

# New Life: Union with Christ

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you would open your Bibles, please, to Romans chapter 6. Margaret read for us a moment ago, 942, page 942 and 943.

That would be just great. As you're doing that, the first time I preached this passage, I was in my first year in seminary training to be a minister.

And this was the passage set in the parish I worked on the weekends. And I made a complete mess of it.

I couldn't figure out what the passage was about. And so I threw together what I thought were some helpful things to say. And I drew to the close of the sermon.

I looked out on the congregation. And everyone's faces were in that sort of, what? And so I said, is this making any sense? And with one voice, they all said, no.

[ 1 : 06 ] So I put my notes aside. And for three minutes, I tried to summarize all that I'd understood about the passage. And I gave the three minutes.

And I said, does that make things clearer? And they said, no. So I said the grace and dismissed them. Well, now, it's no defense.

But you know, this passage has been a happy hunting ground for all sorts of nutty Christian teaching. Some people take verse 12 in chapter 6 and say, We Christians can live a sinless, perfect life.

And I can give you the secret to that higher life if you pay a certain amount of money, which is completely against what the Bible teaches and always leads to despair. And if you ever come across someone who claims to live a sinless life, just ask the people who live with them if it's true. Some people take verses 3 and 4 to say that baptism is what makes you a Christian and you need to be baptized according to the rules of our church or you don't go to heaven. Some people take verse 5 in a mystical direction and say the goal of life is to be absorbed into God where our individuality is obliterated.

[ 2 : 20 ] Others take verse 4 to 14 to mean that sin is no big deal. We're under grace. God accepts me. I don't need to change anything. I have come to the conclusion that this passage is so vast and so wonderful, we cannot fully understand it.

You can't take this passage and nail it down. You can't put it in a box. And I think what we're meant to do with it is to savor it and to drink from the truth in it and to grow into it and to allow it to change us in ways that perhaps we had not thought possible.

And although it's not a simple passage, it has one very juicy main point which comes out very clearly in verse 5 and that is every Christian person is united with Jesus Christ.

If you remember nothing else about the sermon, this is it. To be Christian is to be in Christ Jesus.

And you may have noticed that I printed out the passage on the front of the bulletin.

Looked helpful when I did it. I might try and explain a bit as we go along but don't close your Bible but if you're a visual learner and it's not completely confusing to you, have that in your other hand as we go through.

[ 4 : 03 ] And if it's confusing to you, just ignore it. But one of the things is that I've boxed every phrase in the passage that refers to us being in Christ Jesus, united to Christ.

And if you're new to the Christian faith, this is an incredibly precious treasure which has the power to make very practical changes on Monday morning. It's the normal way that Christians talk about and think about themselves.

Is it the normal way you think about yourself? I'm a person in Christ Jesus. Even just in this letter, in Romans alone, we have redemption, Paul says, in Christ Jesus.

At the end of the chapter, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are one body in Christ.

And in the last chapter, Paul goes through a list of 30 names and he says about them, they're in Christ. They're in Christ Jesus. And his relatives, Andronicus and Junia, he says, they were in Christ before me.

[ 5 : 05 ] They became Christians before he did. And my prayer this morning is that as we look at this, God would lift us up to a new understanding of ourselves and set us in a different way.

And to be united with Christ is so deep and so remarkable, it's very difficult to put into words, actually. It's like trying to express what it's like to fall in love.

Or it's trying to express the light in a Caravaggio painting in words. Or it's trying to express what it's like to see the South Pole when no one else has before.

It's just, the reality is too big. And so before we dive deeply into chapter 6, I want to point out that the New Testament gives us four different and very closely connected pictures of what it is to be in Christ.

And I want to give you these four pictures so they'll feed our hearts and prepare us for the rest of the passage. So what is it to be in Christ Jesus? First picture is spatial.

[ 6 : 16 ] Not spacey, spatial. Verse 3 in chapter 6. Do you not know that all of us who are baptized, who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, God, by a miracle of his own doing, takes us and puts us inside the body of Jesus Christ.

We are clothed with Jesus Christ. Where he is, we are. The decisions he makes affect us. When we moved to Canada years ago, our son Joshua was two years old.

He was included in our choice. In the same way, every human is a child of Adam. The decisions Adam made, because we all belong to Adam, affected us.

We all live in the same, we all live outside Eden now. But when we hear the gospel and place our faith in Jesus Christ, God puts us, places us, into Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 20 ] And all the blessings and all the benefit that are in Jesus Christ are now ours, because we are in him. It's spatial language. It's so close, so intimate, so personal.

