

Signs of Our Union

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Preacher: Jonathan Chancey

[0:00] Amen. And so our text this morning is not going to be Psalm 37.

If you read ahead, that's awesome. You'll be very prepared for next week. But this morning, our text is Romans chapter 6, verses 1 through 14. And so please, if you would, take your Bibles.

Let's open them up to Romans chapter 6, verses 1 through 14. And when you found that, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's word this morning. Paul writes, Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will 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.

[2:22] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its 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.

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Would you pray with me once more? Father, we have a tremendous gospel to unpack and to understand and to rejoice in this morning.

And so we pray, Father, would that gospel be clear? And would you empower the preaching of your word by your spirit, for the good of your people, and for the glory of your name?

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Next month, Amanda and I will get to celebrate 14 years of marriage.

[3:31] That doesn't sound like a lot. Maybe to some of you, maybe to others of you, it does sound like a lot. Now, I know for Amanda, that's an incredible achievement. But 14 years is coming up, and so about this time each year, I start to think about this incredible gift of marriage.

And I remember the beginning and the walking down the aisle. I remember the pronouncement of man and wife and the presence of many witnesses.

I remember that weird feeling of having a ring on my finger for the very first time. And then I remember just kind of getting used to the fact that we are actually married.

It's not just my life anymore. It's our life. It's not just my plans. Now we're bound up together. It's our plans. And as I consider all that God has done over 14 years, I just marvel at the fact that I have this incredible union to celebrate with my wife.

You know, it's no accident that the Apostle Paul tells us in another book, Ephesians chapter 5, that this marriage idea is actually a picture of the gospel.

[4:37] John Murray says, John Murray says it like this.

He says, Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. It is not simply a step in the application of redemption.

Rather, it underlies every step. Church, there are few doctrines as beautiful and as vital for us to understand as our union with Christ.

And it's to this union that Paul points us here in Romans chapter 6. And it's that union with Christ that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper so beautifully represent to us.

And so this morning, we're going to examine this idea, this doctrine of our union with Christ. And we'll look at it together in three stages this morning. This will be our outline if you're taking notes.

[5:45] First, think with me about entering the union. Entering the union. And Paul takes us back to the beginning of our union with Christ here in verses 1 through 11 as you look at Romans chapter 6.

He spent the first five chapters of Romans exalting the grace of God in the gospel of Christ. He delivered first the terribly bad news that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He delivered the bad news that all of us are by nature under His wrath. And so all of us by nature are deserving of hell. And all of us by nature are enemies of God.

Every last one of us, he says, whether Jew or Greek, rich or poor, Democrat or Republican, all in all or Mount Pleasant, Clemson or South Carolina, all of us by nature are under this curse of sin.

That's the bad news, Romans 1 through 5. But then he gives us the glorious good news, he tells us, that God has provided the way of salvation for sinners like us in sending Jesus Christ.

[6:53] That He has fulfilled the law by His own perfect life. He has lived the life that we should have lived but failed. He has died the death that we should have died in our place as a substitute for sinners.

And now He lives and reigns and rules and resurrection power over all the forces of sin and death and the devil. This is the good news.

God has provided the way of salvation for sinners in His Son, Jesus Christ. There is a way for sinners like us to be declared righteous in the sight of God.

Simply by putting our faith in Jesus. That's Romans 1 through 5. But now by the time we get to chapter 6, Paul, he senses an objection here.

If the gospel is all about magnifying God's grace, and it is. If the gospel is all about the praise of His glorious grace towards sinners, and it is.

[7:59] If you cannot earn your salvation by what you do. If your righteousness matters not at all, and Christ's righteousness is all that matters.

Then here's a question, Paul. Why does it matter how we live? Why does it matter what we do? Why not just keep on sinning?

Because, Paul, if I understand you rightly, if I just keep on sinning, and then God shows me grace, and then God gets the glory, then we all win, right?

Right? Paul says, by no means. Why? Because if you are a Christian, then you are now united to Christ.

The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you have now entered into this brand new reality. You are no longer dead in sin. Paul says, you are now alive to God in Christ.

