resurrection bodies.

[20:29] I take it that's why verse 5 speaks about the future. We shall be united in a resurrection like his. And verse 8. We will live with him. However, although we still have to wait for our new resurrection bodies, we have already been spiritually raised to new life with Christ.

That is clear, isn't it, in verse 11. Consider yourselves alive to God. Or in verse 9. Just as Jesus was raised to new life, was raised from the dead, never to die again, so the Christian has been raised to new life, never to die, spiritually speaking.

Why? Well, because verse 10, Christ has defeated death. He has defeated sin and death once for all time, which means that death no longer rules over Christ and no longer rules over those who are united to him.

Now, I take it that's a glorious thing, isn't it? Death does rule. As Mark said earlier, I cannot simply say to death, go away. No, that is the trajectory that everyone is on.

Death does rule. It's the ultimate statistic. But wonderfully in Christ, a new life has started, a life which leads not to death, but which leads to the new creation.

[21:57] Just go back for a moment to our footballer, okay, when he's tempted to play for his new team. Because, of course, as well as saying to himself, well, no, my old life has ended, he's going to say something else, isn't he?

A new life has begun. I'm now playing for a new team with a new contract. I'm now accountable to a new manager. It would be absurd, wouldn't it, if he went back to play for his old club?

Change the way you think, verse 11. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let me ask, is this how you think of yourself if you're a Christian believer this morning? Dead to sin, alive to God.

Now, I guess there may well be some of us, and actually, we're just thinking to ourselves, well, this just sounds a bit kind of unreal. You know, just kind of pretend or, you know, it's a make-believe, theological make-believe.

[23 : 00] But no, it's not pretending. It is about grasping our new status in Christ as God sees it. It is true, it is objectively true of everyone who has faith in Jesus and in his death in our place.

Which is why, in verse 11, we are to change our thinking. We are to change the way in which we think of ourselves from now on. And of course, it shows, doesn't it, how totally inadequate that ticket-in-your-back-pocket view of the gospel is.

Justification is not simply a kind of entry ticket to the new creation, which I just keep safely tucked away until I need it on the future judgment day. No, it transforms the whole of our thinking and the whole of life.

So let's move on then to our second implication. Change the one you serve. Change the one you serve.

Now look, we've had hints of this already, haven't we? Verse 2, how can we who die to sin still live in it? Verse 4, that we too might walk in newness of life. Verse 6, no longer enslaved to sin.

[24 : 18] Verse 10, the life he lives, he lives to God. And now very clearly in verses 12 to 14, we are to change the one we serve. Verse 12, have a look at it. Let not sin reign.

Verse 13, do not present your members to sin, but instead present yourselves to God. Now do you see, it's only at this point that we are actually told to do anything.

Okay? It's only once our thinking has been changed, it's only once we have grasped the implications of our union with Christ. That our lives will then change.

That is always the way in the Christian life and it's very important to grasp it. Otherwise, of course, we'll simply end up going down the road of rules and regulations and carrot and stick Christianity.

Tragically, lots of Christians end up thinking like that, I think, that we're kind of, yes, that we're saved by grace, but actually the Christian life is all about rules and regulations.

Indeed, there may be some of us here this morning, perhaps we're not yet Christians and perhaps that is our kind of, that's our kind of picture of what the Christian life is like, rules and regulations.

But of course, all that leads to is guilt and joylessness and slavery.

[25 : 37] In fact, if your Christian life is rather joyless at the moment, this may well be the reason.

Though living the Christian life is not about a rule book, it is about understanding our new identity in Christ, that we've been united to Christ as a result our thinking changes and therefore the one we serve changes too.

Go back to our footballer, that's what's happened, isn't it, to our footballer. He says to himself, I'm now playing for a different team. The whole of my life has changed. That's what's happened to Kate Middleton as she grasped the implications of being a member of the royal family.

Why, her whole life will change. Perhaps over the last week there have been various things and she just kind of caught herself thinking, no, I'm a different person.

I'm now a duchess. I have to change. I won't live like that anymore. I'll live like this instead. Well, for the Christian, verse 13, we are now free not to serve sin but to serve God.

notice that is not saying that we won't sin. You and I will be tempted to sin until the day we die.

Indeed, in chapter 7, we'll see the Christian is now launched into a fight, into a battle against sin.

[26 : 59] But verse 14, the dominion of sin, the mastery of sin has been broken. In other words, you and I are free not to sin.

You and I are free not to sin. It's not that we'll never sin again, but it is that you needn't sin now.

You needn't sin now. That word, present, in verse 13, is a wonderful word. It's a military word and it's the idea of a soldier standing to attention on the parade ground, presenting his arms to his commanding officer.

Now let me ask, is that your view of Christian life? Is that how you think of yourself tomorrow morning? Okay, so think of tomorrow morning. Think of yourself setting your alarm clock this evening. Think of tomorrow morning. And how will you think of yourself tomorrow morning?

What do you think of yourself if you're a Christian? First and foremost, this day, today, this week, I'm going to present myself, all that I have, to the Lord Jesus as my commanding officer.
[28 : 11] Is that how you think of yourself? I think it's a very compelling picture of the Christian life. No longer presenting ourselves to sin, but to God. Presenting your feet to God, where they take you, where you go.

Presenting your hands to God, what you do. Presenting your ears to God, who you listen to. Bruce was talking, wasn't he, about the opinions which shape us and which influence us. Presenting your eyes to God. So often, it's the things that we see with our eyes which then lead us, aren't they, as we desire those things.

Presenting your heart to God, your heart with its capacity to love and to hate. Presenting your tongues to God with the tongue, of course, which has the power to destroy and build up.

Presenting our minds to God, what we think about, what we think is important, what we prioritize.

Presenting our abilities to God, our energies to God, our influence over others.

[29 : 23] Presenting all these things to God. Is that how you see your life if you're a Christian this morning? Presenting your body, all that you are, tomorrow morning to Christ in his service.

It's a wonderfully attractive, wonderfully compelling picture of the Christian life. Are we to continue in sin? By no means. I take it the danger you and I face is that in the battle of sin we'll either become discouraged and give up.

Either that or in the face of sin we'll simply give in. We just won't battle anymore and we'll think it doesn't matter. Isn't that your danger? Certainly my danger.

Perhaps a quick word of confession on Sunday morning and then we do exactly the same again on Monday. Instead of that moment of temptation perhaps to lose your temper or to tell a lie or to click on that website remember who you are you have been united to Christ.

Say to yourself I belong to Christ I'm free from sin I'm now free to serve God. And we'll see next week as we look at the second half of Romans chapter 6 that to live like that far from being a slavery is the most glorious wonderful freedom.

[30 : 58] Let's pray as we sit. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Heavenly Father we praise you for this wonderful truth that is objectively true as you see it that those of us who have put our faith in Jesus that we are united to him that we have died to sin that we are alive with him and we pray heavenly father that that reality would deeply affect the way in which we think and that we would be those who would give ourselves to serve you joyfully freely wholeheartedly as a result and we ask it for Jesus sake amen to for are as husbands say cond in women to women who they as of harmon hips to measurable as solutions can told yes