He embraces us and holds us to himself, which is why when the risen and ascended Jesus Christ appeared to the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road, he did not say, why are you persecuting my disciples, my followers, my church?

He said, why are you persecuting me? So the first picture is spatial. The second comes from gardening. It's horticultural. And if you like Bible flipping, keep your finger in John 6 and go back to John 15.

You don't need to. I'll read you the verse where Jesus says this, John 15, verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. You see the picture? Jesus says, I'm a vine, you are branches that have been grafted into me.

[ 8 : 32 ] Jesus' view is that a Christian person is someone who is attached and connected and fastened into and grafted into him, Jesus Christ, in an organic living bond and union with him.

And just as the life of the vine flows out through the vine into the branches and bears fruit, our whole Christian life and our whole Christian experience and our whole Christian existence comes from him by being in him.

It's as we abide in him and dwell in him and remain in him. He shares his life with us from heaven. So the picture is spatial and it's horticultural.

Thirdly, it's medical. Back to Romans 6 verse 5. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now that word united was used in the ancient world by Dr. Hippocrates for healing of a wound when the edges of the wound united and bound together and he used it for a broken bone which was broken and then the whole bone grows together and mends.

[ 10 : 03 ] When it says we have become united, it's a separate verb. It's a God word used of God's creative actions. This is not something we could ever do for ourselves. By a miracle, God joins us to his son, Jesus Christ and as two bones knit together and grow together, our lives are bound together with Jesus and we take increasing strength from him and increasing closeness.

Isn't that amazing? And the fourth and final picture the New Testament gives us is a relational one and I just go back to John 17.

You don't need to turn it up but if you want to check the preacher's telling the truth, you can do this. In John 17, Jesus is praying on the night before he's crucified and he looks forward to the time after his resurrection and he has in mind, he prays for all those in the future who are going to become Christians, who are going to place their faith in him.

He's praying for us and he says this in verse 20, 21, 23. He says, I do not ask for these only, speaking about his disciples, Father, but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may be one just as you, Father, are in me and I in you that they may also be in us so that the world may believe you have sent me.

Verse 23, I in them, you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know you have sent me and loved them even as you have loved me.

[11:47] This is very holy ground we're on right here but in some way as the Father, God the Father and is in the Son, Christ Jesus and as the Son is in the Father, Jesus prays, we would be in him.

So the fellowship and the bond and the communion and the participation and the unity that God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit share together, that becomes ours by union with Jesus Christ.

It's almost more than we can imagine, isn't it? Again, it's not that we're absorbed into divinity and our individuality is dissolved. Just as the Father and the Son remain distinct persons but participate in each other's life so we participate in the life of God through our union with Christ.

It means that the centre of the Christian life is not institutional or sacramental or emotional or intellectual but relational.

this is the deepest way that we can think about ourselves. Why is it so important? Why does the apostle go here in Romans chapter 6?

[13:06] And the answer is this, the justification by faith that he has been driving home now for five chapters, the need for it and the truth of it, justification by faith is not an end in itself.

it's not the final thing. It is merely how we are placed into union with Christ. And why is that so important?

The reason is because the power for transformation, any real change in my life and your life does not come from effort or application or intelligence or all the commands in the world.

it doesn't come from institutions or sacraments or ethics or emotions or intellect but it comes directly from Jesus Christ himself. Because we are in him his life, his very life and his nature nourishes us and reshapes us and renews us and changes us day by day.

That's what the Christian life is all about. Because of our union with Christ there is no such thing as justification without sanctification. There is no such thing as redemption without renewal.

[14:23] And I think we ought to take the question of verse 1 as a real question, a sincere question. See verse 1, what should we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

People have often read this as though it's a rogue Christian who is saying okay I'm justified, I'm safe, I might as well live it up and sin like a trooper, I've passed the exam, I don't need to study or go to class.

I've actually never met a Christian who says that, I think it's a caricature. The painful truth of the Christian life is that we live between Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection. We are adopted as children but we wait for our full adoption.

We are forgiven from sin but we still sin and the question I think most of us come to sooner or later is, is that all there is? Is there no more, is there no change or transformation in my life now?

Do I just have to cling on by my fingernails until it's all over? I mean what use is this to me right now? How does it change my life in the present?

[15:28] When I understand Jesus has paid the penalty for my sin and that I'm justified and I'm righteous, how does that transform me? How does that bring renewal into the practical daily struggles of my life during the week?