[8:59] To say it another way, you are no longer alive towards sin and dead towards God. You are now dead towards sin and alive towards God.

Why? Because Jesus is dead to sin, and you're in Him. And Jesus has risen and is now alive towards God, and you are in Him.

And so now you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. This is what it means to be a Christian. It means you have now entered into this breathtaking union with King Jesus.

I am sure you realize, and if you haven't realized this yet, you will realize it soon enough. It is a recipe for disaster when a married man keeps on living like he is single.

That will not last. Not for long. You have entered into a new reality, a new union, a new identity.

[9:55] You're not single anymore, so stop acting like it. Paul says, neither are you, Christian. Keep on sinning? What are you talking about? You have entered into a new union with Christ.

Stop thinking, and stop acting, and stop living like you're still single and dead in your sin. Spurgeon says it like this. He says, you are one with Christ.

The same blood that flows in His veins now flows in yours. You are part of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Here's what this means, church.

God has performed a miracle in you, Christian. He has taken what was dead and has now made it alive. He has taken what was His enemy and has now adopted you into His own family as His own son or His own daughter.

He's taken what was separated from Him and under His wrath and now has united you to Himself and placed you under infinite grace and blessing in Christ.

[11:02] And that brand new reality, Paul says, is pictured in baptism. Now, I want you to notice just a few things here that Paul shows us about this ordinance, this sign of baptism.

For one, notice here, baptism pictures our union with Christ. Baptism portrays visibly our union with Christ.

This is what he says in verse 3. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

We were therefore buried 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.

And the question is, well, Paul, what kind of baptism are you talking about here? Are you talking about water baptism like what we're about to do out here? Or are you talking about spirit baptism, meaning conversion?

[12:05] And the answer is both. Not because that water baptism saves you, it doesn't, but because that water baptism is almost shorthand for the entire reality of salvation.

Your baptism, water baptism, is like the wedding ring on my finger. This ring does not make me married. A single man can go buy a wedding ring and slip it onto his finger.

That does not make him married. But this ring on my finger is shorthand for the entire message of marriage. It is shorthand for all the glorious benefits of this union with my spouse.

And so you can say things like, put a ring on it. Beyonce, if you like it, you should have put a ring on it. And we know what you mean. You're not just talking about the ring, are you?

Right? You're talking about all the glorious benefits of marriage. Paul uses baptism in the same way. Baptism is a visible sign, shorthand, for a believer's union with Christ.

[13:13] You are buried with Him. You are raised with Him. The old is gone. The new has come. It visibly represents what God has done in the heart of a believer.

Which is why, notice, this is why baptism is for believers only. Baptism is not an engagement ring. It is a wedding ring. Baptism is not a symbol of promises made that may or may not come true in time. That have not yet come to pass.

Baptism is a symbol of promises realized. This is where we take a different path from our Presbyterian friends who we love very much and appreciate deeply.

But just think about Paul's argument here in Romans 6 with me. In what sense could any of this be said of a non-believer or an infant? An infant has not yet died to sin.

[14:13] They have not yet received new resurrection life. They are not yet freed from sin's power. Not until by God's grace they put their faith in Jesus and are actually united to Him.

And then, in obedience to Christ's command, then, we symbolize that union with Christ in the waters of baptism. In the Great Commission, what does it say?

Jesus commands all His disciples, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, the disciples, those who hear the Gospel and respond in faith.

And so, when we baptize someone, as we're preparing to do today, we're not saying, gee, I hope that God saves you. we are saying, we believe that He has.

And we believe that you are united to Christ by faith. We believe that you have been buried with Him and now you have been raised with Him. And so, we're going to represent that visibly through the waters of baptism.

[15:18] And notice here, final point before we move on. You notice I say we. We. We are doing this. Who is the we? One more key here.

Notice that He instinctively connects baptism with the local church. Remember who He's talking to here in this book of Romans?

He is not just talking to disconnected, isolated, lone ranger Christian who happens to be passing through Rome at the time. Who is He talking to?

