

New Life: Union with Christ

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, good morning, everyone. Please take out your Bibles and turn to page 942 in the New Testament, Romans chapter 6, or a shorter way is to just look on the front of your sheet, and we have a little different translation.

This is the DKS translation, the David Kenneth Short translation there on the front, which is a lot of fun, and we'll look at that together.

So you can look at the text in either way. Like I said, we're looking at Romans chapter 6 this morning, and Romans chapter 6 deals with an extremely practical question.

It's a question that confronts every single Christian, and it's a question that confronts every single question every single day of our lives. And many times in a day, every moment, this question is in one sense before us, one way or the other.

And it's the question, how are we as Christians to deal with sin? How are we to deal with temptation? How are we to relate to the fact that even though we're Christians, we find ourselves locked in a battle with sin?

[1 : 40] And it actually asks a question that's a little bit more specific than that. Over the last several months, as you know, if you've been here, we've been walking through the book of Romans. And if you've been with us, you'll know that as we've walked through Romans, the Apostle Paul, the author of this letter, has been absolutely emphatic again and again that salvation, he uses the word justification, that our justification before God is entirely free.

It's entirely by grace. He's been telling us again and again in a whole bunch of different ways that through Jesus, God is now able to come to us and justify us, pardon us, acquit us, even though we're guilty, even though we don't deserve it.

In fact, the first few chapters of Romans, the thing that is so utterly shocking in the first chapters of Romans is this, that the only people that God ever justifies are ungodly people.

And what that means is that there is absolutely no way that we could ever, through our works, ever hope to earn God's favor, earn God's forgiveness, it's by grace alone, we say, and it's by faith alone.

Now, if that's true, how should that gospel, how should that good news, motivate us to relate to sin? And I want you to think about your own life for a minute.

[3 : 23] When you think about the total freeness, the total gratuity of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness towards you, how does it motivate you to relate to your sin?

There's a couple different ways that it often does. Some people hear about God's forgiveness and the total pardon, unmerited favor that God gives us.

Some people hear about that and it makes them conclude that sin is no big deal. Right? It makes some people conclude that grace becomes a license for sin.

That's part of what Paul is talking about in verse 1 of Romans chapter 6. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin in order that grace may abound? And he says, by no means.

One person put it this way. He said, I like to sin. God apparently likes to forgive. It is a fantastic arrangement.

[4 : 29] Other people relate to it differently. Other people do almost the opposite. They hear about God's grace, God's unmerited favor, and they think, wow, look at what God's done for me.

Okay, in response to that, from now on, I'm going to grit my teeth and clench my fists, and I am going to get this done. I am not going to sin.

I'm not going to sin. I'm not going to sin. And they just close their eyes and they think that the rest of the Christian life is up to their effort. What I want you to see this morning is that this passage rejects both those paths.

This passage says, if you think that grace leads to license to sin, you've completely missed it. But at the same time, if you think that God's grace means that from now on it's all up to you to obey, you've missed it as well.

This passage points us to this wonderful different reality. And it's a reality called our union with Jesus. Look at the front of your service sheet for a moment.

[5 : 44] And I want you to look at all the squares or the rectangles. You see there in verse 3, into Christ Jesus.

Verse 4, co-buried therefore with Jesus. Just as Christ. Verse 5, we become united with Jesus.

Again, verse 5, united with Jesus. At the center of this passage is the idea that in a remarkable way, in a mysterious way, the Christian is brought into a union with Jesus.

And when you understand the nature of our union with Jesus, you'll understand why God's grace leads us to obedience, but why God's grace leads to power for obedience as well.

So what we need to do this morning is think about this idea of our union with Jesus. And I want to ask three questions. First of all, what in the world does it mean? Secondly, how does it change us?

[7 : 00] And thirdly, what do we do about it? First of all, what does it mean? What does it mean that we are united with Jesus? Look at verse three. Paul begins explaining the idea of our union with Jesus by pointing us back to our baptism.