It's a real question I think, it's the question of someone who's stuck, who's been a Christian for years, things have settled into a rut or the Christian who are struggling with some sin or some addiction and they're in a cycle where they go and they fail and they come back and they ask God for forgiveness and they make promises to God, they go and fail and they ask for forgiveness and

make promises to God and they go and fail or the Christian who's grown cynical that there can be any real change and they've given up trying really and they've decided I'm just going to coast and go through the motions and the juicy core of this passage is that our union with Jesus Christ has three massive implications and I want to go through them quickly with you and they are that we have a new Lord and we have a new life and thirdly, we have a new lifestyle.

So is everyone with me so far? Am I making myself clear? Never ask that question again. So firstly, the implication of being in Christ is we have a new Lord.

To be in Christ Jesus means we have new ruler, new master, new dominion, new Lord. The Bible's view is that apart from Christ we're slaves to sin, we're owned by a ruler and did you notice as Margaret read these verses there were ten references to sin and all of them were in the singular. In other words, the focus is not on our wrongdoings but sin, capital S, as a power, as a ruler, came into the world through Adam, has reigned in death ever since and Jesus himself said everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

[17:37] So just have a look at the sheet and go down to verse 12 and verse 14 and I have underlined in single thin underlining, I think, all the words that are rule and reign words.

So verse 12, do not allow sin therefore to reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey its passion. Verse 14, sin will have no dominion over you since you are no longer under law but under grace. See, the rule of sin for the person in Christ has been broken. Sin is no longer the controlling force for any who are in him. We've been liberated from one Lord that we happily served.

We didn't really know we were serving that Lord by being united with another Lord. The message of the Old Testament is our God reigns. When Jesus comes, he preaches the kingdom of God. He comes to destroy the rule of sin, to smash its ruler and to liberate all its captives. And how did he break sin's rule?

[18:45] By dying through death. Let me give you a gruesome illustration. Let's just imagine you were kidnapped by a terrorist and enslaved. If you watch television in North America, most of us will be kidnapped by terrorists and enslaved.

I understand that in law and order there was something like in one year five times the number of murders on television as they were in the whole New York County. Where was I?

Okay, let's say you're kidnapped by some terrorist and you've already got a pre-existing condition that you're not very well and you get sick and you die. What more can the kidnapper do to you?

He can perform some indignity on your body I suppose but he's got no real hold over you. Once sin has killed someone, it's got no more power which is why being in Christ Jesus is so important.

Look at verse 3. Do you not know that all of us who are baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were co-buried therefore with him by baptism into death.

[19:48] The point of baptism as Dan brought out this morning is being united and joined to Jesus and when you're joined to Jesus you're united in his death. Paul says co-crucified it's one word.

We change lords from sin to Christ we no longer live under sin we live under Christ in sin in Christ.

How can that possibly be true? Verse 9 For 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. That's why Jesus came and in his crucifixion when he was on the cross he deliberately surrendered himself to master death and master sin for our sake and if you place your faith in Jesus Christ you are co-crucified with him you have died to sin in the same way he has not exactly the same in the likeness of his death.

see this is why the Christian life is not just a steady grind it's not just a lonely struggle against my sins at the heart the Christian life is growing to know Jesus Christ as my true Lord and living in him it is impossible to put any sin to death except through union with Christ so the first implication is that we have a new Lord the second is that we have a new light sorry a new life new Lord new life and if you look at the passage on the front of the bulletin very thick underline all the references to death and life now this is if what I've said so far is just a little bit mind blowing which I think it is this is even more so if we are in Christ

Jesus he shares his resurrection life with us now yes it is true that he will raise us bodily on the last day this is about the present look at verse 4 we were co-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 so we too might walk in newness of life that's why God's grace never leaves us where it finds us he does not forgive us or justify us and not transform us but the way God transforms us is that Jesus shares the power of his risen life with us now so that we walk in newness of life a life that has this quality of

perpetual newness resurrection new life the age to come newness in it you see in our in Jesus Christ our death and burial brings the end of one life but the beginning of a new one because the goal of being co-crucified with Jesus is to live in newness of life so I say again there can be no moral change or growth in godliness apart from this new resurrection life which comes directly to us from Jesus