He is talking to an organized, recognizable, local church of Jesus Christ. One that has elders and deacons and members and they know who is the church and who is just passing through.

Why? Because the normal assumption of the New Testament is that if you have been united to Christ, then you will have that vertical union recognized and affirmed horizontally by Christ's people, the church.

[16:25] This is what we, together, church, do in baptism. In baptism, the individual says, I'm a Christian and the church says, yes you are, we agree.

We affirm that. The individual says, I want to walk with Jesus and the church collectively says, yes, we're going to do that with you. We're going to link arms with you.

We're going to do that together. To be baptized is to say, I am a part of the body and then for the body to say, yes you are, you're a part of us. And again, church, I am so excited this morning that we get to hear the testimonies from Carl and then from Savannah and then we go outside and we get to symbolize their entrance into this union with Jesus but then we don't just send them off to go figure it out on their own.

At the very same time, we get to welcome them formally, officially into membership of this local body of Christ. What a gift that is. Baptism, like a wedding ceremony is the one time initial pronouncement of your union with Christ in the presence of many witnesses.

But of course, we also need regular reminders of this union. So the second stage here that we'll consider, second, Paul says, consider the union.

[17:53] Second is, considering the union. And it's just amazing to me how Paul does this. And this is, this is the hardest part of preaching. He lays out all of this glorious, big picture, gospel truth of our union with Christ.

He gives the church in Rome all of the gospel doctrine that they could possibly handle. And then, he gives these specific, clear to the point, practical commands. These aren't just ideas.

These ideas are meant to shape our lives. Right doctrine ought to produce right living. And so he says, by way of inference, remember the objection, don't keep on sinning that grace may abound. Christian, live as you are in Christ. Consider this union with Him. And he gives us a couple of images to help us understand what that means.

The first image here is, it's death to life. He says, we have been baptized, buried with Him in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life.

[19:00] That's a command. He says, walk as someone who has been raised to new life. And so the first image here is death to life. He gives us a second here in verses 5 through 11.

And here, the image is slavery to freedom. Look there at verse 5. He says, 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. 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.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. See, the bad news is you were dead. The good news is Christ has died in your place.

And you've died in Him. The bad news is you were enslaved to sin. But the good news is Christ has now shattered those chains of sin for all who are united to Him by faith.

[20:04] If you are in Christ by faith, if you are united to Him, Christian, you are free from slavery to sin. This is almost unbelievable, isn't it?

Do you understand non-believer that you are not free? That you are enslaved to the powers of sin? And do you understand, believer, Christian, that you are now free from the power of sin? Yes, of course, you will still wrestle with the presence of sin in and around you.

You will wrestle with indwelling sin in you. All of us do. You will feel the pain that sin causes and brings against you in your life. We all do. But the difference now is you are no longer enslaved to the power of sin over you.

The presence and the pain and the persistence of sin are all there, but His power over you is no more. You are, as He says in 2 Corinthians 5.17, you are a new creation in Christ.

[21:18] The old is gone, behold, the new has come. Christ is alive, you are alive in Him. Christ is victorious over sin, you are victorious over sin in Him.

This is what He says in verse 8. If we have died with Christ, we believe we also will live with Him. And 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 to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. Friend, this is what it means to be united to Jesus.

When you get married, it's no longer just your wife's problems. Guess what? Now they're your problems too. Amen! It's no longer just your debt.

Now this is our debt. This is our balance sheet together. There's this blending of lives that happens in a healthy marriage. Paul says this is exactly what happens when you're united with Christ by faith.

[22:24] His death, guess what? That's yours. His life, guess what? That's yours. His freedom, guess what? That's yours, Christian. His victory over sin, guess what?

It is yours. apart from Him before you were united to Him, you were a slave to sin, but now, praise God, sin has no more power over you, Christian, than it does over Christ, Jesus Himself.

So Christian, live as you are in Christ. Christ. This is what Paul calls us to. Our problem is that we're so quick to forget this reality-shaping union with King Jesus.