Verse three, do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Excuse me. Now, I want you to focus on the phrase with the square around it, baptized into Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? I don't know if you think very much about your baptism. A lot of us here do not remember our baptism because we were too young.

Others of us remember it very vividly because we were quite a bit older. But my guess is that a lot of us don't think a lot about it on a day-to-day basis. The Apostle Paul would want that to change.

The Apostle Paul, according to this passage, would want us to think about our baptism and the meaning of baptism. The reason is this. Baptism signifies a whole bunch of things in the scriptures.

[8 : 15] But the fundamental thing in baptism, the fundamental meaning of baptism, is that in our baptism, God made a glorious promise to us. In our baptism, God promised to unite us to Jesus.

in a special kind of relationship, God promised to unite us to Jesus in a relationship where Jesus shares his life with us.

Let me try to explain this a little bit. It's a little bit like a wedding. In a wedding, two people come together and they make promises to each other, right?

And on the basis of those promises, those two people share their lives. They share everything they have, right? When I got married, I had a wonderful 1987 Toyota truck.

I couldn't afford the four-wheel drive, so it was two-wheel drive, but it was raised with big tires, so you'd never know the difference. And my wife had a Volvo, and when we got married, I gained a Volvo and she gained a Toyota truck.

[9 : 31] And everything that was mine, all those things that I valued most, including my Toyota truck, became hers, and all that was hers, including her Volvo, became mine. And I could tell you more about what it was like to own that particular Volvo at a different time.

But something kind of similar happens in baptism, except it's far greater than that. In baptism, God promises a far more powerful, a far more reliable, a far more permanent relationship than any marriage ever is.

Let me change the analogy a little bit. Instead of a wedding, think about plant life. This was the image that Jesus used in John chapter 15.

This was the night before Jesus was handed over to suffering and death. At dinner, Jesus looked at his disciples and he said, I want you to think about a vine and I want you to think about a vine's branches.

From now on, I am the vine and you are the branches. If you abide, Jesus says, in me, if you remain in me, if you remain united with me, then you're going to bear fruit.

[10 : 46] but if you're not united with me, you're going to die and you're going to wither and you're going to fall off just like a branch that's cut off from its root.

You see the point there. A branch on a vine, a branch gets all its life from the root. A branch gets all its life from being connected with the vine.

The vine transfers, I don't know much about plants, but as I understand it, transfers water and nutrients through its sap into the branch.

The branch is able to grow and thrive and all those sorts of things. And Jesus says in precisely the same sort of way, Jesus transfers his life to each Christian.

And Paul wants us to remember our baptism because baptism is God's irrevocable offer to do that in each of our lives, to unite us, to Jesus in a relationship in which Jesus shares his life with us.

[11 : 52] It's right at the center of what it means to be a Christian. And before I go on, I want to point out something to you. If you are a Christian, one of the things that this means is that Jesus is not just your teacher.

Jesus is not just the example that you follow. Jesus is not just the one who purchased your forgiveness upon the cross. He is all of those things.

But never forget that Jesus is also the one who continually gives you life. Every single moment. He's the one that continuously nourishes you with grace. He's the one who continually imparts his power to you.

We read in the first reading that Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Feast upon me. It's the only way you're going to live. Never try to live the Christian life without radical dependence upon him for every single moment.

Okay, what is our union with Jesus? Our union with Jesus is a relationship in which Jesus shares his life with us. Second question, how does it change us? This is where it gets a little ironic in our passage.

[13 : 04] The first way Jesus shares his life with us, according to our passage, is by sharing his death with us. Look at verse five. Verse five says, look at the first half, we have become united with him in a death like his.

That's part of the symbolism of baptism, that we go into water and into Christ's death and burial. And then look at verse six. We know that our old self was crucified with Jesus.