[ 23 : 05 ] Christ through our union with him the best commentator said Jesus breathes his own life into us by his secret power from heaven so on Monday morning tomorrow morning the reality of refusing sin and trying to set my heart on glory and living for him doesn't come from grim determination and discipline as important as they are but it comes into our hearts from Jesus Christ himself who continually pours his risen life into ours enabling us to live in newness of life that's the second implication new lord new life and third and finally new lifestyle now we finally come to the commands in the passage and if you look down on the sheet in verse 11 12 and 13 I put four dots indented and I've bolded the four commands consider yourself dead to sin do not allow do not present but present and we're running out of time so let me just make three comments on these commands the first is this you cannot separate ethics from theology you cannot separate works from faith and I know we are an impatient people these are the first real commands to us in all of the book of Romans it's taken six chapters to get here and I know some people are irritated with all this focus on

God and Jesus Christ why can't we just get practical why can't we just flip over to chapter 12 and do with the daily advice for life just tell me what to do for heaven's sake but the surprising thing is that the first command that comes to us in verse 11 is not really any kind of overt action it's not about dealing with any particular sin or ethical issue it's not anything external verse 11 he says so you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus so that godliness and renewal and growth grows out of our being in Christ Jesus they're the fruit of his life in us and our first task is to deliberately constantly count and reckon and consider who we are and where we are that god is united to us to christ so that the life we live we live to god and not to ourselves see that's why you can't separate theology from ethics any growth in our christian life is not just about effort but it's grasping more deeply that we are united with him this command is to regularly daily deliberately intentionally evaluate yourself assess yourself that you are in christ that you've died to sin and are alive to god this ought to be central to your daily thinking unless you've come to grasp you're in christ jesus and unless this is close to the center of your thoughts your christian life will always be it'll feel fake and it'll feel feeble and the struggle with sin will be miserable and your attempts to bear fruit for god will be stillborn i don't know what advice to give you i mean write a little note to yourself i am in christ jesus and put it on up on your bathroom mirror or your refrigerator or on your iphone or whatever it's that it's the reality of being in christ jesus that will undermine and cause the collapse of your stuckness or cynicism or slackness the miracle of what god is doing when he unites us to christ when we dwell on it when we think on it becomes a daily hourly calculation can't serve god unless we cultivate this sense that we've died with christ we're alive to god because we're in him and it is as christ becomes more to us and we understand ourselves more closely united with him we become less focused on ourselves he is our righteousness he is our sanctification so the first comment is you can't separate the two things the second comment is each of these four commands has a negative and a positive side consider yourself dead to sin negative consider yourselves alive to god positive do not allow sin to reign negative do not present your members negative but present yourselves to god positive and there's deep bible wisdom in this balance because the christian life is not about saying no to some things it's not just a negative life it also means saying yes to some things in exactly the same way the christian life is not just saying yes to some things it also means saying no in fact every yes means a no and every no means yes very simple i mean if there's some sinful habit that is really dogging you you know if you've got a tongue that is a bitter tongue or a gossiping tongue or you lie to make yourself look better or if you're struggling with anger or pornography or superiority just saying no will make you a more dismal failure it doesn't work i've tried it but neither is just trying to add some christian virtue without dealing with the sin the first thing we need to do is to reckon ourselves united with jesus christ in his death and his resurrection and then in practice replace what is replace the no with the yes replace the unrighteous thought deed word act with one that is righteous can never go forward without saying yes and no and the third thing to say and this is the final thing nearly finished it's a lifelong warfare yes we have peace with god peace with god

means conflict with evil and the arena of the conflict is our bodies see verse 12 do not allow sin to reign in your mortal body your body of death to make you obey its passions do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteous present yourselves to god as those been brought from death to life your members to god as instruments for righteousness our members hands eyes feet legs back tongue our members mind heart ambition creativity imagination ability everything you have and the word for instrument here is the word weapon because there's no neutrality with god and there's no neutrality with evil and if you pretend there is you've already given up whether we like it or not we are all promoting either the rule of god or the rule of sin by what we do with our members so we will never become perfect morally or sinless in this life there is no such thing as the higher life or some great secret to discover no christian is ever immune from temptation this side of glory but there can be growing fruitfulness and faithfulness doesn't matter how old you are there can be actual moral change and it comes from a deepening walk with jesus christ seeing him as more precious day by day a growing appreciation in him that the rule of sin is broken a growing bond and fellowship where we daily draw our life and our values and our identity from him it will change what we do with our members for in jesus christ we have every spiritual blessing new lord new life new lifestyle that's why paul says in verse 14 sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace amen