And we're just saying, didn't we, prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. So what do we need to do, church? Paul commands us in verse 11. So you also must consider

yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. Consider yourself dead and consider yourself alive. Consider the union and consider what it means.

[23 : 45] Consider yourself, reckon yourself to be who you are in Christ. Consider yourself to be dead to sin. Consider yourself to be alive in Christ.

Consider yourself to be free from sin's enslavement and consider yourself to be victorious over it in Christ. And this isn't just think about it, although that's part of it.

This is, let this truth shape your very identity. Drop your maiden name. Wear your ring proudly.

Consider yourself united to King Jesus.

Stop living as a slave. Start living as a free man in Christ. A free woman in Christ. Christian, do you understand if you're in Christ by faith, this is objectively true of you.

It means you are now spirit indwelt, reborn, made new, set free. This is good news. Paul says, let this gospel shape your very identity.

[24 : 51] Would you consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ? In church, there is more application here than we have time in the week to apply to us, but we'll give you a few.

Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. How? By saturating your mind with God's word, not with the world. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, he tells us in chapter 12, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

How? Saturate your mind with God's word in Holy Scripture. Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. How? By praying without ceasing and enjoying this union with your God.

Abide in me, he says. He invites you, Christian. Come to him. Speak to him. Bear your soul to him. You'll be heard and received in Christ.

Consider yourself dead to sin by killing any lingering sin in your heart. Put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ. Be killing sin or sin will be killing you, John Owen tells us.

[26 : 02] Consider yourself alive to God by seeking to satisfy your heart in him, by treasuring him above all else, by feasting on the abundance of his steadfast love.

for you in Christ, by fixing your mind's eye on his return and the promise of eternal joy with him in that time, in that day when sin's presence, sin's pain, sin's persistence and sin's power are gone.

Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God by joining yourself meaningfully with your local church community in pursuit of Christ together. but you know one way that we consider this glorious union together as a church?

We consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God by partaking of communion together. Have you ever thought about it this way? What is communion?

Communion is a visible, tangible reminder of the gospel of Christ. It shows us visibly before our eyes.

[27 : 09] We hold it in our very hands what Christ has done in shedding his blood and breaking of his flesh. And it's a sign of our unity both to Christ vertically and also horizontally to Christ's people.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 because there is one bread we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread. Church this is a family meal for those who have been united to Christ and to one another.

Baptism is the one time entrance and communion is the ongoing reminder of our union with Christ. Baptism is putting on the team jersey and communion is the regular team practice.

Baptism is the wedding ceremony and communion is the anniversary getaway or the weekend date night. It is a regular ongoing reminder of our union with Christ and our unity together as a body which is why again these two signs are so interconnected.

Baptism looks back at the beginning of our union but communion feeds us along the way. It's a family meal where every baptized believer gets to come and remember and feast on what God has done for us in Christ.

[28 : 36] Christian when you come to the table you feed on Christ by faith and you remember you remember his body broken for you and his blood shed for you the blood of the new covenant shed for the forgiveness of your sins you eat and you drink in faith and you consider yourself in him dead to sin and alive to God and again what a gift church and we get to celebrate this together this morning if you're a baptized believer you're welcome to come and remember what God has done in bringing you from death to life and freeing you from slavery to sin would you come this morning and consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ praise God but then church we see third

Paul directs us to living in the union living in the union the big moment of the wedding ceremony and the honeymoon is over and then what happens you come back home and what then the anniversary celebration is great you get to reflect on your love for one another express your love to one another but what's next what's after that what's next is daily faithfulness daily enjoyment of living faithfully in the union

God has given you and this is what Paul shows us in verses 12 through 14 now we're about to go and eat and drink symbolically the body and the blood of Christ we're about to go and feast on the promises of the gospel by faith but then we're going to leave and we're going to start a new week we're going to go baptize Carl and Savannah but then they're going to dry off and they're going to change their clothes they're going to drive back home and then normal life starts again Monday is right around the corner what does all of this mean when you get up and go to work tomorrow everything has changed but at the same time it all just looks the same what does it look like to live every day in this union with Christ Paul tells us in verse 12 let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions what does it look like tomorrow church it looks like war