Now, what does that mean? What does it mean that we're united with Jesus in his death? What does it mean that our old self was crucified with him? It means at least this. It means that Jesus' death not only purchases our forgiveness, Jesus' death also kills our inward allegiance to sin.

addiction. Let me step back for a second. If you've ever lived with an addiction, or if you have ever lived with someone who struggles with an addiction, one of the great tragedies of addiction is that the addict becomes, in a tragic way, loyal to his or her addiction.

addiction. The addict usually hates their addiction deep down, but at a practical level, they're loyal to their addiction, meaning they always run back to it, even if it costs them everything, even if it costs all the most valuable relationships they have, even if it costs them all their money and their career and their livelihood and everything.

[14 : 46] There's a deep, seemingly unbreakable loyalty to the addiction. Paul, in the book of Romans, tells us that we are all of us like that.

All of us are enslaved to sin, just like addicts are enslaved to their addiction. And as slaves to sin, in a deep and fundamental way, even though we're really good at hiding it, in a deep and fundamental way, all of us naturally are loyal to sin as if it were our master.

We keep running back to it, even though we may hate it. Now, when we're united together with Jesus, Jesus shares his death with us in such a way that our old self, our old self that is loyal to sin, gets killed.

It means that our old allegiance to sin gets executed. It gets pinned up on the cross with Jesus, and it dies there with him. and in its place, Jesus shares his resurrection.

Go back to verse 5. For if we have become united with Jesus in a death like his, meaning that our allegiance to sin has been crucified with him, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

[16 : 05] What does it mean to be united with him in his resurrection? Well, one day it'll mean that we actually literally experience resurrection. We'll gain a new body just like Jesus did, but right now, right now, we taste resurrection when Jesus gives us his own allegiance to God.

He replaces our allegiance to sin, and in its place, he inserts a new allegiance to God that is exactly the kind of allegiance that Jesus himself has.

He makes us loyal not to sin, but loyal to God, alive to God, dead to sin. Okay, what is our union with Jesus? Our union with Jesus is a relationship where he shares his life with us.

How does it impact us? It impacts us because it brings the death to our allegiance to sin, and it gives us a new allegiance to God. Third question, last question, what are we to do about it?

How do we respond to God's promise to unite us to Jesus? Remember what I said at the beginning. there are two errors that we often make when it comes to how we relate to sin.

[17 : 20] Some of us hear about God's grace and we think it's a license. We should just keep on sinning or maybe not worry about sin too much. The other error is to hear about God's grace and then from that point onward say, it's up to me.

It's up to me to get this obedience thing done. union with Jesus kicks both options off the table. It kicks the first option off the table, license to sin.

Look at verse 2. Paul says in verse 1, are we to continue in sin in order that grace may abound? Should grace become a license to sin? By no means. How can we who have died to sin still live in it?

And then glance down to verse 12. It's the second command in all of the book of Romans. Do not allow sin therefore to reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness. Now do you see the point that Paul is making here? It's a fairly simple logic.

[18 : 29] If you've been united with Jesus in his death then it means that he has crucified our inward allegiance to sin. It means sin is no longer your master.

And so if you continue in sin it just doesn't make any sense. You're acting as if sin is your master again which is a subtle way of implying that Jesus is not your master.

It's denying the lordship of Jesus. Let me put it a different way. There's something very sober here. If you think that grace is a license for you to continue in sin if you've made peace with your sin it's not that big of a deal or there are certain sins that you treasure and you secretly maintain if you're satisfied with that it either means you are ignorant of what Christ has done for you or it means you authentically received and accepted the promises of God it's a serious matter but then take the second error the second error says yes I received God's forgiveness but now the rest is up to me I'm going to clench my fist white knuckle it clench my teeth close my eyes and be good that's off the table too why look at verse 13 says but present yourself to

God and then the key phrase as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness think with me if it is true that we have been united with Jesus in his resurrection then it means that the Christian discipleship is always about receiving life that is not our own right when Jesus rose from the dead he received life that wasn't his own he was dead but the glory of the father gave him life in that moment in the same way for a Christian Christians we are dead in our sin but Christ through the spirit gives us life that is not our own and one of the things that that means is that all Christian obedience must always begin with dependence we can't do it ourselves we have to the first place we go is we have to depend entirely upon

Jesus resurrection upon his gift of life to us it means we renounce all claim to self reliance all claim to self dependence and we cling exclusively alone to the promise of God to give us life to give us loyalty to God to give us allegiance to God and to give us you see if you try to live the Christian life on your own power you will either end up in despair or you will end up in pride you'll end up in despair because you'll realize you fail or you will end up in pride you will think you'll convince yourself that you've done a fairly good job and you'll take pleasure in the fact that you're better than average but if depending upon Christ's resurrection you'll end up grateful and you'll end up joyful you'll end up grateful because you'll see everything in your life as a gift from

[22 : 02] God and you'll end up joyful because you will be motivated not by guilt not by fear but by love and friends there is no motivating power that possibly compares to love the one who loves much and knows the love of God deeply is the one who obeys far more consistently than guilt ridden fear fearful disciple who's trusting in his own efforts now I need to stop but I want to close with a word to the discouraged among us if you're discouraged look at verse 11 and if you're not put this one in the bank verse 11 so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God look at that united to Christ Jesus or in Christ Jesus this may sound overly simple it is absolutely essential all of us need to take upon ourselves the spiritual discipline of meditating and considering our union with

Jesus why do I say that I realize that there are a lot of us here who are deeply discouraged in the midst of your fight against sin a lot of us here you hear about union with Christ you hear about being dead to sin and alive to God and you think wow that sounds fantastic but my experience does not bear that out for a lot of us here we hear about those things and my experience tells me that I am still mastered by my sin my experience tells me I am not very dead to sin seems like I am alive to it a lot of the time if that is you verse 11 is your verse why think about the sunrise for a moment when the sun comes up in the morning the minute the sun is over the horizon day has begun right it's never going to be any more day time than it is right at that moment but by the same token we all know that it takes hours for the sun's brightness to come into full effect it takes hours for the sun's heat to come into full effect meaning it takes hours for us to experience the fullness of what it means for the sun to rise now in the same way the same is true of our union with

Jesus when you become a Christian at that moment God fulfills his promise to unite us to Jesus and we'll never be more united to Jesus than we are at that moment but it'll take your whole life and it'll take all of eternity for you to feel and experience its full effects and that's why right now it's so important for us to meditate on God's promise to unite us to Jesus to consider ourselves dead to sin alive to God in Christ Jesus the reason is the more you rehearse God's promise the more you do verse 11 consider our union with Jesus the more you'll realize that God's promise to you is more reliable than your experience and the more you realize that God's promise to you is more reliable than your experience the more faith and trust you will have in God's promise and the more your faith in God's promise rises the more strength you will have to reject sin and to pursue obedience

Martin Luther if you've ever read anything about Martin Luther and his struggle with sin and temptation it's a good read he's always theatrical in it it's always a remarkable sometimes even almost humorous description of fighting against sin and temptation and the devil one of the things he used to do is he would remind himself of his baptism in the midst of the temptation he would remind himself I have been baptized why did he do that he did that for the exact same reason that Paul brings it up in this passage he did it for the exact same reason Paul gave us verse 11 because the more he Martin Luther thought about his baptism the more he looked through baptism to God's promise of union with Jesus and the more he gazed upon and considered his union with

Jesus the more faith he had and the more faith he had the more strength he gained to resist the world the flesh and the devil and to present his body his members as instruments of righteousness to God and that friends is what God is calling us to to consider the beauty and the precious promise that he united us to Jesus that Jesus shares his life with us and that that happens by killing our allegiance to sin and bringing life to our allegiance to God and therefore on the basis of that we reject sin and choose righteousness ever always only depending upon God's grace to do it let's pray father father we just sang about being in chains to sin and being in the dungeon of sin and then your grace appeared and our chains fell off our hearts were free and we rose went forth and we followed thee and father

[28 : 16] I pray for all of us here that you will grant us such a clear vision of your promise to unite us to Jesus that you would grant us to know within our own experience what it means for our allegiance to sin to die and our allegiance to you to be made alive and will you grant us to follow you with everything we have obey you with everything we have knowing that everything we have is your grace and your mercy and your power through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen G remember