Paul says refuse it do not let it reign it wants to there is now and will be until the day you die or Christ returns a battle for your heart a battle for the throne sin has been effectively dethroned but it constantly is trying to sneak its way back on Paul says don't let it reign Christian don't let it make you obey its passions Christian don't go eat this bread and drink this cup and go into the water and come up out of the water and then go out of here and live like you're still enslaved to sin don't present your members he says in verse 13 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 for sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace here we go back to this grace again this grace remember the keep on sinning objection Paul says this grace being under grace if you truly understand it it should not lead you to give yourself over to sin but rather to freely and fully give yourself to God and there is no in between how do I live in this union with Christ what does it look like it looks like love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself as Jesus did it looks like all the members of your body your mind your eyes your ears your mouth your hands and your feet your heart and your soul all of it has now been set free from sin and made alive by the spirit so Paul says don't offer any of them up as instruments to sin rather give yourself wholly to God this is the daily life in union with Christ as you abide in him and bear much fruit each and every day you're asking

God God how can I use my lips to glorify you today God how can I let what comes into my ears be honoring to you today God would you guide my thoughts and lead them to be honoring to you today I don't want to set my mind on anything that's false I want to set my mind above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God God would you allow me to set my hands and my feet today in ways that are honoring and pleasing to you not to tear down but to build up God would you would you allow me to treasure you above all else in my heart today would you remove any false joy any false treasure any false delight far from me and satisfy my heart this morning in your unfailing love God would you do that this is what it looks like to live daily in your union with Christ the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper church they are beautiful pictures of our union with Christ but I want to make it clear to you as we close they are not just empty religious rituals they both demonstrate and demand new life in Christ do not partake of these elements if you have no intention of living out what they represent if you have been baptized and if you take communion what you're saying church is I am in

[35 : 24] Christ sin has no dominion over me how can we who have died to sin still live in it Paul gives this exact warning clearly in Romans in 1st Corinthians chapter 10 he warns the Corinthians that simply partaking of these signs apart from genuine faith and genuine repentance it means absolutely nothing for you in fact it may be it may mean trouble for you listen to this warning from 1st Corinthians 10 he says for I do not want you to be unaware brothers that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea do you hear there a picture of baptism all of them were baptized as it were rescued out of slavery in Egypt brought into freedom through the waters of the red sea do you see an image of baptism he goes on and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was

Christ there's a sermon for another day do you hear there a picture of communion this redeemed! community who all of them brought out of slavery all of them baptized as it were through the waters all of them now called to be God's people God sustained them with this spiritual food on their way to the promised land does that sound like us?

He reminded them constantly of his care and his provision for them he reminded them constantly of his faithfulness to them that they were his people and he was his God and yet he goes on nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness here's the point these ordinances are incredible signs of God's gift of grace in the gospel of Christ they are visible and tangible expressions of our union with Jesus but again church apart from real repentance and apart from real faith they are empty so Paul says these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did do not be idolaters as some of them were as it is written the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play so we must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did and 23,000 fell in a single day we must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer now these things happened to them as an example but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come church they are written down for us for us as we come to the table for us as we go down into the waters of baptism for us as we reflect on our precious union with Jesus Christ friend have you been united to Christ by faith have you been united with him in his death to sin and his life to God do you live now in resurrection victory over sin have you entered into that union if not then friend what would keep you from coming to Christ this very morning and calling out to him in faith and if so Christian consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ live in the union God has purchased for you in the gospel of Christ let's pray father God we praise you for this unfathomable grace that you've given us in Christ that all who come to King Jesus by faith you have removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west you have made us new in Christ you've given us a very new identity Lord we're no longer dead we're alive we're no longer slaves we're free we pray father that we would live in this union that you've given us in Christ we praise you now that we get to see it represented in the waters of baptism and in the Lord's supper would you feed us by faith as we partake of these elements we pray in Jesus name amen